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# **Meritorious Curating and the Renewal of Pagoda Museums in Myanmar**

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2020

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## Abstract

Gifts have been accumulated, stored and displayed at sacred sites in Myanmar for millennia as they have elsewhere within the Buddhist world. This thesis is the first attempt to analyse the phenomenon known as the 'pagoda museum' that existed since at least the early 1900s and emerged as a formal response to legacies of Buddhist merit-making in Myanmar around the time of Independence (1948). It seeks to understand the forms and practices of the pagoda museum as processes of museumisation located within sacred space. The museological approach was initially inspired by comparative studies of local curating in Thai monastery museums (Kreps 2003, Koanantakool 2006) and more broadly in small-scale or micromuseums (Candlin, 2016). The growing museological interest in the representation of Buddhist art and material culture in Asia and beyond augments the comparative approach taken in the thesis (Suzuki 2007; Mathur and Singh 2015; Grimes 1992, Gaskell 2003; Tythacott 2011, 2017; Clark 2016).

Three case studies chosen from a survey of 84 sites in 2015–2016 demonstrate that pagoda museums may be understood in terms of three inter-related dimensions; as *spatial* entities that develop from within a sacred site, as *curatorial* or keeping practices that are themselves a work of merit, and in terms of the *objects* of merit-making that are interpreted through the medium of display. The case-studies focus on sites of national or regional significance which offer comparative data for analysis. The Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum in Yangon, the 'Inner Museum' at Yadana Man Aung Temple in southern Shan State, and the Bagan Archaeological Museum. The latter demonstrates that state and pagoda museums have long co-existed and share permutations of curatorial practices especially with regard to the display of sacred objects.

Visitors' responses offer important insights to the way pagoda museums were being renewed during the period of survey. They demonstrated that the deep connection with sacred objects, the source of the enduring vitality of pagoda museums, results in a model of museumisation that challenges museum conventions in Myanmar and beyond.

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Colleagues at the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore gave much assistance and indulged my research interests during the museum's timely moment of collaboration with their Myanmar counterparts. I thank in particular Alan Chong and Kennie Ting for their continued support.

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## Notes on transcription of Burmese terms

The name Myanmar is used here to refer to the country following the government's change of name in 1989. Discussions situated prior to this time cite Burma and associated place-names e.g. Rangoon instead of Yangon. Burmese is used to designate the language of the Bamar ethno-linguistic group and the official working language. The nationality of the people is referred to interchangeably as Burmese or Myanmar.

A conventional transcription of Burmese words is used which by definition is highly varied in terms of spelling, but which attempts to capture the sounds of the language, as discussed by John Okell.<sup>1</sup> Whilst most terms used are Burmese, the conventional Pali or Sanskrit words may be cited more frequently e.g. *sāsana* instead of *thathana*; as well as terms included in the *Oxford English Dictionary* e.g. *stupa* instead of *zedi*.<sup>2</sup>

The inclusion of non-English terms is denoted as follows: Myanmar (M), Shan (Sh), Pali (P), and Sanskrit (S).

With the exception of proper nouns and terms already incorporated in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), all terms are italicised on first use and thereafter are non-italicised. Diacritics are included for terms not already incorporated in the OED.

## Note on dates

BCE or Before Common Era is used throughout.

ME or Myanmar Era (or Kawza Thekkarat, which started 22 March 638) is calculated in the Gregorian calendar by adding 638.

BE or Buddhist Era refers to the Burmese tradition which starts on 13 May 544, after the Buddha's passing away.

## Abbreviations

ACM: Asian Civilisations Museum

DOA: Department of Archaeology, National Museum and Library

MOC: Ministry of Culture

MORA: Ministry of Religious Affairs

MORAC: Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture

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<sup>1</sup> John Okell, *A Guide to the Romanization of Burmese* (London: The Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 1971), 5.

<sup>2</sup> With the exception of proper nouns and terms already incorporated in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), all terms are italicised on first use and thereafter are non-italicised. Diacritics are included for terms not already incorporated in the OED.



# INTRODUCTION

## The Museum in the Pagoda

A visit to a pagoda in Myanmar<sup>1</sup> is a journey towards a sacred centre marked by the stupa or *zedi* (M), the reliquary for the Buddha's relics which commemorates the Buddha and his teachings. The shrines around the base are a focal point for devotees' offerings and circumambulations – the rituals of merit-making. Surrounding the stupa are prayer halls and pavilions for meditation and sermons, shrines for revered monks and auspicious deities or *nats* (M), a trustees' office, storerooms of various kinds and sometimes a space that is signposted 'museum'. The absence of this designation does not, however, preclude the existence of collecting and keeping activities. As visitors expand their pathways around the pagoda away from the sacred centre, marginal spaces with evocative titles may appear as places for the safekeeping of gifts. A 'Hall of Ancient Buddha Images' may house sacred images on an altar, or a 'Perfumed Chamber' may be filled with teak cabinets for gifts shrouded by an informal shrine heaped with offerings. Finding a 'museum' in the pagoda is not therefore always a straightforward prospect and is often contingent on recognising the signs of accumulation, storage and display.

No detailed museological study has been made of this category of museums in Myanmar. The starting point for doing so has come from personal experience as a curator at the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) in Singapore, where the issues of representing religious art and living traditions had challenged the museum in several ways. One of these was the sustainability of accommodating rituals which eventually became an intermittent attribute of special exhibitions. Regional museums however had long accommodated rituals in their permanent galleries. At the National Museum of Cambodia visitors presented jasmine garlands to deities and Khmer New Year rituals were conducted by staff in the Western Gallery which houses the famous statue of King Jayavarman VII. Both the Cham Museum of Art and the National Museum in Bangkok had ancient images of Ganesh which received regular offerings of flowers and

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<sup>1</sup> The name 'Myanmar' officially replaced 'Burma' following the enactment of the 'Adaptation of Expressions Law' on 18 June 1989. The former is used throughout this thesis, while the latter is used in reference to historical events that occurred before the re-naming. See Gustaaf Houtman, *Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics: Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy* (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 1999), 43–45.

coins.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, in August 2013 colleagues at the National Museum in Yangon revealed that rituals adapted to conservation protocols were undertaken on a daily basis by staff within the Buddha Images Showroom.<sup>3</sup> A similar gallery dedicated to Buddha images operates in the same way at most of the state museums in Myanmar. The term 'state museum' is used throughout the thesis to distinguish museums that are funded by the Department of Archaeology and National Museum within the Ministry of Culture. In contrast, pagoda museums are managed by boards of trustees and supported by donations from local constituents. They take guidance on religious protocol from monastic advisors and are ultimately under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.<sup>4</sup>

While distinctions between sacred and secular space were not made by colleagues, it was evident that a different protocol operated in the Buddha Images Showroom from other galleries. Daily rituals were undertaken before opening hours underpinned by an etiquette of respect. For example, shoes were removed at the entrance, prayers were said but were not accompanied by offerings and staff simply knelt on the tiled floor without the aid of a mat. The curator's daily inspection of the showcases took the form of a clockwise circumambulation around the gallery with intermittent stops to pay homage in front of images that were felt to be particularly efficacious. Space-clearing rituals for the well-being of the buildings were attributed to protective spirits as well as the efficacy of the Buddha images.<sup>5</sup> The nominally secular ACM also undertook rituals in the early stages of its development to protect and bless the renovated wing of the old Empress Place building before its opening in 2003.<sup>6</sup> Protocols were further developed to accommodate rituals within special exhibitions of Buddhist art and culture, which became increasingly popular with various Buddhist communities.<sup>7</sup> One of the

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<sup>2</sup> Personal communication, Khun Sathal, 11 February 2017; Duyen Nguyen, 17 February 2017; Suppawan Nongnut, 9 February 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan and staff members, National Museum, August 2013. For examples, see Alison C. Bastian, 'Exhibiting Buddhism: The Museumification of Burmese Buddha Images' (DeKalb, IL, Northern Illinois University, 2014), 71, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1625034485?fromunauthdoc=true>.

<sup>4</sup> In March 2016 the two ministries were merged and were known as the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture (MORAC). Htoo Thant and Ei Ei Toe Lwin, 'NLD Reduces Government Ministries', *The Myanmar Times*, 18 March 2016, <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/nay-pyi-taw/19532-nld-reduces-government-ministries.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Fieldwork observations, 11 December 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Freedom of religion rather than secularism is a constitutional right in Singapore.

See: <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/CONS1963?ProvIds=P11V-&WiAl=1#pr14-> A multifaith approach was taken in line with the government's multicultural policies adhered to by the Museum. However, the impetus came from staff following a series of unusual settling-in problems following the opening of the first wing of the Museum in 1997. Buddhist, Muslim and Hindu rites were conducted with the assistance of staff from those faiths. Tan Huism, Gauri Krishnan, personal communication, 10 August 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Of the five special exhibitions dedicated to Buddhist art since its opening in 1997, three saw significant numbers of Buddhists making offerings: *On the Nalanda Trail: Buddhism in India, China and Southeast Asia* (2 November 2007–23 March 2008), *Enlightened Ways: The Many Streams of*

challenges of exhibiting re-contextualised objects in a civilisations museum was to see how they might regain their sacred quality in the moments of ritual that took place during the exhibition. When colleagues in Yangon informed me that museums also exist in pagodas, this contextual shift presented an intriguing possibility to investigate how a museum on sacred ground would re-present the sacred. The notion of a museum in the pagoda raised questions about the nature of 'museum' and 'pagoda', and the relationship between the two as a basis for curatorial activity relative to sacred objects.

### Why a Study of Pagoda Museums Matters

As no detailed museological study has been made of the spaces that are designated 'pagoda museum' in Myanmar, the thesis will be the first attempt to elicit an understanding of the term 'pagoda museum' as a museological entity. It will identify and analyse the attributes that are distinctive of a pagoda museum. It will analyse the spatial qualities that frame the visitors' experience of the museum. It will also consider the nature of curating and the significance of this activity within the context of merit-making rituals. It will then analyse the way custodians engage with objects through the medium of displays to elicit their meanings. The thesis will also trace the changes that were observed as pagoda museums renovated or renewed their displays. The approach to analysing these inter-related dimensions of space, curatorial practice and objects draws partly from the stages of my initial encounters at the Shwedagon Pagoda, although on subsequent visits they often appeared conflated and difficult to separate.

The question is timely as pagoda museums like their state counterparts have undergone renovations during a time of social change. Since late 2010 the first steps to the 'civilianisation' of the military government were taken<sup>8</sup> and pro-democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest.<sup>9</sup> Subsequent political and economic reforms undertaken by President Thein Sein (2011–2016) have opened the country up on many fronts. The cultural sector, in particular, has seen renewed

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*Buddhist Art in Thailand* (30 November 2012–17 April 2013), *Cities and Kings: Ancient Treasures from Myanmar* (2 December 2016–5 March 2017). See: <https://www.acm.org.sg/whats-on/exhibitions>

<sup>8</sup> Seth Mydans and Liz Robbins, 'Myanmar Junta Frees Dissident Daw Aung San Suu Kyi', *The New York Times*, 13 November 2010, sec. Asia Pacific, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/14/world/asia/14myanmar.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Trevor Wilson, 'The Significance of Myanmar's 2010 Election', *New Mandala* (blog), 15 December 2010, <https://www.newmandala.org/the-significance-of-myanmar%e2%80%99s-2010-election/>.

engagements with international museum partners and institutions such as the United Nations Educational and Scientific Organisation (UNESCO) and the establishment of a new National Museum in Nay Pyi Taw in 2015. While these initiatives have mainly concerned the state museums, significant developments have also been undertaken by pagoda museums. The renovation of the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum and the opening of a new museum, the Yadana San Kyaung at Phaung Daw Oo Temple in southern Shan State in 2016, are just two examples. Similar renovations were imminent at other sites such as the Mahamuni Pagoda and Botahtaung Pagoda at the time of writing. The paucity of documentation and research means that data on the pre-existing spaces and practices of pagoda museums is being lost. Hence the thesis will present and analyse new data that has been gathered during this moment of change.

## Pagoda and State Museums

Pagoda and state museums have developed in parallel since the latter inherited the legacy of the colonial museum, specifically the Phayre Museum (1872 – ca.1904). Historical evidence for keeping and displaying gifts in the monastery emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and several pagoda and monastery museums have buildings or collections that are at least a century old.<sup>10</sup> While administratively separate, the two have collaborated during periods of religious and cultural revival and during times of natural disaster. For example, the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum augmented the collection of the National Museum in Yangon during the late 1990s, while the Department of Archaeology (DOA) assisted with pagoda renovations after storm Nargis in 2008.<sup>11</sup> Pagoda museums have also turned towards their state counterparts for guidance to improve storage and display conditions.

These institutional working relations and the shared practice of Buddhist rituals within their museums necessitates a reflexive analysis of the pagoda museum. The thesis will show a convergence of interests between pagoda and state museums that transcends the divide between secular and sacred space. It will question the relevance of this distinction given that this binary cannot easily be presumed in the context of Myanmar. As Juliane Schober noted in her study of modern Buddhist identity in Myanmar at the

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<sup>10</sup> These include the Shwedagon Pagoda's Paribawga Daik, Shwesandaw Pagoda Museum, Bandula Monastery in Mrauk-U, and Maung Di Pagoda in Twante. See Appendix 1.

<sup>11</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan, interview with the author, 21 August 2016. Nyunt Han, 'Cultural Heritage Monuments in Myanmar Hit by Cyclone Nargis', *SPAFA Journal* 18, no. 2 (2008): 14. The DOA conducted surveys of the damage and helped renovate the site, as trustees raised funds for these works. Anonymous interview with the author and interpreter Moe Aung Lwin, 13 August 2015.

turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there is no Burmese term for ‘secular’ that does not have religious connotations – the nearest term *lokiya* (P) or ‘this-worldliness’, by implication refers to its opposite or ‘otherworldliness’.<sup>12</sup> The thesis will therefore consider the basis for pagoda museums and how they can be recognised *alongside* state museums in Myanmar.

## A Ritual Practice

The term *pya-daik* literally ‘display building’, is usually translated from the Burmese as ‘museum’. While the term may give the impression of an ordered approach to the spatial organisation of the pagoda museum, in practice these sites often function more fluidly with smaller rooms or *pya-khan*, translated as ‘showroom’ rather than museum. These may occupy multiple sites and are often not sign-posted or they may be referred to informally as a museum.

The thesis will analyse the pagoda museum from the perspective of merit-making and the underlying premise for its rituals – the reciprocal relationship between donors and the Buddha. The term *hpaya* (M) refers to both the Buddha and pagoda, a conflation which will be considered with respect to the museum’s spatial relationship with the pagoda. Both are believed to embody a ‘field of merit’ from which donors may cultivate their own merit or *kutho* (M) through the practice of generosity or *dāna*.<sup>13</sup> Merit-making is one of the core practices that is believed will endure as the religion declines over a 5,000 year period.<sup>14</sup> In a country where some 89% of the population is said to practice Theravāda Buddhism, this results in continual accumulations of gifts to the pagodas.<sup>15</sup> This ritual of exchange also lies at the core of social relations in Myanmar as Juliane Schober observes, where moral actions give rise to one’s social status in future lives,

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<sup>12</sup> Juliane Schober, *Modern Buddhist Conjunctures in Myanmar: Cultural Narratives, Colonial Legacies, and Civil Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2011), 44.

<sup>13</sup> On *dāna* see: *Buddha Mahavamsa* or *The Great Chronicle of Buddha* written by the famous Mingun Sayadaw: “The Great Chronicle of Buddha. Volume One, Part One, Anudipani. Chapter VI: Paramita (Perfections),” trans. Ko Lay and Tin Lwin, *The Perfection of Generosity or Generous Offering (Dāna Parami)*, 1991, <http://www.myanmar.net/nibbana/mingun1.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> John S. Strong, *Relics of the Buddha* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 221–23.

<sup>15</sup> The figure reported in 2016 was 89.28%. ‘Ministry of Religious Affairs’, accessed 10 July 2016, [http://www.mora.gov.mm/mora\\_sasana1.aspx](http://www.mora.gov.mm/mora_sasana1.aspx). The religious rituals of renewal and merit-making particularly after 1948 in post-Independence Myanmar have provided the impetus for much of these collections. See a number of publications including Juliane Schober, ‘Buddhist Just Rule and Burmese National Culture. State Patronage of the Chinese Tooth Relic in Myanmar’, *History of Religions* 36, no. 3 (1997): 218–243; Houtman, *Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics*; Elizabeth Moore, ‘Ritual Continuity and Stylistic Change in Pagoda Consecration and Renovation’, in *Proceedings of the Myanmar Two Millenia Conference, December 15-17, 1999. Part 3* (Yangon: Universities Historical Research Centre, 2000), 156–91, <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/482/>; Donald Martin Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma. Myth and Folklore in an Evolving Spiritual Realm* (Bangkok: River Books, 2011).

and conversely one's current status represents the culmination of previous merit.<sup>16</sup> The thesis will analyse how curatorial practices at the pagoda museum may be constituted as meritorious as lay Buddhist volunteers gift their time and labour to care for the collections.

## A Comparative Museological Approach

The thesis includes a broad survey of 84 sites undertaken between 2015 and 2016.<sup>17</sup> The list was compiled on the recommendations of academic and museum colleagues as well as informants who made additional suggestions (see Appendix 1).<sup>18</sup> The survey did not aim to be comprehensive given the ubiquity of pagodas that apparently defies official calculation. The total number of pagodas remains unclear although the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture (MORAC) website mentions a total of 179 famous pagodas.<sup>19</sup>

Three broad criteria were used to refine the selection of sites for survey. These included sites with designated museums (21), sites known to keep 'ancient things' (50) and state museums (13). The survey aimed to identify sites in different regional or cultural contexts and to provide data that could be used to refine comparisons made between selected case-studies (fig.1). While publicly accessible monastery museums were included in the survey, collecting that takes place within monastic quarters is a topic that is beyond the scope of the thesis. The comparative approach is intended to identify commonalities and divergences within the historical and cultural patterns of pagoda museum development. Furthermore, the inclusion of state museums in the survey allowed for the possibility to see pagoda museums within a wider spectrum of related museological practices.

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<sup>16</sup> Juliane Schober, 'Religious Merit and Social Status among Burmese Buddhist Lay Associations', in *Merit and Blessing in Mainland Southeast Asia in Comparative Perspective*, Monograph 45 (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1996), 197–98.

<sup>17</sup> The 12-week fieldwork period was conducted: 11–21 August 2015, 1 January to 28 February 2016 and 4–21 August 2016. Additional follow-up checks were made during the period 22 September – 2 October 2017. Observations made prior to fieldwork which are cited include visits to the Buddhist Art Museum at the Kaba Aye Pagoda (August and September 2013) and the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum (December 2013 and May 2014).

<sup>18</sup> I am grateful to Professor Elizabeth Moore for her suggestion to undertake a survey and to her and Daw Nu Mra Zan, U Thaw Kaung, Ma Ohnmar Myo and several curatorial colleagues for their timely suggestions in the compilation of these sites.

<sup>19</sup> The site also lists the total number of monasteries (58,399) and nunneries (2,794). Ministry of Religious Affairs, 'Financial Aid Granted to Religions', Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, 2005, [http://www.mora.gov.mm/mora\\_department1.aspx](http://www.mora.gov.mm/mora_department1.aspx).

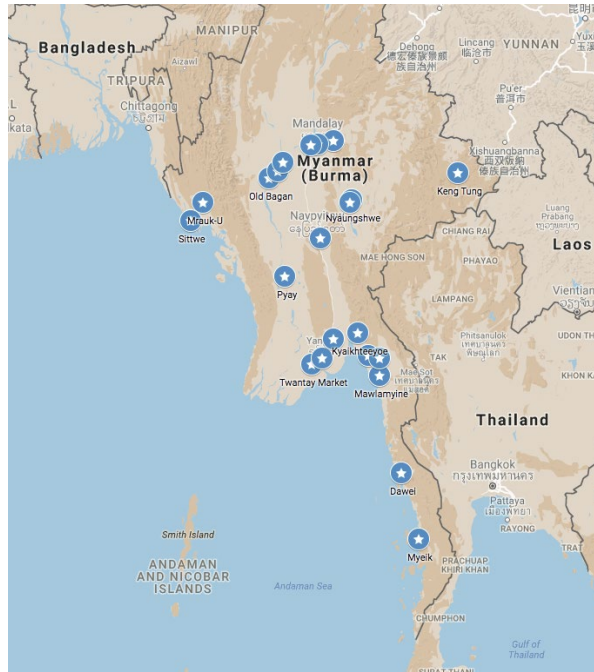


Figure 1. Map of sites surveyed. August 2015 – August 2016. Source: Google Maps.

The thesis will draw on the survey’s findings to analyse three chosen case studies. These will focus on two pagodas with designated museums; the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum in Yangon and the Yadana Man Aung Temple in southern Shan State and a third, a state museum in the central plains of Bagan known as the Bagan Archaeological Museum. While they were not intended to be representative of the country, all three are situated at the centre of pilgrimage networks of national or regional significance and all saw themselves as part of a wider constituency. All three were also undertaking renovations or processes of renewal which demonstrated comparable forms of curatorial activity. Additional considerations in the selection of sites as case studies included the willingness of informants to participate in the research and physical accessibility. Extreme weather conditions, natural disasters and sporadic insurgency in regions such as Rakhine State and northern Shan State were also significant factors to consider.<sup>20</sup>

The documentation that was undertaken comprised photographic documentation of the sites, object storage and display conditions; recorded interviews with a range of

<sup>20</sup> A near-fatal road accident in 2013 gave some forewarning of the risks of travelling overland in remote areas during the monsoon season. During January 2016 unexpected insurgency near Mrauk U in Rakhine State prohibited further visits to the museum at the Bandula Monastery. An earthquake on 24 August 2016, two days after completing fieldwork resulted in damage to 389 temples at Bagan. Myanmar News Agency, ‘Renovation of 89 Quake-Hit Pagodas in Bagan to Start next Month’, *Global New Light of Myanmar*, 21 December 2016, <http://www.globalnewlightofmyanmar.com/renovation-of-89-quake-hit-pagodas-in-bagan-to-start-next-month/>.

informants with an interpreter; and periods of time engaging in participant observation often on my own, or with a friend, colleague or interpreter particularly in situations where entering certain spaces as a lone woman may have been inappropriate. This was particularly the case in shrines which women are prohibited from entering and within monastic grounds where women are not allowed to fraternise with monks.<sup>21</sup>

Interviews comprised qualitative research using semi-structured questionnaires that addressed a broad range of questions regarding the museum and its spatial parameters, its collection and displays, the curator and their constituents of donors and visitors. Group and individual interviews were facilitated by interpreters mainly from the fields of cultural tourism and education. The inherent challenges to this are evident in the extensive use of translated documents and interviews. Furthermore, my position as a curator from Singapore called for moments of greater reflexivity in the application of participant observation and interview methodologies. Requests for advice on museological matters during fieldwork for example presented such moments. At these times the approach to 'participant observation' often felt more participative than observational, as informants felt the need to share issues and seek new responses to the challenges they faced on a daily basis. Some sense of this dialoguing and participation is more evident in places, for example, in the preparation of large Buddha image displays at the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum (see Chapter One: *Respect for Buddha's Belongings*). Here, as Charlotte Aull Davies notes, the researcher's own social interactions can 'help to construct the observations that become their data'.<sup>22</sup>

More specifically, by analysing the unique attributes of pagoda museums, the thesis will uncover new modes of display and ways of seeing Buddhist objects that augment the nascent study of museology in the context of Myanmar.<sup>23</sup> The thesis will contribute new data to the field of comparative museology where over the past couple of decades studies have recognised local forms of curating<sup>24</sup> and the complex nature of museums

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<sup>21</sup> Permission from the Ministry of Culture (MOC) and from pagoda trustees to undertake photography was sought in advance and always granted without fail, for which I am indebted to Director-General U Kyaw Oo Lwin at the ministry and to Head of Office at the Shwedagon Pagoda, U Htun Aung Ngwe. By late 2016 however rules on photography in the state museums had been completely relaxed.

<sup>22</sup> Charlotte Aull Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography. A Guide to Researching Selves and Others*, 1st ed. (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 1999), 5.

<sup>23</sup> Nu Mra Zan, 'Museums in Myanmar: Brief History and Actual Perspectives', in *New Horizons for Asian Museums and Museology*, ed. Naoko Sonoda (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2016), 19–36, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-0886-3>. Bastian, 'Exhibiting Buddhism: The Museumification of Burmese Buddha Images'.

<sup>24</sup> Christina F. Kreps, *Liberating Culture: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Museums, Curation, and Heritage Preservation*, Museum Meanings (London: Routledge, 2003). Paritta Chalernpow Koanantakool, 'Contextualising Objects in Monastery Museums in Thailand', in *Buddhist Legacies in Mainland Southeast Asia. Mentalities, Interpretations, and Practices* (Paris; Bangkok: École française



as 'hybrid cultural forms'.<sup>25</sup> These have mainly focussed on heirloom collecting in Indonesia and monastery museums in the Theravāda Buddhist context of Thailand. The thesis contributes to these regional studies and to those within wider Asia.<sup>26</sup> While the pagoda museum sits close to these examples from the region where permutations of indigenous and colonial practices have prevailed, historical interactions with state museums in Myanmar enables closer comparisons to be made between the two than has previously been done and will augment these studies.

Furthermore, since the 1990s, there has been a significant growth of interest in the question of representing Buddhist art and religion in Western museums among scholars from a range of disciplines including art history, anthropology and museology.<sup>27</sup> These relate predominantly to Western museums of art or ethnography with a legacy of collecting mainly Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhist materials. While the cultural context is very different from that of the pagoda museum in Myanmar, the turn to consulting diasporic source communities and a greater receptivity to other forms of museums and curating has been part of this expanding field of study.

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d'Extrême-Orient; Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre, 2006), 149–65. Louis Gabaude, 'Where Ascetics Get Comfort and Recluses Go Public: Museums for Buddhist Saints in Thailand', in *Pilgrims, Patrons and Place: Localizing Sanctity in Asian Religions* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2003), 108–23.

<sup>25</sup> Christina Kreps, 'Thai Monastery Museums. Contemporary Expressions of Ancient Traditions', in *Transforming Knowledge Orders: Museums, Collections and Exhibitions*, vol. 16, Internationales Kolleg Morphomata, (Paderhorn: Germany: Fink Wilhelm GmbH & Co., 2014), 234. Christina Kreps, 'Appropriate Museology and the "New Museum Ethics". Honoring Diversity.', *Nordisk Museologi 2* (2015): 14.

<sup>26</sup> Justin Thomas McDaniel, *Architects of Buddhist Leisure: Socially Disengaged Buddhism in Asia's Museums, Monuments and Amusement Parks* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017), <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/49883>. Saloni Mathur and Kavita Singh, 'Reincarnations of the Museum. The Museum in an Age of Religious Revivalism', in *No Touching, No Spitting, No Praying: The Museum in South Asia* (New Delhi: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2015), 203–18. Clare E. Harris, *The Museum on the Roof of the World. Art, Politics, and the Representation of Tibet*, Buddhism and Modernity (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2012). Yui Suzuki, 'Temple as Museum, Buddha as Art: Hōryūji's "Kudara Kannon" and Its Great Treasure Repository', *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*. Museums: Crossing Boundaries, no. 52 (Autumn 2007): 128–40.

<sup>27</sup> Louise Tythacott, 'Curating the Sacred: Exhibiting Buddhism at the World Museum Liverpool', *Buddhist Studies Review* 34, no. 1 (2017): 115–33, <https://doi.org/10.1558/bsrv.29020>. Imogen Clark, 'Exhibiting the Exotic, Simulating the Sacred: Tibetan Shrines at British and American Museums', *Ateliers d'anthropologie* 43 (2016), <https://journals.openedition.org/ateliers/10300>. John Clarke, 'Planning the Robert H.N. Ho Family Foundation Gallery of Buddhist Sculpture, 2009-2014', in *Sacred Objects in Secular Spaces. Exhibiting Asian Religions in Museums* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 67–79. Bruce M. Sullivan, ed., *Sacred Objects in Secular Spaces. Exhibiting Asian Religions in Museums* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015). Louise Tythacott, *The Lives of Chinese Objects. Buddhism, Imperialism and Display* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011). Chris Wingfield, 'Touching the Buddha. Encounters with a Charismatic Object', in *Museum Materialities. Objects, Engagements, Interpretations* (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), 54–70. Ivan Gaskell, 'Sacred to Profane and Back Again', in *Art and Its Publics. Museum Studies at the Millenium*, by Andrew McClellan (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 148–62. Chris Arthur, 'Exhibiting the Sacred', in *Godly Things. Museums, Objects, and Religion* (London, New York: Leicester University Press, 2000). Chuang Yiao-hwei, 'Presenting Buddhism in Museums', in *Godly Things. Museums, Objects, and Religion* (London; New York: Leicester University Press, 2000), 107–19. Ronald Grimes L., 'Sacred Objects in Museum Spaces', *Studies in Religion/ Sciences Religieuses* 21, no. 4 (1992): 419–30.

The primary question of the thesis, to define the pagoda museum through the analysis of spatial and curatorial attributes in relation to objects, intersects with the experiences of these museums at the point of exhibition-making and its reception by audiences. The thesis brings data on pagoda museums to this literature for the analysis of modes of display and interpretation. And finally, the thesis draws on museological theory where this helps to refine an understanding of the purpose and attributes of the pagoda museum, for example, its role as a ritual site,<sup>28</sup> or as a 'heterotopia',<sup>29</sup> how it manifests the 'museum effect',<sup>30</sup> the 'polysemic' nature of objects<sup>31</sup> and visitors' own 'embodied' knowledge.<sup>32</sup>

In order to elicit an understanding of the pagoda museum the thesis is structured around three main chapters. Each addresses a different case study and analyses the attributes of pagoda museums as observed in the permutations of their spatial qualities, and curatorial practices in relation to objects. Chapter One, *Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum, Yangon*, will lay out the evidence for historical precedents for pagoda museums. The development of the pagoda museum is then discussed with analysis of the unique spatial qualities that were evident in 2015 and after renovation in 2016. The chapter looks in particular at visitors' responses to the new displays and considers the special role of pagoda museums as ritual sites that sustain Buddhist merit-making. The role of the volunteer-keeper, U Maung Maung Gyi is examined in relation to the notion of a meritorious practice. This is then considered in light of the new forms of object interpretation adopted during the renovation of the museum.<sup>33</sup>

Chapter Two, *Yadana Man Aung Temple, Southern Shan State*, will investigate the variant form of the museum within the hollow temple, hence referred to as the 'temple museum' in Southern Shan State. It will analyse the unique spatial qualities of the so-called 'Inner Museum', its proximity to the sacred centre and the effects of the iconographic programme on devotees' rituals of visiting. It will examine the work of the

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<sup>28</sup> Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>29</sup> Fiona Candlin, *Micromuseology. An Analysis of Small Independent Museums* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 182–83.

<sup>30</sup> Svetlana Alpers, 'The Museum as a Way of Seeing', in *Exhibiting Cultures. The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 25–32.

<sup>31</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 77.

<sup>32</sup> Sandra H. Dudley, ed., *Museum Materialities. Objects, Engagements, Interpretations* (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), 5.

<sup>33</sup> The inclusion of the honorific 'U' denotes the seniority and status of this male informant in relation to the author. 'Daw' is the female counterpart to this. Informants of equivalent age to the author are sometimes addressed as 'Ko' and 'Ma' respectively. The honorifics are omitted in author citations. The naming tradition does not include a family surname and at times place-names are adopted by individuals who wish to acknowledge a long-standing family relationship with their place of birth.

trustee-keeper U Mya Thaung in the incremental renewal of the museum and his interpretive use of ritual objects in the sustenance of Shan Buddhist merit-making rituals.

Chapter Three, *Bagan Archaeological Museum, Bagan*, will examine the historical precedents for a state museum that developed from within a field of monasteries and temples. It will analyse the spatial qualities of the Bagan Archaeological Museum relative to its unique position at the centre of a sacralised landscape. In particular it will examine attributes of the exhibition of sacred Buddha images to argue for a role that is comparable with the pagoda museum in sustaining the rituals of merit-making. It will draw on the work of three generations of curators: U Aung Kyaing, Daw Nu Mra Zan and Daw Baby, to examine the various manifestations of a meritorious curatorial practice in the state museum. Finally, the chapter will consider the biography of a potent Buddha image that accumulated different meanings through its travels via replication and exhibition to re-generate the museum's connection with the sacred landscape.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum, Yangon**

## Introduction

This chapter will address the question of how the pagoda museum and its curatorial remit should be understood as a museological entity by identifying and analysing the unique attributes of the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum during a period of renovation (2013 to 2016).<sup>1</sup> As the subject of pagoda museums in Myanmar has received little or no academic attention, the chapter will draw on historical precedents to elicit a basis for understanding the formally designated pagoda museum that emerged just after Independence (1948). It further draws on the spectrum of pagoda and state museums<sup>2</sup> in Myanmar to refine points of comparison, and analyses this new data in relation to a number of museological paradigms. In this way, the chapter will demonstrate the relevance of the pagoda museum to the museological field, particularly where this validates forms of local curatorship,<sup>3</sup> and addresses issues that are germane to the exhibiting of Buddhist art and material culture within state museums and beyond.<sup>4</sup> While cognisant of the religious premise for the pagoda museum, the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum's plan to be 'systematic' and aim for 'international museum standards,' calls for an analysis that draws on the broader issues pertinent to the field of museology since around the early 1990s.<sup>5</sup>

The Shwedagon Pagoda stands apart as one of the country's three most revered relic stupas, or *dat-daw zedi* (M), together with the Mahamuni Pagoda and Kyaikhtiyo or Golden Rock. The relic stupa, a reliquary for the Buddha's ashes or relics, is infused with the numinous qualities of the dharma or teachings.<sup>6</sup> Stupas, usually referred to as pagodas or hpaya (M), also the term for the Buddha in Myanmar, form the focal points

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter discusses observations made during a period of 17 days: 14, 29–30 August, 2 September, 31 December 2015; 2, 5, 8–10, 15 February 6, 18–19 August 2016, and additional interviews with Daw Nu Mra Zan 22–23 September 2017, and U Maung Maung Gyi 1 October 2017. Where necessary observations made in 2013 are also included.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'state museums' is used to distinguish museums that were funded by the Department of Archaeology and National Museum within the Ministry of Culture before it was merged with the Ministry of Religious Affairs in March 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Kreps, *Liberating Culture*. Paritta Chalermpong Koanantakool, 'Contextualising Objects in Monastery Museums in Thailand'.

<sup>4</sup> Grimes, 'Sacred Objects in Museum Spaces'. Arthur, 'Exhibiting the Sacred'. Gaskell, 'Sacred to Profane and Back Again'. Suzuki, 'Temple as Museum, Buddha as Art: Hōryūji's "Kudara Kannon" and Its Great Treasure Repository'; Tythacott, 'Curating the Sacred: Exhibiting Buddhism at the World Museum Liverpool'.

<sup>5</sup> Alpers, 'The Museum as a Way of Seeing'. Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*. Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors. Symbolic Action in Human Society*, Symbol, Myth and Ritual Series. (Ithaca, N.Y.; London: Cornell University Press, 1974). Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture. Tourism, Museums and Heritage* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1998). Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*. Rachel Souhami, 'Exhibition Production as Processes of Translation' (Ph.D, Manchester, University of Manchester, 2011). Nu Mra Zan, 'Museums in Myanmar'. Candlin, *Micromuseology*.

<sup>6</sup> Adrian Snodgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stupa* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992), 353–54.

for extensive networks of pilgrimage circuits and a national cult of relic worship that emerged during the long period of military rule (1988–2011). The historic rituals of relic enshrinement and pagoda renovations that were taken up by state patrons following the decline of royal patronage in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century formed the basis for collective merit-making at sites such as the Shwedagon since Independence (1948).<sup>7</sup> The significance of pagoda museums as sites of nation-building since then is reflected in the survey in which roughly half of the museums emerged during the early years of Independence, and the other half during the early years of military rule and campaigns aimed at safeguarding national unity (see Appendix 1, section A). While cognisant of the changes in the political landscape and the effects this had on pagoda museums, further investigation into their political significance per se remains beyond the scope of the thesis, as the primary concern is with an analysis of their museological attributes.

No comparative museological study has been made of the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum, which remains one of the largest since its establishment in 1992. While size is not the only attribute worthy of study, it nonetheless contributes to an understanding of the specific context for the museum; a monumental three-storey building which was deemed a requisite for a site of national pilgrimage. However, in 2016, the museum expanded again from the upper floor (2<sup>nd</sup> floor) to occupy the two lower floors where the library and archive had been housed (see fig.1.15).<sup>8</sup> The space dedicated to displays of sacred objects is comparable to the Buddha Images Showroom at the National Museum in Yangon and the Bagan Archaeological Museum (see Chapter Three).<sup>9</sup> While the comparison raises a point of relevance for the wider museological field in Myanmar, it is not meant to imply a national benchmark for pagoda museums. Notably all share a preoccupation with safeguarding sacred objects; gifts that are venerated as signifiers of the Buddha (Buddha images, relics, model stupas). Yet other unique attributes that are shared with more modest museums at smaller pagodas remain germane to the search for a comparative understanding of the pagoda museum.

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the ramifications of state patronage in the tradition of cosmological Buddhism see Schober, 'Buddhist Just Rule and Burmese National Culture'.

<sup>8</sup> MITV reported a total floor area of 2,987.82 square metres. MITV News, 'Buddha Museum: Shwedagon Officially Opens Newly Upgraded Facility', 18 March 2016, <http://www.myanmaritv.com/news/buddha-museum-shwedagon-officially-opens-newly-upgraded-facility>.

<sup>9</sup> The second floor was slightly larger (around 1,200 square metres) than the National Museum's Buddha Images Showroom (around 817 square metres) Kyaw Shin Naung, conservator, personal communication, 30 August 2019.

The chapter is structured in terms of the inter-related dimensions of space, curatorship and objects. This sequence follows the way my encounter with the pagoda museum first unfolded, beginning with a journey to locate and engage with the site and its exhibits, with observations made of its spatial qualities revealed particularly through visitors' responses, followed by interactions with curators and their practices relative to particular objects. Additionally, it is prefaced with a brief account of the conceptualisation of museums in Myanmar. The first section, *Precedents for the Pagoda Museum*, draws on historical evidence for keeping and displaying objects in sacred spaces during the colonial period (1824–1948). It considers how these activities of safekeeping co-existed with colonial museum-making and attempts to foster 'museum-mindedness'.<sup>10</sup> It then examines the evidence for museological developments that emerged during the early years of Independence and asks how the pagoda and rituals of merit-making were implicated in the formation of collections and early models of the pagoda museum.<sup>11</sup>

The second section, *Making Space for the Pagoda Museum*, assesses how spaces were created for storing and displaying gifts during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and after culminating in the formally conceived Shwedagon Pagoda Museum of 1992. The museum's unique form and location – a modern building sited remotely at the edge of the main platform – are analysed in relation to the way it distinguished itself from other sites of display at the pagoda and its stated aims to make the collection accessible to visitors. The museum's marginal situation and a distinguishable inner world are analysed in terms that resonate with the heterotopic quality of micromuseums.<sup>12</sup>

The third section, *A Space of Safekeeping and Abundance in a Field of Merit*, discusses the internal spatial attributes relative to safekeeping in pagoda museums. It analyses the prevalence of abundant and eclectic displays, and how these qualities augment Svetlana Alpers' notion of the 'museum effect' to offer another 'way of seeing' in the pagoda museum.<sup>13</sup> The basis for this other way of conceiving the displays is examined in terms of the 'monothematic' attribute associated with micromuseums,<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> L. F. Taylor, 'A Burma Provincial Museum', *Journal of the Burma Research Society* XIV, Part 1. (1924): 1–20. Gordon Luce H., 'Draft Scheme for a Burma Museum', *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 33, Part 2. (31 June 1947): 118.

<sup>11</sup> Nihar-Ranjan Ray, 'A Report on the Organisation of a Library, a Museum and an Art Gallery, Constituting a National Cultural Centre', (Cultural Advisor's report for UNESCO) (Rangoon: UNESCO, 31 January 1955).

<sup>12</sup> Candlin, *Micromuseology*, 152, 182–83.

<sup>13</sup> Alpers, 'The Museum as a Way of Seeing', 26–27.

<sup>14</sup> Candlin, *Micromuseology*, 154–55.

and the underlying relations between donors and the stupa's 'field of merit'.<sup>15</sup> The ritual basis for the museum is further examined in the culmination of the renovated museum of 2016, the re-centering of the Buddha within this and the turn to 'systematic' approaches.

The fourth section, *A Place for Ritual and Transformation*, develops the analysis of the museum's spatial qualities as seen through visitors' responses to the displays of sacred objects on the second floor. It draws on Carol Duncan's notions of the museum as a ritual site, to analyse how these responses were shaped by the 'iconographic programme' of the displays.<sup>16</sup> It focusses on ritual responses to three areas of the museum – the shrine room, pathways around the main hall and displays of the Buddha. It draws on comparative observations of shrines at other museums to assess how the shrine room operates as a locus of ritual, yet like other kinds of museums remains subject to processes of exhibition-making.<sup>17</sup> The notion of the museum as ritual site is further analysed relative to its situation within ritual pathways at the pagoda, their replication within the displays, and the 'liminal' or momentary quality associated with rituals as they occur during the visit to the museum.<sup>18</sup> Further analysis of the iconographic programme's new configurations and technologies of display will also demonstrate the limitations and opportunities for venerating the Buddha in the context of the pagoda museum.

The fifth section, *Meritorious Curating and the Volunteer-Keeper*, shifts the focus to examine the role of the lay volunteer-keeper U Maung Maung Gyi and how it is defined as meritorious in relation to the collection of gifts. It further discusses notions of renovation and the ethos of respect in light of the conventional duties of care that were called into question during the museum's shift towards greater systematisation.

In the final section, *Objects of Merit-making and the 'Systematic' Pagoda Museum*, the analysis focusses on the plan for a 'systematic' museum as it related to the ordering and reclassification of objects and their display. Hierarchical relations between objects are examined in relation to their displays and the need for greater selectivity. More specifically, this section questions how objects in the pagoda museum are made to

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<sup>15</sup> Melford E. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society. A Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes*, 2nd expanded ed (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1982). Kate Crosby, *Theravada Buddhism: Continuity, Diversity and Identity* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Suzuki, 'Temple as Museum, Buddha as Art: Hōryūji's "Kudara Kannon" and Its Great Treasure Repository', 138–39. Souhami, 'Exhibition Production as Processes of Translation', 50–51.

<sup>18</sup> Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 10–11. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 13–15.



conform to the new classificatory schemes and the ordering of knowledge about the pagoda and its gifts. Finally, consideration is given as to how the monothematic nature of the pagoda museum is enriched by the multiple meanings that objects gather over time. The displays of several new categories of objects are analysed in terms of their polysemic qualities<sup>19</sup> and the formal as well as informal means by which the pagoda museum encourages their interpretation.

## Precedents for the Pagoda Museum

Origins for the operations of the modern pagoda museum such as the conventional duties of care for sacred objects, arguably lie in the histories of royal patronage and pagoda renovations. The Shwedagon Pagoda's trustees' records, for example, include royal donations and renovations that date to the late 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>20</sup> The records of royal orders also allude to the pagoda as a site for collecting objects together for the purpose of repair. For example, an order for 24 July 1638 calls for the collection of old images at the Shwezigon Pagoda in Bagan for this purpose (see *Respect for Buddha's Belongings*).<sup>21</sup> These sources establish a long history for the ritual basis for pagoda keeping practices. However, precedents for the development of a museological phenomenon are more recent and come from a legacy of encounters with the colonial museum.

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, evidence suggests that conditions were being created for the reception of new ideas, including notions of collecting and the role of the museum, as observed in the West. In 1872, the first diplomatic visit to Europe was undertaken by the King's chief minister, the Kinwun Mingyi, whose account includes many visits to palaces, churches, stately homes and museums. In 1882 Sir James George Scott, also known as Shwe Yoe, wrote of the 'curiosities' brought back by the Kinwun Mingyi from Europe and given to 'Lingayama's monastery' in Mandalay. These included ample photographs, postcards, engravings and souvenir printed materials such as posters and tickets which were displayed amongst other donations such as Dutch clocks, spittoons and betel boxes around a central arrangement of sacred images displayed in glass cases.<sup>22</sup> Evidently monasteries, like pagodas, which had long been sites of

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<sup>19</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 77.

<sup>20</sup> Moore, 'Ritual Continuity and Stylistic Change in Pagoda Consecration and Renovation', 22, fn.23.

<sup>21</sup> Than Tun, ed., *The Royal Orders of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885. Part One, A.D. 1598-1648* (Kyoto: The Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1983), 78, 104,

[http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs19/Than\\_Tun-1983-Royal\\_Orders\\_of\\_Burma-01-bu+en-red.pdf](http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs19/Than_Tun-1983-Royal_Orders_of_Burma-01-bu+en-red.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> Shway Yoe, *The Burman. His Life and Notions* (New York: The Norton Library, 1963), 132–33.

collecting and keeping by this time became recipients of meritorious gifts acquired through these new encounters. This brief description resonates with the diverse kinds of gifts that reside within pagoda museum collections today, while their juxtaposition with sacred objects such as Buddha images indicates a merit-making practice. This mode of display infers a narrative of gifts offered to the Buddha that continues in recent times (see Chapter Two: *Gifts to the Buddha*).

Monasteries and pagodas were to provide a valuable source of collecting for colonial site museums at Bagan (Pagan)<sup>23</sup> and Pyay (Prome) during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Chapter Three: '*Pagan Museum, 1904*'). And they continued to play a part in the development of the state museums as their own collections proliferated as discussed below. Their intertwined histories become apparent around the time of Independence following the faltering development of the Phayre Museum, the first colonial museum established by 1872 to house the collection of Sir Arthur Phayre, first Chief Commissioner of the newly created province of British Burma in 1862.<sup>24</sup> L.F. Taylor's report of 1924 recounted that the Phayre Museum, based at the Agri-Horticultural Society in Yangon (Rangoon), had originally housed 'local curios and contributions from neighbouring settlements'. Despite receiving some 3,000 to 4,000 mainly Burmese and Chinese visitors each month in 1872, sustainability became a pressing issue, and by the 1890s the Society called for Government to develop a new Provincial Museum.<sup>25</sup> Lack of funding and curatorial expertise were the main obstacles, and by 1904 the collection had been handed to the Superintendent of the Archaeological Survey of Burma in York Road, from where it subsequently went into storage at the government Secretariat.<sup>26</sup>

By 1947, the need for a 'Burma Museum' was revisited by G.H. Luce in a detailed scheme that expanded on Taylor's report and ideas that were subsequently discussed by a government committee (1945).<sup>27</sup> He drew inspiration from European models such as the Imperial Institute in South Kensington, the Musée Guimet in Paris and the Pitt

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<sup>23</sup> In 1989 the old name Pagan was changed to 'Bagan' as part of the government's policy of changing the country's name from Burma to Myanmar and previous place names. The new names are used here together with the previous names in brackets.

<sup>24</sup> Patricia M Herbert, 'The Sir Arthur Phayre Collection of Burmese Manuscripts', *The British Library Journal* 1, no. 1 (1975): 62.

<sup>25</sup> Taylor cited earlier British Burma Administration Reports. Taylor, 'A Burma Provincial Museum', 1–4. The villa that was run under the auspices of the Rangoon Agri-Horticultural Society, was dismantled in the early 1900s to make way for a hospital. Nu Mra Zan, 'Museums in Myanmar: Brief History and Actual Perspectives', *New Horizons for Asian Museums and Museology*, 21 July 2016, [http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-10-0886-3\\_2/fulltext.html](http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-10-0886-3_2/fulltext.html).

<sup>26</sup> Taylor, 'A Burma Provincial Museum', 5–6.

<sup>27</sup> Luce, 'Draft Scheme for a Burma Museum', 99.

Rivers Museum in Oxford to identify four main functions for the new museum – conservation, exhibition, education and research. Furthermore, he saw the museum as a means to overcome long-standing conflicts within the country and its border regions, and conceived that a network of museums could collaborate to represent ethnic minority cultures. The Intha for example, could be represented at a district level in Nyaung Shwe (then Yawnghwe) in southern Shan state, while cultural objects could be sent back to the central museum in Rangoon.<sup>28</sup>

By the early 1900s several small-scale ‘site museums’ had been set up in Bagan, Mrauk-U and Pyay under the auspices of the Archaeological Survey of Burma<sup>29</sup> after its establishment in 1902.<sup>30</sup> Their proximity to the temples set a precedent that may have contributed to Luce’s thinking on collaborative collecting. For example, U Aung Kyaing recalled that Taw Sein Ko drew on local monasteries to augment the Pagan Museum’s collection during the early 1900s.<sup>31</sup> The modest site museum was a form that was replicated during the late 1940s in areas that Luce was interested in. Yadana Man Aung Temple in Nyaung Shwe set up a museum under the patronage of the last Sawbwa Sao Shwe Thaik in 1947 (see Chapter Two: *The ‘Outer Museum’*).<sup>32</sup> The Shwebonpwint Pagoda Museum and Library in Pyay was also established in 1948 on pagoda land. According to the Secretary of the museum U Tin Sein, its archaeological collection includes materials collected by Luce which he deposited after 1948.<sup>33</sup> Evidently Luce felt it important to keep collections in the regions and that spaces such as the pagoda museum provided a viable means to do this.

Significantly, Luce proposed architectural models that were based loosely on the plans of the Ananda and Patothamyia temples in Bagan for the central and district museums respectively.<sup>34</sup> This pre-empted the temple-style museum that opened at the Kaba Aye Pagoda in 1964 (see *Buddhist Art Museum Model*), and offered a precedent for

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<sup>28</sup> Luce, 102–3.

<sup>29</sup> These included the Pagan Museum (1903), Mrauk-U Archaeological Museum (1904), the Mandalay Palace Museum (1905) and Thayet Thaw Museum (c.1907) in Sri Ksetra. Nu Mra Zan, ‘Museums in Myanmar’, 22–23. These dates of establishment pre-empt the opening of the museums, hence the signboard at the Pagan Museum is dated 1904. Daw Nu Mra Zan, personal communication, 16 December 2019.

<sup>30</sup> This was the forerunner to the Department of Archaeology (DOA) set up in 1957. Michael Aung Thwin, ‘Burma Before Pagan: The Status of Archaeology Today,’ *Asian Perspectives* 25, no. 2 (1983–1982), 1. Ministry of Culture, ‘Brief History. Department of Archaeology, National Museum and Library’, 2013, <http://www.culture.gov.mm/DANML/History/default.asp>. ‘The Ancient Monuments Preservation Act 1904’, Pub. L. No. Act No. VII of 1904 (1904), [http://asi.nic.in/pdf\\_data/5.pdf](http://asi.nic.in/pdf_data/5.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> U Aung Kyaing, interview with the author, 4 January 2016.

<sup>32</sup> The Botahtaung Pagoda began renovations in 1948 after suffering bombing during World War Two, and the Kyantha Ya Pagoda in Mandalay set up a Tooth Relic Museum in 1945.

<sup>33</sup> U Tin Sein, Secretary, interview with the author, 16 August 2015. See Appendix 1, A.12.

<sup>34</sup> Luce, ‘Draft Scheme for a Burma Museum’, 110, 112.

drawing analogies between the modern museum and its temple counterpart in the context of Southeast Asia. The importance of the temple was implicit in this effort to validate the concept of the museum and to foster consciousness, referred to at the time as 'museum mindedness'.<sup>35</sup> The challenge of fostering this mind-set for the post-colonial state museum would endure across the region – in 1989 the lack of 'museum mindedness' was attributed to the low attendance rates at Indonesian state museums.<sup>36</sup> However, by the 1950s Luce's earlier turn to the temple for architectural inspiration had materialised quite literally when 'the museum' was taken to the annual pagoda festival. Festivals had long been acknowledged as a means to disseminate government 'propaganda' in order to educate agricultural communities about modern seed crops and farming methods.<sup>37</sup> By the same token, the festival became a platform for making educational exhibitions.

### Exhibitions at the Pagoda

In 1955 UNESCO expert and cultural advisor, Nihar-ranjan Ray, further developed Luce's recommendations for a National Museum in a report to the recently established Ministry of Union Culture.<sup>38</sup> He advised the building of a new National Museum and the development of its collections through sourcing objects from local cultural events and district museums.<sup>39</sup> The Annual Cultural Exhibition was one such event which was organised by the ministry each February on the western grounds of the Shwedagon Pagoda. This was an educational display with 'subject-galleries' that included: a 'Geological and Mineralogical Gallery, a Books and Periodicals Gallery showing the evolution of modern printing and publication in Burma, a Health and Hygiene Gallery and small sections of indigenous arts and crafts, principally tribal and folk'.<sup>40</sup> These categories conformed with Luce's proposal for the Burma Museum which would address a wide spectrum of scientific and cultural subjects, in which religion (animism and Buddhism), would play a small part.<sup>41</sup> The event was held during the Tabaung festival which attracted large numbers of visitors and vendors of goods from around the

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<sup>35</sup> Luce, 113.

<sup>36</sup> Christina F. Kreps, 'Appropriate Museology in Theory and Practice', *Museum Management and Curatorship* 23:1 (2008): 34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647770701865345>.

<sup>37</sup> Superintendent Government Printing and Stationery, Burma, 'Report on the Administration of Burma for the Year 1928-29' (Rangoon, Burma: Superintendent Government Printing and Stationery, Burma, 1930), iii, <https://digital.soas.ac.uk/AA00000793/00004/pdf>.

<sup>38</sup> The ministry was established in 1952. Nu Mra Zan, 'Museums in Myanmar', 19.

<sup>39</sup> Ray, 'A Report on the Organisation of a Library, a Museum and an Art Gallery, Constituting a National Cultural Centre'.

<sup>40</sup> Ray, 48.

<sup>41</sup> Luce, 'Draft Scheme for a Burma Museum', 109.

country and beyond.<sup>42</sup> These included commodities and objects of popular culture: ‘toys, curios, domestic brass, stone and lacquer ware, indigenous medicines and Burmese toilet goods’.<sup>43</sup> While objects of popular culture have remained a regular feature of pagoda museum collections, Ray only mentions the objects that had been formally selected, classified and displayed for educational purposes.

Although no specific mention was made of collaboration with pagoda museums, Ray’s inclusion of Luce’s strategy of collaborating with ‘local museums’<sup>44</sup> was founded on working with monasteries and pagodas. By 1955 the Shwedagon Pagoda’s designated space for safekeeping, the Paribawga Daik, had already been established since 1919 (see *Making Space for the Pagoda Museum*).<sup>45</sup> Pagoda museums had emerged around the time of Independence and during the decade after.<sup>46</sup> Much later, during the late 1990s, pagoda museums and monastic representatives continued to assist in various ways with the development of Buddha image collections for state museums such as the National Museum and Sagaing Buddha and Cultural Museum (see Chapter Three: *Buddha Images Showroom*).

Ray advised that the collections made from the exhibition at the Shwedagon Pagoda festival be re-displayed in ‘cubicles’ at Jubilee Hall to augment the small ad hoc collection that already existed there.<sup>47</sup> This collection formed the early phase of the National Museum which had been set up at the hall in 1952. However, it remained there until 1970 when it moved to Pansodan Street.<sup>48</sup> It would be another 26 years before the museum was housed in a purpose-built building as advised by Ray.

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<sup>42</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan, personal communication, 16 June 2018.

<sup>43</sup> The festival also attracted traders from Laos and Cambodia, but by the early 1970s, it had become more of a funfair with modern attractions such as ferris wheels, a cinema and Burmese theatre shows. Win Pe, *Shwe Dagon* (Rangoon: Printing and Publishing Corporation, 1972), 124.

<sup>44</sup> Ray, ‘A Report on the Organisation of a Library, a Museum and an Art Gallery, Constituting a National Cultural Centre’, 76–79.

<sup>45</sup> Established as the Paribawga-Daik’ (1919) and later the Curio Gallery (1949).

<sup>46</sup> Pagoda museums surveyed included: Shwesandaw Pagoda’s ‘Colonial Era Prayer Hall and Museum’ (1900) and later a museum building (1954), Kyantha Ya Pagoda’s Tooth Relic Museum (1945) Shwebonpwint Pagoda Museum and Library (1948), Botahtaung Pagoda Museum (1953), Alein Nga Sint Pagoda Museum (1954), Yadana Man Aung Temple Museum (1949) and ‘Inner Museum’ (1958).

<sup>47</sup> Ray, ‘A Report on the Organisation of a Library, a Museum and an Art Gallery, Constituting a National Cultural Centre’, 48.

<sup>48</sup> The hall was constructed in 1889 to commemorate Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee. After 1970 it was demolished to make way for a new Defence Services Museum. Thant Myint U, ‘Forgotten Treasures’, *Financial Times*, 2 December 2011, <https://www.ft.com/content/8acdba9a-15dc-11e1-8db8-00144feabdc0>. Jared Downing, ‘At Myanmar’s National Museum, Bridging the Past and Future’, *Frontier Myanmar*, 28 June 2017, <http://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/at-myanmars-national-museum-bridging-the-past-and-future>.



Figure 1.1. Art and craft exhibition, early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Rangoon.  
Photo courtesy of Michael Backman.

A rare undated photograph from the personal collection of Mr. A.P. Morris (1880–1944) who organised the annual art and craft exhibition as Provincial Art Officer,<sup>49</sup> likely depicts one of the exhibitions at Jubilee Hall. By February 1926 this expanded to include a ‘village’ of stalls in the grounds of the Hall and displays of wood and ivory-carving, lacquer work and other crafts produced by government-funded art schools.<sup>50</sup> The spaces demarcated by the pillars may have been the ‘cubicles’ that Ray envisaged for future displays (fig. 1.1).<sup>51</sup>

### Buddhist Art Museum Model

A unique precedent that emerged in the decade following Independence was the commemorative museum built to house gifts made during the Sixth Buddhist Council (1954–56) at the Kaba Aye Pagoda (World Peace Pagoda) in Rangoon. This event

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<sup>49</sup> Morris was an assistant engineer in Burma (1912–1924) and assumed duties in 1914 as Provincial Art Officer. He also chaired the sub-committee that arranged for collections of Burmese arts and crafts to be made for the British Empire Exhibition in 1924. I thank Michael Backman for making this material known to me. Herbert Chatley, ed., ‘Obituary. Arthur Percy Morris (Past-Chairman)’, *The Junior Institution of Engineers. Journal and Record of Transactions* Vol. LV (1945): 98.

<sup>50</sup> Regular participants included the Saunders Weaving Institution in Amarapura, the Pottery School in Insein, and the Lacquer School in Pagan. Superintendent Government Printing and Stationery, Burma, ‘Report on the Administration of Burma for the Year 1929-30’ (Rangoon, Burma: Superintendent Government Printing and Stationery, Burma, 1931), 115, <https://digital.soas.ac.uk/AA00000793/00005/pdf?search=burma+%3dreport>.

<sup>51</sup> For an external image of Jubilee Hall published by D.A. Ahuja in 1910, see <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/c2630359-a048-1508-e040-e00a180613de>. Picture Collection, The New York Public Library. “Jubilee Hall, Rangoon.” New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed May 23, 2018.

took place on the 2,500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Buddha's passing within an enormous complex constructed to the north of the Shwedagon Pagoda. Attended by thousands from across the Buddhist world it was endorsed personally by U Nu, the first Prime Minister (1948–56, 1957–58, 1960–62).<sup>52</sup> The museum's aims evoked the nationalist sentiment that emerged in the 1910s that 'to be Burmese is to be Buddhist', an idea that had continued to shape popular perceptions of social and cultural identity in Myanmar and overseas.<sup>53</sup> Yet it is also a reminder of the problems the devout Buddhist leader had in managing the competing interests of different religious groups which led to his political decline in 1962.<sup>54</sup>

When it opened in 1964 the museum was part of the Institute of Advanced Buddhist Studies under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Home and Religious Affairs.<sup>55</sup> Later known as the Kaba Aye Pagoda Buddhist Art Museum, it remains one of the more exclusive pagoda museums supported by high-ranking officials and guests, who access the collections privately for the purpose of merit-making.<sup>56</sup>

The modern design echoed Luce's earlier references to Bagan temples.<sup>57</sup> Bespoke interiors were inlaid with colourful patterns and Bagan temple-inspired features, such as the arched doorways and rose-windows (fig.1.2). Although the dramatic effects of projected light within the cavernous temples of Bagan were difficult to replicate, this evocation of sacred space offers a unique exhibitionary model for the analysis of later pagoda museums (see this chapter: *Liminal Moments on Ritual Pathways*).

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<sup>52</sup> Donald M. Seekins, *Historical Dictionary of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 337.

<sup>53</sup> Schober, *Modern Buddhist Conjunctures in Myanmar*, 2.

<sup>54</sup> Social unrest amongst non-Buddhist minorities following the declaration of Buddhism as the state religion in August 1961 was one reason that led to the take-over by General Ne Win in March 1962. Seekins, *Historical Dictionary of Burma (Myanmar)*, 32. Donald Eugene Smith, *Religion and Politics in Burma*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 281–82.

<sup>55</sup> Kenneth Hudson and Ann Nicholls, *The Directory of Museums and Living Displays*, Third Edition (New York: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 1985), 112. Board of Trustees Kaba Aye Pagoda, 'A History of the Buddhist Art Museum.' (Kaba Aye Pagoda, Yangon, Undated.).

<sup>56</sup> Heidi Tan, 'Art, Power and Merit. The Veneration of Buddha Images in Myanmar Museums', in *Buddhist Art of Myanmar* (New York: Asia Society Museum, 2015), 82–83. Another museum, the Chatta Sangayana or Sixth Buddhist Synod Museum was set up with Daw Nu Mra Zan's assistance, much later in October 2000, to commemorate the meeting. The collection includes historical and religious objects, famous monks' personal items, memorabilia from the Council, commissioned paintings and models of the Mahapasana Cave where the meeting took place. The exhibits aim to 'stimulate interest, to give information and to increase piety'. See: [www.mora.gov.mm/mora\\_department2.aspx](http://www.mora.gov.mm/mora_department2.aspx)

<sup>57</sup> The design was undertaken by Benjamin Polk, a partner with the Indian architectural firm Polk & Mehandru in New Delhi. Board of Trustees Kaba Aye Pagoda, 'A History of the Buddhist Art Museum.'



Figure 1.2. Shrine display (left), re-gilded Buddha images (right), Buddhist Art Museum, Kaba Aye Pagoda, Yangon, 15 August and 8 October 2013. Photographs: Heidi Tan courtesy of Buddhist Art Museum.

The museum eventually established a name that reflected its dedication to ‘Buddhist art’, a paradigm it claimed as essential to Myanmar culture. In 2013 an undated sign over the main door read: *Bouda Yinjehmu Pya daik*. Although translated there as ‘Buddhist Art Museum’, the term ‘yinjehmu’ more typically refers to the broader term ‘culture’.<sup>58</sup> Art and culture are further defined by the objects it collected: ‘Buddha statues and utensils of Saṃgha etc.’, many of which were donated during the time of the Council. Furthermore, the museum was oriented to the Buddhist world and its experts, as stated in its aims:

To have the public educated on Buddhist art, a tap root of Myanmar culture and the arts....to let the monks, missionaries and researchers, both internal and external, study the essence of Myanmar culture; and to have relations diplomatically with other countries possessing a Buddhist tradition.<sup>59</sup>

The Buddhist Art Museum’s aspirations aligned in many ways with the earlier museum plans outlined above by Luce and Ray. Ray was also an advisor, under the auspices of the Ford Foundation, to the development of the Buddhist Art Museum.<sup>60</sup> A reminder of Luce’s four functions mentioned earlier are identified in the museum’s pamphlet – caring for objects so as not to harm their original condition, exhibiting objects, conducting research and facilitating visitors’ research.<sup>61</sup> The pagoda museum also addressed another of his aims which was to create a ‘living museum’.<sup>62</sup> In 2008, the

<sup>58</sup> Fieldwork observation, 9 October 2013.

<sup>59</sup> Board of Trustees Kaba Aye Pagoda, ‘A History of the Buddhist Art Museum.’

<sup>60</sup> Board of Trustees Kaba Aye Pagoda.

<sup>61</sup> Board of Trustees Kaba Aye Pagoda.

<sup>62</sup> Luce, ‘Draft Scheme for a Burma Museum’, 108.



collection was augmented by a large group of Buddha images that had been transferred from the customs department. Curator Daw Nwe Nwe collected donations to repair and re-gild the images for a new shrine display (fig.1.2, right). The group was displayed together with a large marble image that had been commissioned for the Council. Believed to be powerful, the image had subsequently been re-consecrated at the Shwedagon Pagoda before its reinstallation at the museum in 2004.<sup>63</sup>

This example demonstrates several precedents for the pagoda museum, not least of which is its role to provide opportunities for merit-making. The ritual underpins both the curatorial processes of ritual care and the collective support of donors. Merit is cultivated at multiple points and in many ways; for example, through the practice of generosity (*dāna*), assisting others to do good deeds, sharing the merit of doing good deeds and rejoicing in the merit earned by others.<sup>64</sup> The ritual premise for the pagoda museum's spatial qualities, curatorial remit and interpretive use of objects is revisited in this chapter.

The new shrine also set a more recent precedent for other pagoda museums, in this case by demonstrating that a condition of 'Buddhist art' is that it needs to be ritually activated, in recognition of the 'inherently powerful' quality of Buddha images.<sup>65</sup> This example contrasts with the new Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum where its remit as a ritual site was more explicitly articulated when it re-opened in 2016. Although a shrine had existed there since 1992 it had been less well defined and operated informally, somewhat like the altars that existed in parallel at the state museums (see this chapter: *A Place for Ritual and Transformation*; Chapter Three: *Quiet Potency on Display*).

## Making Space for the Pagoda Museum

Trustees' records list in some detail, the historical events in the life of the pagoda going back to the late 14<sup>th</sup> century. They include royally sponsored renovations and losses due to natural disasters and colonial occupation. However, little is known of the spaces for keeping or display at the pagoda until 1991 when the 'Buddha Museum, with 28

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<sup>63</sup> Tan, 'Art, Power and Merit. The Veneration of Buddha Images in Myanmar Museums', 83.

<sup>64</sup> Committee for Compiling A Dictionary of Buddhist Terms, Ministry of Religious Affairs, *A Dictionary of Buddhist Terms* (Yangon: Ministry of Religious Affairs, 1996), 150–51.

<sup>65</sup> Juliane Schober, 'Venerating the Buddha's Remains in Burma: From Solitary Practice to the Cultural Hegemony of Communities', *The Journal of Burma Studies* Vol.6 (2001): 112.

showrooms' is mentioned.<sup>66</sup> However, by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century spaces in the southern section of the pagoda nearest to the trustees' office had emerged. Biggs' guide book of 1895 mentions that the southern shrine housed older Buddha images but that adjacent niches contained some of the oldest images at the pagoda.<sup>67</sup>

Following the exile of King Thibaw to India in 1885 and the eradication of royal patronage, donations to the pagoda from other sources increased. For example, wealthy merchant families helped to maintain the pagoda with donations of shrines and prayer halls,<sup>68</sup> and copper tiles for the lower sections of the stupa.<sup>69</sup> By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century growth in support for the pagoda was paralleled by growing nationalist sentiment. As Alicia Turner notes, activists lobbied for religious reforms motivated by a sense of fear of the deterioration of the faith or *sāsana*.<sup>70</sup> A new sense of Burmese identity was promoted by the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA). Established in 1906, the YMBA sought to mitigate the erosion of traditional religious values and lobbied for the establishment of a Ministry of Religious Affairs.<sup>71</sup> A specifically Burmese sense of 'national character' was propounded by the Association's president U May Ong who declared in 1908 that, if asked about Burmese identity, he would reply: 'A Burman is a Buddhist'.<sup>72</sup>

### From 'Utensils Building' to 'Curio Gallery' and 'Hall of Ancient Buddha Images'

The need for a keeping space in the southern section of the pagoda was evident during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. A copy of an original blueprint of 1919, dated to 1935, identifies a number of buildings around the southern entrance.<sup>73</sup> This includes a 'Paribawga-

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<sup>66</sup> The enshrined relics of Queen Shinsawbu that were excavated in 1855 during the building of army barracks and now displayed at the Victoria and Albert Museum are one example. See <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O10654/ceremonial-helmet-unknown/>. See also: Moore, 'Ritual Continuity and Stylistic Change in Pagoda Consecration and Renovation', 23–24, n.23. Elizabeth Howard Moore, 'Pagoda Desecration and Myanmar Archaeology, 1853–86', in *Materializing Southeast Asia's Past: Selected Papers from the 12th International Conference of the European Association of Southeast Asian Archaeologists*, vol. 2 (Singapore: NUS Press, 2013), 242.

<sup>67</sup> T. Hesketh Biggs, *The Shwe Dagon Pagoda, Rangoon* (Rangoon: Hanthawaddy, 1895), 33–35. This assumption was attributed to the large quantity of gold leaf that covered these images.

<sup>68</sup> Noel F. Singer, *Burmah. A Photographic Journey, 1855-1925* (Gartmore: Kiscadale, 1993), 13.

<sup>69</sup> Moore, 'Pagoda Desecration and Myanmar Archaeology, 1853–86', 243.

<sup>70</sup> Alicia Marie Turner, *Saving Buddhism. The Impermanence of Religion in Colonial Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), 1.

<sup>71</sup> Juliane Schober, "Buddhism in Burma: Engagement with Modernity," in *Buddhism in World Cultures. Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Stephen C. Berkwitz (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 83, 86. Schober, *Modern Buddhist Conjunctures in Myanmar*, 38.

<sup>72</sup> Schober, *Modern Buddhist Conjunctures in Myanmar*, 71.

<sup>73</sup> A facsimile is displayed in the new showroom *Historic Objects of the Shwedagon Pagoda*. Fieldwork, 22 September 2017.

Daik', literally 'Utensils Building' (fig.1.3, no. 3).<sup>74</sup> As John Strong notes, *paribhoga* (P) refers to 'relics of use' or 'relics of contact' to refer to things used by the Buddha as well as bodily relics that were gifted, such as the Buddha's hairs that were given to the merchant brothers to enshrine at the Shwedagon Pagoda.<sup>75</sup> The term also connotes relics such as bowls or bodhi trees that derive potency from the fact that they are both symbolic representations of the Buddha and his Enlightenment, and yet could also be experienced in the way that Buddha saw or used them.<sup>76</sup> The term suggests the building housed primarily relics of use, referred to hereafter as sacred objects. The connotation of use and the continuity of the Buddha's presence was alluded to by U Maung Maung Gyi, the museum's volunteer keeper, who referred to the collections as belonging to the Buddha (see this chapter: *Respect for Buddha's Belongings*). However, the Paribawga-Daik was also a response to the need for safekeeping other kinds of objects such as 'antique' gold jewellery and Myanmar fine arts which had been donated 'over long periods of time' according to the museum's Record Book.<sup>77</sup>

Curiously, the Record Book says nothing of this early phase of the pagoda museum during the time of Independence. However, Aung Than's publication of 1949 identified a 'Curio Gallery' that housed a collection of 'old pagodas, images and curios'.<sup>78</sup> The title promotes the popular appeal of curios, rather than the sacred objects associated with relics of use. The book includes a rudimentary plan which maps the Gallery at the site previously known as the Paribawga-Daik. Later, the Record Book says, the site was known as the Eh-gan Dazaung (Reception Hall) or more colloquially the Japan Dazaung. Located in front of the trustees' office, it was used as a museum until 1970.<sup>79</sup> According to librarian U Phone Myint, the Japan Dazaung was named in reference to donor U San Chain, whose family ran a business that had dealings with Japan (fig.1.3, no.3).<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Fieldwork observations in discussion with U Maung Maung Gyi. 15 February 2016. The map is authored: 'Traced by Mg. Ba Shin'. The building is numbered '733. Paribawga-Daik'. While a key with physical features of the pagoda is still legible, the deterioration of the map makes it difficult to reproduce effectively.

<sup>75</sup> Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 21, 71.

<sup>76</sup> Strong, 227.

<sup>77</sup> Win Kyaing, 'Le-Zu Dat-Poun Shwedagon Zedi-Daw. Museum Objects List. Record Book (Part 1) [in Myanmar]', trans. Su Latt Win and Yamin Htay, 1 March 2006, 1.

<sup>78</sup> Aung Than, *Shwedagon. The Sacred Shrine*. (Rangoon: Superintendent, Government Printing and Stationery, 1949), 31. Win Pe, *Shwe Dagon*.

<sup>79</sup> Win Kyaing, "Le-zu Dat-poun Shwedagon Zedi-daw. Museum Objects List. Record Book (Part 1) [in Myanmar]," trans. Su Latt Win and Yamin Htay, March 1, 2006, 1, 3.

<sup>80</sup> U Phone Myint, interview with the author and Moe Aung Lwin, 2 September 2015. The blueprint mentions the name of the donor and numbers the pavilion '736'.

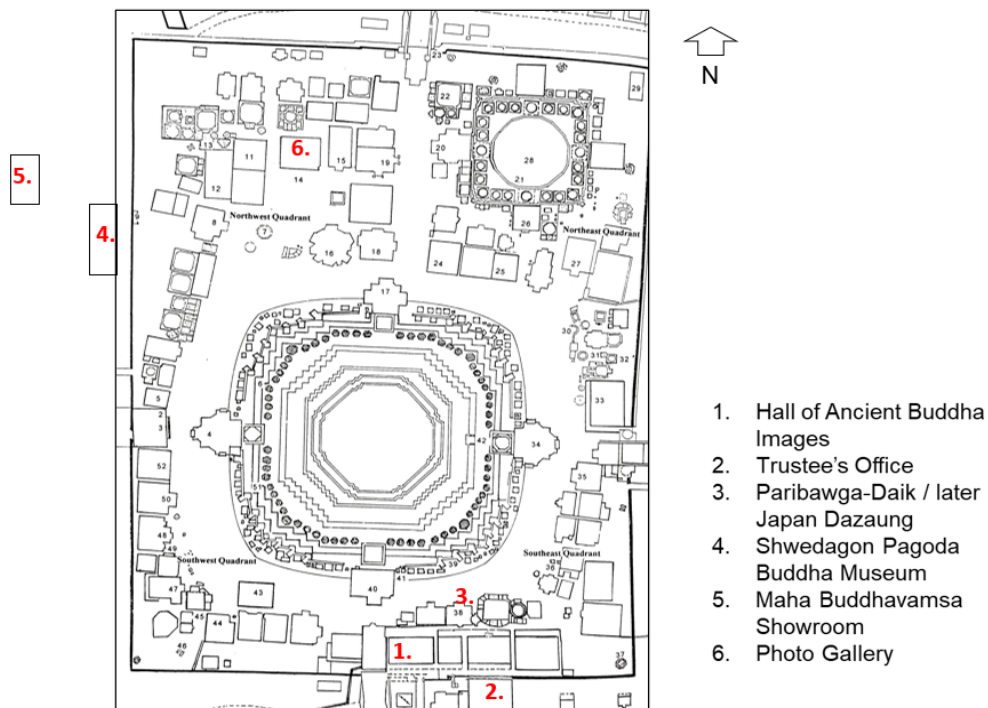


Figure 1.3. Map of Shwedagon Pagoda. Source: Tun Aung Chain and Thein Hlaing (1996:28), courtesy of U Kyaw Win, Myanmar Historical Commission.

In 1976, a larger Hall of Ancient Buddha Images, *Shehaung Bouda Yoke-pwa-mya Dazaung* (M), was constructed just behind the Japan Dazaung and the collection was moved there (fig.1.3, no.1). According to the museum's Record Book these included the Five Buddhas that are currently venerated within the museum's shrine. It also states that the displays still conveyed the appearance of a storeroom.<sup>81</sup> The hall currently houses an extensive altar with a group of around fifty Buddha images that are said to be the oldest at the pagoda. These benefit from the added security which restricts use of the hall for ceremonies and official meetings.

<sup>81</sup> Win Kyaing, "Le-zu Dat-poun Shwedagon Zedi-daw. Museum Objects List. Record Book (Part 1) [in Myanmar]," 1.



Figure 1.4. Hall of Ancient Buddha Images, 14 August 2015. Photograph: Heidi Tan, courtesy Shwedagon Pagoda Board of Trustees.

Arranged on a dais wrapped in gold cloth, the group comprises ten large seated images dressed in robes with the donor's names attached, and a variety of smaller images lined up in front (fig.1.4).<sup>82</sup> This gathering reflects the importance of older images in the hierarchy of donations as implied earlier by Biggs. The historic movements of sacred images and other objects through these various keeping spaces in the southern section, and their intermittent use, demonstrates a well-established ritual premise for the pagoda museum in which ritual care is given through veneration and periodic re-gilding as discussed below.

### The Maha Buddhavamsa Showroom, 1991

A more formalised notion of museum-making emerged by the late 1980s as culture and heritage were mobilised as part of nation-building following the establishment of military rule in 1988. Gustaaf Houtman identified this as a 'museum period' in which different kinds of museums were established. While state museums such as the 'Buddhist Museum' in Sagaing, otherwise known as the Sagaing Buddha and Cultural Museum, are cited, pagoda museums remain unacknowledged. He notes also that Bagan was acknowledged to be 'a living museum'.<sup>83</sup> The ambitious scale of developments at sites

<sup>82</sup> This type of hall was observed at other pagoda museums including Phaung Daw Oo Temple at Inle Lake. It is used for hosting important visitors such as Prime Minister General Thein Sein who visited in July 2008 to inspect the pagoda after storm Nargis. The New Light of Myanmar, "Prime Minister Inspects All-Round Renovation of Shwedagon Pagoda," July 16, 2008, Vol.XVI, Number 89 edition.

<sup>83</sup> Houtman, *Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics*, 93–94.

of national importance is evident in the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum's Record Book. It notes that the idea of a museum was first raised by the trustees in 1986, but that it was not until after 1989 when the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) became involved that the trustees' plans were realised to landscape the pagoda's gardens, develop the site known as the Maha Buddhavamsa Showroom and construct a building for a museum, library and archives.<sup>84</sup> Similarly ambitious works emerged in the early 1990s at other renowned religious sites namely the Maha Buddhavamsa Museum of World Buddhism at the Mahamuni Pagoda in Mandalay.<sup>85</sup> Schober observes how the large-scale display that maps Buddhist cosmology, sacred sites, and stories of the Mahamuni Buddha, evokes for religious visitors a conflation of powerful images and narratives that emphasise the place of the Mahamuni Buddha in Burmese life. Significantly, she notes that these messages are more important than museological concerns for preservation or display.<sup>86</sup> However, the highly constructed style of the display suggests otherwise. An elaborate mezzanine viewing balcony positions the aerial spectator over the cosmological landscape below, while surrounded by photographic documentation of famous sites around the Buddhist world.<sup>87</sup>

This attention to narratives of sacred geography is also seen in the purpose-built Maha Buddhavamsa Showroom (lit. Great Life of Buddha) which displays small-scale vignettes of the Buddha's life stories. Also known as Bodawin Showroom, it constitutes a large hall that was built at ground level on the western side of the pagoda in 1991. It was initially identified as the 'Museum of the Buddha' to be distinguished from the 'Museum, Library and Archives' built a year later on the nearby overlooking hillside in 1992.<sup>88</sup> Its identity as a museum remained for many years – in 1999 the Showroom was still referred to in trustees' records as a 'Buddha Museum with 28 showrooms'.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Win Kyaing, "Le-zu Dat-poun Shwedagon Zedi-daw. Museum Objects List. Record Book (Part 1) [in Myanmar]," 1.

<sup>85</sup> The dioramic effect had already been adopted earlier for example at the Maha Wizaya Pagoda built near the southern entrance of the Shwedagon Pagoda in 1980 by Ne Win (Prime Minister, 1958–1960; Chairman, Revolutionary Council, 1962–1974 and President of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma, 1962–1981). Seekins, *Historical Dictionary of Burma (Myanmar)*, 278–79, 329–31.

<sup>86</sup> Juliane Schober, 'In the Presence of the Buddha: Ritual Veneration of the Burmese Mahamuni Image', *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia*, 1997, 278–79, [http://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/BDLM/toModule.do?prefix=/search&page=/search\\_detail.jsp?seq=335810](http://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/BDLM/toModule.do?prefix=/search&page=/search_detail.jsp?seq=335810).

<sup>87</sup> Fieldwork observations, 24 August 2015 (see Appendix 1, A.8).

<sup>88</sup> Tun Aung Chain and Thein Hlaing, *Shwedagon* (Yangon, Myanmar: Universities Historical Research Centre, 1996), 13, 31.

<sup>89</sup> The hall was finished on 17 April 1991 at a cost of 15 million Myanmar kyats then worth about 2.2 million US dollars. Moore, "Ritual Continuity and Stylistic Change in Pagoda Consecration and Renovation," 24, n.23. The rate of exchange at the time was 6.85 kyats to the dollar. "Historical Exchange Rates from 1953," accessed October 13, 2016, <http://fxtop.com/en/historical-exchange-rates>. Interestingly the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum which had opened a year later in 1992 was not included in this published list of historical events.

Although the designation 'museum' was eventually replaced by 'showroom' to distinguish the site from its neighbour, the two are conceived as related. The distinction also serves to demonstrate that notions of a museum can exist simultaneously or change over time. A museum can be conceived as a place to tell stories of the Buddha, or as demonstrated by the new Shwedagon Pagoda Museum, a place dedicated to the storage and display of a collection.



Figure 1.5. Birth of Buddha diorama, Maha Buddhavamsa Showroom, 19 August 2016. Photograph: Heidi Tan, courtesy of Shwedagon Pagoda Board of Trustees.

As the terms Buddhavamsa (P) and Bodawin / *Bouda-win* (M) indicate, the rooms present the life events of the Buddha, conveyed through the spectacle of hyper-realistic dioramas of near life-sized figures. Like the painted mural tradition, these synoptic presentations conform to the didactic approach of the Buddhist biographical tradition. These were popular with families on outings during festive full-moon days (fig.1.5).<sup>90</sup> The Showroom had also remained largely unmapped but after renovation in 2016 was included on a new online map at the far north-western reaches of the pagoda's ground-level entrance (see fig.1.2).<sup>91</sup> Both the Showroom and Museum pre-empted the new

<sup>90</sup> Su Latt Win could recall the sense of excitement she felt as a ten-year-old visitor. Su Latt Win, personal communication, November 2016.

<sup>91</sup> Secretary, Buddha Museum Advanced Display Group, 'Shwedagon Pagoda Museum. Advanced Renovation Work Plan [in Myanmar]', trans. Su Latt Win, December 2013, 23. 'Area Map. Shwedagon Pagoda', Shwedagon Pagoda. Official Website, 2018, <https://www.shwedagonpagoda.com.mm/area-map>.

National Museum, which opened on Pyay Road in September 1996, in time for the tourism promotional event known as “Visit Myanmar Year”.<sup>92</sup>

### Shwedagon Pagoda Museum, 1992

According to the museum’s inaugural pamphlet, formal planning of the museum was started in 1989 by trustees in consultation with the president of Yangon District, State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), and the Head of the Defence Department, while building works were done by the Ministry of Engineering.<sup>93</sup> Although senior military officials with approval from the committee of advisory monks or *aw-wada-sariya sayadaws* were credited as heading the new development, the merit associated with this work was shared with many other donors whose award-giving ceremony was illustrated in the museum’s pamphlet.<sup>94</sup> According to Schober, institutions of the state rather than individual patrons were acknowledged in public rituals of merit-making at this time in order to avoid the cult of charismatic individuals that had occurred earlier during U Nu’s rule.<sup>95</sup> When the building opened in July 1992, prominent signage on the exterior read: *Shwedagon Zedi-daw Pya-daik, Pitakat-taik, Mawgun-daik*, or ‘Shwedagon Pagoda Museum, Scripture Library, Archive’. The scale and importance of the Museum and Library was such that they formed one of nine departments at the pagoda, together with Finance, Administration, Gold Jewellery, Parks and Landscaping, Works, Security and Fire, Stores, and the Secretariat for keeping staff records.<sup>96</sup>

The inaugural pamphlet outlined the museum’s objectives which included: the display of images of the Buddha and stupas, historical objects from the pagoda, donations made by monks and others including valuable objects such as jewellery, and ‘art objects’ which were to be studied and would increase respect and faith.<sup>97</sup> The museum was differentiated from other pagoda museums for its ‘systematically arranged’

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<sup>92</sup> Janette Philp and David Mercer, ‘Commodification of Buddhism in Contemporary Burma’, *Annals of Tourism Research* 26, no. 1 (1 January 1999): 21–54, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383\(98\)00050-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(98)00050-4).

<sup>93</sup> Board of Trustees, Shwedagon Pagoda, ‘Four Relics Shwedagon Pagoda. Museum, Scripture Library and Archive. Opening Ceremony [in Myanmar]’, trans. Su Latt Win (Board of Trustees, Shwedagon Pagoda, 14 July 1992)..

<sup>94</sup> Board of Trustees, Shwedagon Pagoda.

<sup>95</sup> Schober, ‘Buddhism in Burma: Engagement with Modernity’, 91.

<sup>96</sup> Head of Office, U Htun Aung Ngwe, oversees these departments. U Htun Aung Ngwe, interview with the author, Yangon, 14 August 2015.

<sup>97</sup> Official opening leaflet, 14th July 1992. See Appendix 1.2. The opening was patronised by First Secretary of the State Law and Order Council (SLORC) General Khin Nyunt, the patron of the Shwedagon Pagoda’s renovation in 1999. U Maung Maung Gyi, interview with the author, 10 February 2016.



displays and excellent examples of Myanmar handicraft. It was also identified as distinct from other sites of display at the pagoda. For example, the term *pya-daik*, literally ‘show/display building’ or even ‘exhibit building’ was translated as ‘museum’.<sup>98</sup> Other sites were designated *pya-khan*, a term translated variously as ‘showroom’, ‘exhibition hall’ or ‘gallery’. For example, the *Maha Buddhavamsa Pya-khan* was previously translated as ‘Maha Buddhavamsa Showroom’, then in August 2016 as, ‘Maha Buddha Vamsa. The Life of Buddha Exhibition Hall’, while the nearby *Shwedagon Zedi-daw Da-poun Pya-khan* was designated ‘Shwedagon Pagoda Photo Gallery’ (fig.1.6).<sup>99</sup>



Figure 1.6. Shwedagon Pagoda Photo Gallery, 10 February 2016. Photograph: Heidi Tan, courtesy Shwedagon Pagoda Board of Trustees.

The need to distinguish the museum was a response to the visual complexity of the pagoda and the growing impetus to formalise its heritage value.<sup>100</sup> Other sites include large historical objects housed within dedicated buildings. These include: three stone slabs with unique 15<sup>th</sup> century trilingual inscriptions said to have been installed by King Dhammazedī (r.1472–1492),<sup>101</sup> two large bells donated by the kings Singu (r.1776–1781) and Tharawaddy (r.1837–1846), teak pillars from the Southern Shrine dated to

<sup>98</sup> Myanmar Language Commission, ‘Myanmar-English Dictionary’, 1993, <http://sealang.net/burmese/>. See John Okell, ‘Burmese By Ear or Essential Myanmar,’ 2002, 203 <https://www.soas.ac.uk/bbe/>. The only other sites that incorporate the word ‘*daik*’ or ‘building’ are the original library (*pitakat-taik*) and archive (*mawgun-daik*) which were moved from the existing museum to the eastern lower platform, ostensibly to make more room for the museum. Secretary, Buddha Museum Advanced Display Group, ‘Shwedagon Pagoda Museum. Advanced Renovation Work Plan [in Myanmar]’, 23.

<sup>99</sup> I am grateful to Su Latt Win for this suggestion.

<sup>100</sup> The heritage community is currently preparing zoning plans for Yangon, that include the Shwedagon Pagoda and its eventual nomination as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Su Su, personal communication, 4 December 2016. In 2015 the Department of Archaeology and Yangon Heritage Trust both endorsed the Shwedagon Pagoda as a candidate for the tentative list. Myat Nyein Aye, ‘UNESCO Officer Sees Yangon as Prime Candidate for Listing’, *The Myanmar Times*, 9 December 2015, <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/business/18042-unesco-officer-sees-yangon-as-prime-candidate-for-listing.html>.

<sup>101</sup> Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 73.

1840 and stone steps from the eastern stairway dated to 1924. Replica and original umbrella spires are also enshrined within the north-eastern section of the platform, donated by King Hsinbyushin (r. 1763–1776) and King Mindon (r. 1853–1878).<sup>102</sup>

#### *On the Threshold of the Pagoda*

As with most pagoda museums, the building designated as ‘museum’ shares the sacred ground of the stupa and had its own ground separately consecrated with ritual deposits in 1989 in preparation for construction.<sup>103</sup> Photo documentation suggests that over time the museum was made to conform to its vernacular surroundings. The original bright orange single-tiered roof, edged with multiple concrete renditions of the traditional *duyin gauk* or ‘peacock-chest’ finial, contrasted starkly with the surrounding pavilions and halls when first built (fig.1.7, left).<sup>104</sup>



Figure 1.7. Shwedagon Pagoda Museum with original roof. Source: Tun Aung Chain and Thein Hlaing 1996, 34. Photo courtesy U Tun Aung Chain (left). With new roof, 16 May 2014 (right).

In 1999, the roof was replaced with a vernacular style tiered roof with decorative gold eaves that gave the building greater affinity with its surroundings. However, the fenced and gated monumental building has none of the elegance of nearby shrines with their soaring tiered roofs (fig.1.7 right).<sup>105</sup> Unlike other pagoda museums most of which are small single-storey buildings, the building resonated with bland modern-style civic buildings in other parts of Southeast Asia at this time – the functional design with

<sup>102</sup> Aung Than, *Shwedagon*, 31. Elizabeth Moore, ‘Text and New Contexts: Shwedagon and Kyaikhtiyo Today’, in *Texts and Contexts* (Yangon University, Myanmar: Universities Historical Research Centre, 2001), 4, [http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs/EM\\_UHRC01.pdf](http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs/EM_UHRC01.pdf). Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 96.

<sup>103</sup> Win Kyaing, ‘Le-Zu Dat-Poun Shwedagon Zedi-Daw. Museum Objects List. Record Book (Part 1) [in Myanmar]’, 2–3.

<sup>104</sup> Elizabeth Howard Moore, Hansjorg Mayer, and Win Pe, *Shwedagon. Golden Pagoda of Myanmar* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999), 103.

<sup>105</sup> The Record Book acknowledged that both roofs were ‘in Burmese style’ although no rationale was given for the renovation. See Appendix 1.3.

simple spacious interiors and good ventilation was employed in secondary schools in Singapore for example, during the 1980s.<sup>106</sup>

The museum's distinction from other sites of display is further emphasised by its tenuous physical connection with the pagoda. When viewed from the southern side, its foundations are visibly separate from the north-western edge of the pagoda, while the upper floor hovers like an annex tethered by two bridges to the stupa's main platform (fig.1.7 left). However, its eastern façade blends in with its surroundings and presents the 'seamless' quality that is common to micromuseums and most pagoda museums (fig.1.7, right).<sup>107</sup>



Figure 1.8. Backdrop depicting Shwedagon Pagoda Museum on Theinguttara Hill above the western grounds (top left), foregrounded by the Sule Pagoda (centre), ca. 2006. Maha Wizaya Pagoda, 7 February 2016. Photograph: Heidi Tan.

Yet the museum's remoteness is further revealed by the view from the western approach to the hill depicted in a painted backdrop at the Maha Wizaya Pagoda. The prominent museum building is recognisable on the remote hillside positioned, somewhat inaccurately, below the stupa platform (fig.1.8, top left). This remote situation was also identified in the museum's 'Advanced Renovation Work Plan' (hereafter Work Plan), which stated the need for a new pathway that would connect it

<sup>106</sup> Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore. A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1988), 50–51. The larger yet similarly understated National Museum in Yangon is described as an embodiment of 'generic international Modernism' and more redolent of the 1960s. Iola Lenzi, *Museums of Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2005), 86.

<sup>107</sup> Candlin, *Micromuseology*, 153.

with the Maha Buddhavamsa Showroom, and in effect re-establish the museum as an alternative gateway to the stupa.<sup>108</sup>

In 2015, the museum appeared to be a separate space of safekeeping distinguished by crowded displays and an eclectic collection (see *A Space of Safekeeping and Abundance in a Field of Merit*). The sense of an inner world of the remotely situated museum was heightened by juxtapositions of mundane and sacred objects. This resonates with the claim of a marginal 'otherworldly' quality for certain micromuseums, in which Candlin draws on Michel Foucault's concept of 'heterotopia'; a place that encapsulates objects of all kinds from all previous periods of time, and separates them from the present.<sup>109</sup> Foucault further describes the museum as a kind of 'universal archive', where time and things perpetually accumulate, yet remain safe from becoming worn out.<sup>110</sup> While Foucault's assumption, she suggests, is of a universal museum concerned with historical content, the micromuseum subverts that model in that the formal presentation of history is not always a key concern, dust is allowed to prevail, and objects often remain actively used. Pagoda museums share similar conditions; chronologically ordered histories are absent, dusty storage-like conditions are frequently encountered and objects are 'used' in rituals of veneration. However, at many pagoda museums the very real presence of wear and tear from light, heat and humidity renders Foucault's ideal of an ever-present ever-growing collection just that, an ideal. Also, while there is a strong sense of an inner world in the pagoda museum, it is circumscribed by the sacred landscape in which it resides. Candlin's version of heterotopia differs in that it envisages the micromuseum as separated from 'ordinary cultural spaces' or the mundane world that immediately surrounds it.<sup>111</sup>

The heterotopic quality manifests as a result of the pagoda museum's designation as a separate space of safekeeping, twice removed from the mundane world and situated within the space and time of the sacred site. The names of the site evoke narratives of the remote and auspicious landscape which the two Mon brothers Tapussa and Bhallika navigated with guidance from Sule Nat, the local spirit whose image resides in the Sule Pagoda gesticulating northwards towards the hill.<sup>112</sup> The Burmanised name Shwe Dagon literally 'Golden Dagon', originates from the Mon term Lagun and the

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<sup>108</sup> Secretary, Buddha Museum Advanced Display Group, 'Shwedagon Pagoda Museum. Advanced Renovation Work Plan [in Myanmar]', 23. See Appendix 1.4.

<sup>109</sup> Candlin, *Micromuseology*, 182–83.

<sup>110</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias', in *Rethinking Architecture. A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. Neil Leach (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), 355.

<sup>111</sup> Candlin, *Micromuseology*, 182–83.

<sup>112</sup> Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 110.

earlier name Tigum-pa-nagara (P), 'Town of Three Hills'.<sup>113</sup> Mon inscriptions from Thaton refer to a stupa or *ceti* (P) / *zedi* (M) known as Tikumbhaceti; the term 'kumbha' refers to a small hill resembling the frontlet bone of an elephant.<sup>114</sup> A further rendition of Dagon is the tree trunk or *Takun* (Dagon) that lay balanced on the peak of Theinguttara Hill; a sign for the two brothers to deposit the gift of the Buddha's hair relics.<sup>115</sup> The site's formal name 'Four Relics Stupa' or *Le-zu Dat-poun Zedi-daw* memorialises the enshrined relics of the three previous Buddhas together with those of Gotama Buddha and underscores the importance of the site as the only one in the country where such coalescence of auspiciousness exists.<sup>116</sup>

The more remote quality of pagoda museums surveyed was observed among those that reside on water, such as the Phaung Daw Oo museum at Inle Lake, or high up on hills, such as the Bandula Monastery museum in Mrauk-U, and the Buddhist Culture Museum at Thein Daw Gyi pagoda in Myeik in the southern-most region of Myanmar. The latter is a small building perched on a steep hillside that is packed with objects, many unique to the region – lead coins, beaded slippers, Thai amulets – and images including the famous Alodawpyi Buddha discussed in Chapter Three. The journey to the remote museum at the Shwedagon Pagoda is like ascending to another world at the summit some 50 metres above the city. Undertaken barefoot, it is part of the 'bodily offerings' that constitute merit-making rituals at the site.<sup>117</sup> The removal of shoes at the base of the stairways is a mark of respect, while the climb includes buying offerings and souvenirs at small shops along the stairways and circumambulations of the terraces to visit monasteries and community halls. The faster escalators and elevators on the western and southern sides respectively are more typically taken by foreign fee-paying tour groups.<sup>118</sup> However, the western entryway is comparatively quiet and flanked by dense landscaping, fruit trees and abundant birdlife. Glimpses of the

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<sup>113</sup> Local knowledge of the site comes from multiple sources including early Buddhist texts from India, local oral histories and inscriptions. Noel F. Singer, *Old Rangoon. City of the Shwedagon* (Gartmore: Kiscadale, 1995), Preface, 2-4. Singer notes also that Dagon was anglicised as Rangoon in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and in 1989 this reverted to Yangon.

<sup>114</sup> These stone inscriptions were installed by King Dhammazedi at the Kalyani monastery during the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. Biggs, *The Shwe Dagon Pagoda, Rangoon*, 12. Emil Forchhammer, *Notes on the Early History and Geography of British Burma*. (Rangoon: Superintendent Government Printing, 1891), 7, 17.

<sup>115</sup> Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 77–78; Shway Yoe, *The Burman*, 182.

<sup>116</sup> Board of Trustees, Shwedagon Pagoda, 'Four Relics Shwedagon Pagoda. Museum, Scripture Library and Archive. Opening Ceremony [in Myanmar]'. See Appendix 1.2.

<sup>117</sup> Elizabeth Moore, 'Unexpected Spaces at the Shwedagon Pagoda, Myanmar', in *A Companion to Asian Art and Architecture*, ed. Rebecca Brown M. and Deborah Hutton S. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2011), 184, <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/11827/>.

<sup>118</sup> The western stairway was closed by British troops and re-opened on 2 March 1930 with a ceremony attended by 4000 members of the sangha. Eight flights of escalators were installed in 1992. Moore, "Ritual Continuity and Stylistic Change in Pagoda Consecration and Renovation.", 22–24, n.23.

museum set into the hillside glide by as the escalator arrives at the summit on the fourth terrace and the visitor is greeted by the radiant 112-metre high gold-clad stupa, fronted by the western shrine to Kassapa, the third Buddha of this era.

### **A Space of Safekeeping and Abundance in a Field of Merit**

As mentioned earlier, another sense of the otherworldly or heterotopic quality of the pagoda museum was starkly revealed in the dense eclectic displays observed in 2015. Barricades and other means of safekeeping were prevalent here as they were at other sites including the Botahtaung Pagoda where collections were obscured by steel gates, and the Mahamuni Pagoda where displays were protected by ornate iron fencing. Similar measures were observed at Phaung Daw Oo Temple, Thihoshin Pagoda, Yadana Man Aung Temple (Chapter Two: *The 'Outer Museum'*) and the Pagan Museum (Chapter Three: *'Pagan Museum, 1904'*).<sup>119</sup>



Figure 1.9. Visitors lean across the barriers at the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum, 9 September 2015. Photograph: Heidi Tan, courtesy Shwedagon Pagoda Board of Trustees.

At the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum, a strict protocol that included no photography or sitting, was enforced by museum invigilators whose presence encouraged visitors to keep moving. Yet gold reliquaries and Buddha images remained obvious points of interest that caused visitors to linger and lean over the barriers to scrutinise the displays (fig.1.9). Bars are another means employed to protect high-value Buddha images especially in Thai monastery museums. Koanantakool illustrates an example

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<sup>119</sup> Fenced-in storage spaces at sites not designated as museums were also observed at Kyaikhtisaung Pagoda in Mon State, Kyundaw Zedi and Maung Di Pagoda in Twante.

and notes that the limited space restricts their veneration.<sup>120</sup> Where space is available and protocol is less strict however, the bars themselves are no barrier to veneration; for example, at the Bagan Archaeological Museum pilgrims prostrate and meditate in front of rare metal Buddha images displayed within fenced enclosures (see Chapter Three: *Buddha Images Showroom*). However, the meritorious value of mundane objects meant that these too were frequently kept in padlocked showcases. Personal possessions such as pocket calculators and wristwatches, unusual natural objects such as fossilised wood and dried fish, as well as antique lacquer, colonial period glassware and a host of other utilitarian objects were among the eclectic displays kept at around half of the museums surveyed.<sup>121</sup>

Before renovation, this attention to safekeeping was a distinctive element in the visual language of the displays. While it remains so for many pagoda museums, the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum's plans for renovation included a more 'systematic' approach that would rationalise the displays through greater selectivity, the implication being that this would increase the visibility (and security) of the collection. This intention relates to the museological phenomena that Svetlana Alpers defines as the 'museum effect'. It implies a 'way of seeing' that is predicated on the removal of objects from their original context for 'attentive looking'. Furthermore, the 'museum effect' was historically premised on selecting objects of 'visual interest' and presenting them as art.<sup>122</sup> Alpers refers to the Western art museum and the problematic nature of exhibiting objects from different cultures that were made for other purposes. Re-contextualised in the pagoda museum, the notion of the 'museum effect' helps to reveal underlying curatorial intention and visual effect within the displays. That intention undermines effect is seen in the obfuscation of the displays by the means of safekeeping. In the pagoda museum, another way of seeing is predicated on accepting that bars and padlocks remain within view to protect and thus confirm the value of the meritorious gifts within.

Furthermore, rather than looking singularly at individual objects, the visitor's gaze falls on the abundance of the group. Its 'visual interest' is predicated on the accumulation of merit made by a vast number of donors in a myriad of ways. One premise for the

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<sup>120</sup> Paritta Chalermpong Koanantakool, 'Contextualising Objects in Monastery Museums in Thailand', 159.

<sup>121</sup> See Appendix One for examples at Bandula Monastery, Kyantha Gyi Pagoda trustees' office, Kyantha Ya Pagoda, Maygawady Sayadaw's house, Shwedagon Pagoda, Shwesandaw Pagoda, Shwe Taung Sar Pagoda, Thein Daw Gyi Pagoda, Thihoshin Pagoda, Yadana Man Aung Temple.

<sup>122</sup> Alpers, 'The Museum as a Way of Seeing', 26–27.

'museum effect' when related to viewing art in the Western museum is the singularisation of the art object. Grimes observes that this is premised on the Western notion that the art object is separate from any association with the market or its status as commodity. Yet sacred objects presented as art in the Western context are then rendered devoid of their sacred meaning and ritual purpose.<sup>123</sup> However sacred objects such as Buddha images are commoditised in prolific quantities, at least that is before consecration, even though protocol advises that they must be 'invited' into a person's life rather than 'bought'.<sup>124</sup> While the renovated Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum identified several categories of 'art' within its renovation plan, the abundant displays conveyed another kind of 'visual interest', one that was predicated on what Alison Bastian identified as the 'aesthetic of accretion'<sup>125</sup> that is found within the shrines, rather than the 'art' that Alpers intended (see *Liminal Moments on Ritual Pathways, Objects of Merit-making and the 'Systematic' Pagoda Museum*).

The effect of abundance also revealed relationships between donors and the pagoda. Scattered across the second-floor, the collection appeared disparate in comparison to the monothematic collections cited by Candlin, whereby a whole building may be filled with one kind of object.<sup>126</sup> However, in the pagoda museum, the eclectic displays of sacred and mundane objects reveal the varying preferences of donors and it is the contingent Buddhist ritual rather than the material evidence that constitutes the monothematic quality of pagoda museums. Eclecticism caused Noel Singer to comment on a repository that existed at the Shwedagon Pagoda during the period 1875 to 1910, where objects were '...a curious mixture of the incongruous, the paltry and the precious.'<sup>127</sup> The reason for this is attributable to the ordering of displays according to the conditions of merit-making as discussed below. Displays were arranged according to criteria which privileged donors' relationships to the pagoda, rather than the historicising or other frames of reference employed by state museums. Multiple gifts together with the labels that donors provided, were kept together in the displays. For example, a gold golf putter and ball on plastic turf included a label in Myanmar and English to inform that it was awarded to the donor Mya Aye as first prize at an international tournament in the Philippines in 1979 (fig.1.10, top left).

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<sup>123</sup> Grimes, 'Sacred Objects in Museum Spaces', 420–21.

<sup>124</sup> Ma Ohnmar Myo, personal communication, 15 April 2016.

<sup>125</sup> Bastian, 'Exhibiting Buddhism: The Museumification of Burmese Buddha Images', 191.

<sup>126</sup> Two museums cited are the Shell Museum set in a church in the village of Glandford in Norfolk and the Cotton Mechanical Music Museum set within farm buildings in Suffolk. Candlin, *Micromuseology*, 154–55.

<sup>127</sup> Singer, *Burmah*, 13.





Figure 1.10. Displays of a golfing prize (top left), medals and crockery (top right) and hairlock mounted on a silver staff with silverwares (top left), 2 September 2015. Photograph: Heidi Tan, courtesy Shwedagon Pagoda Board of Trustees.

The displays included mundane objects of personal value such as a tress of hair and jewellery, silverware, colonial crockery and sporting awards, loosely grouped yet in close proximity to sacred relics and Buddha images. Valuable materials such as gold and silver were displayed together, hence the tress of hair mounted on a silver staff appeared with silverwares, miniature Bodhi trees and other so called 'relics of use' (fig. 1.10, below). Commemorative objects related to social achievements such as medals for religious examinations and multiple blood donations were displayed in an adjacent showcase along with imported English crockery and other household utensils (fig.1.10, top right).

However, the displays were also abundant with similar types of objects. One reason for repetitive displays, as Koanantakool notes, is the competition amongst local Thai donors for prestige.<sup>128</sup> However, the informal ambience produced by these displays delights and invites curiosity from visitors, as observed some years ago amongst a

<sup>128</sup> Paritta Chalernpow Koanantakool, 'Contextualising Objects in Monastery Museums in Thailand', 163.

group of secondary school students who expressed overwhelming preference for the pagoda museum as they felt that they could see many more things than at the National Museum.<sup>129</sup> The perceived imbalance of collections between state and pagoda museums observed by the students confirms the importance of abundance in the context of the pagoda museum. This attribute has also enabled the pagoda museum to supplement the National Museum's collection. For example, in the late 1990s a group of bronze Buddha images dating to the Yadanabon period – the last two reigns of King Mindon (r.1853–1878) and Thibaw (r.1878–1885) – was transferred to the National Museum<sup>130</sup> for permanent display in the Buddha Images Showroom.<sup>131</sup>

As alluded to above, abundant displays are predicated on the conditions of merit-making which in turn are motivated by the reciprocal relationship between the donor and recipient, the recipient in this case being the stupa/Buddha. The basis for this is the recipient's store of merit, also known as 'field of merit' or *puññakkhetta* (P), that donors engage through rituals of generosity. A traditional analogy is that of the field with the most fertile soil from which the planter of a seed will reap the best crops.<sup>132</sup> A hierarchy of fields was identified by Spiro in the context of Theravāda Buddhist tradition in Myanmar which accorded the highest merit to building a pagoda, followed by a monastery and other kinds of support for the community of monks.<sup>133</sup> Forms of public ritual that re-enacted historical forms of patronage, defined by Schober as the 'Royal mode' of merit-making, recognise relics and Buddha images as 'infinite sources of merit' from which donors may earn merit as well as social status.<sup>134</sup> The abundance of relics and images at the pagoda museum, particularly where original donor credits are included in the display, enhances the commemorative value of donations and the prestige accrued by the donor.

Another condition of merit-making is the emotive quality of the experience. Abundant displays generate this quality as their presence implies that sharing the merit was part of the intention to give. The quality of joyfulness is a shared attribute of merit-making as noted by Kate Crosby. It is particularly evident when offerings are made to the

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<sup>129</sup> Their impression was that there was a greater variety to see at the pagoda museum, which could also have been a perception formed by the different modes of display at each venue i.e. crowded at the pagoda versus spacious at the National Museum. Random interviews were undertaken during a visit to the museum in 13 December 2013.

<sup>130</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan, interview with the author, 21 August 2016.

<sup>131</sup> Bastian, 'Exhibiting Buddhism: The Museumification of Burmese Buddha Images', fig.36.

<sup>132</sup> Torkel Brekke, 'Contradiction and the Merit of Giving in Indian Religions', *Numen* 45, no. 3 (1998): 300, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1568527981562131>.

<sup>133</sup> Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*, 109.

<sup>134</sup> Schober, 'Venerating the Buddha's Remains in Burma: From Solitary Practice to the Cultural Hegemony of Communities', 112.

monastery which according to a canonical text the *itipisogāthā* or ‘Mirror of the Dhamma’ is considered ‘the highest field of merit’<sup>135</sup>

A person’s joy at offering dāna is affected by the worthiness of the recipient, the pleasing atmosphere, the ability of the monk/s in question to receive gracefully, the extent to which these aspects combine to allow the donor to rejoice in their own merit and for those also participating in the merit-making activity to rejoice.<sup>136</sup>

A sense of this emotive quality is evident in Shwe Yoe’s observations of enthusiasm during the spontaneous offering of jewellery that was thrown into a furnace to be smelted for the casting of bronze bells during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>137</sup> The public nature of these rituals of donation, like the repetitive striking of bells so that others may hear the sound of merit being made, points to this intention to share not just the spectacle of ritual, but the same sense of joy in giving.

On a daily basis the practice of generosity is usually understood as one of a set of practices known as ‘ten wholesome actions’ or *dasa kusala kamma* (P) whereby generosity or dāna is followed by moral conduct or *sīla* (P), and meditation or *bhāvanā* (P). The cultivation of merit is safeguarded by the code of rules or Pāṭimokkha within the Pali canon – it is believed the rules will survive even after the extinction of the teachings and Buddha’s relics over a period of 5,000 years.<sup>138</sup> The safekeeping of museum objects, the material evidence of merit-making, is given impetus by the fact that they have potential to inspire generosity in those who view them.<sup>139</sup> Their display therefore makes them accessible for this purpose, and for others to rejoice at the sight of them and furthermore earn merit from this form of ‘cash in’ on others’ meritorious actions.<sup>140</sup> Spiro also observed that merit sharing ceremonies give others the opportunity to applaud donors and thus benefit from their acts of merit.<sup>141</sup>

Abundant displays also present a wide range of ways to inspire potential donors. As Stanley J. Tambiah observed in his study on the ideology of merit in North-east

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<sup>135</sup> Crosby, *Theravada Buddhism*, 120.

<sup>136</sup> Crosby cites Samuels. Jeffrey Samuels, ‘Is Merit in the Milk Powder? Pursuing of Punna in Contemporary Sri Lanka’, *Contemporary Buddhism* 9, no. 1 (May 2008): 123–47.

<sup>137</sup> Shwe Yoe, *The Burman*, 206.

<sup>138</sup> Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 221–23. The Pāṭimokkha will disappear in the third millennium of the 5,000-year period.

<sup>139</sup> Shwedagon Zedi All-Round Perpetual Renovation Committee, *Historic Record of the Hoisting of the Gold Umbrella on the Shwedagon Pagoda* (Yangon: Shwedagon Board of Trustees Office, 1999), 1.

<sup>140</sup> John S. Strong, *Buddhisms. An Introduction*. (London: Oneworld Publications, 2015), 163.

<sup>141</sup> Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*, 126.

Thailand, villagers preferred to give commercially bought goods to monks on special occasions as these conferred more merit than their home-grown produce. Yet other means of donation such as personal time and labour enabled even the poorest to cultivate merit.<sup>142</sup> In the same way, abundant and eclectic collections signal to potential donors the many kinds of things that can be offered, and if nothing else they may still cultivate merit in the pagoda museum by sharing in the joy of others' gifts.

In sum, the safekeeping of gifts evokes and sustains the living relationship between donors and the pagoda's field of merit. This was alluded to by the volunteer-keeper U Maung Maung Gyi who clarified that everything in the collection ultimately belongs to the Buddha (see *Respect for Buddha's Belongings*). Although different from its predecessor, the Buddhist Art Museum, the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum's displays demonstrate another example of the 'living museum' envisioned earlier by Luce. This sense of the value of objects as belongings of the Buddha was conveyed more explicitly at the museum within Yadana Man Aung Temple (see Chapter Two: *Displaying the Buddha's Gifts*).

### Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum, 2016

Almost a quarter of a century after its establishment during the period of museum-building, the museum's renovation took place amidst a further period of economic and political reforms that were initiated by President Thein Sein (2011–2016). This period was marked by a series of cultural initiatives that focussed on engagement with international museums and cultural agencies; for example, the loan of artefacts for international exhibitions in the United States (2014–15) and Singapore (2016),<sup>143</sup> the nomination of the Pyu Ancient Cities as UNESCO World Heritage sites (2014),<sup>144</sup> membership of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in 2016 and most recently the nomination of Bagan as a World Heritage site (2019).<sup>145</sup> In Myanmar, the new National Museum in Nay Pyi Taw and the renovation of the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum were completed in 2015 and 2016 respectively.

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<sup>142</sup> S.J. Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults of North-East Thailand*, Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 146–47.

<sup>143</sup> Loans were made to The Metropolitan Museum of Art for the exhibition 'Lost Kingdoms: Hindu-Buddhist Sculpture of Southeast Asia' in 2014 and to the Asia Society for the exhibition 'Buddhist Art of Myanmar' in 2015. Further loans were made to the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore for the exhibition 'Cities and Kings: Ancient Treasures from Myanmar' in 2016.

<sup>144</sup> See <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1444/>

<sup>145</sup> Personal communication, Daw Ohnmar Myo, 20 August 2019.

The museum's Work Plan attributed the renovation of 2013 to 2016 to the need to expand the spaces for storage and display. A committee with presidential endorsement, together with the Department of Archaeology (DOA), aimed to display objects more 'systematically' and achieve 'international museum standards'. A growing collection during the early 2000s had led to greater selectivity, and by 2015 the museum had challenged itself to improve the means of keeping and displaying its collection of 2,590 objects. Significantly the museum consolidated its aims to promote both the study *and* veneration of its collections by reclassifying its collection and theming the new displays.<sup>146</sup> The need to accommodate larger crowds on special days was also recognised. Visitorship to the pagoda had increased from 175,000 in 2010 to over 500,000 in 2015 and underscored the need to include the site within a plan to conserve the historical and religious heart of Yangon.<sup>147</sup>

By August 2015 the store, library and archive on the lower floors were dismantled and renovations were started on the second floor in preparation for the opening in March 2016. Workmen constructed aluminium signage, working barefoot as required by pagoda etiquette.<sup>148</sup> In February 2016, signboards with the new designation: 'Shwedagon Zedi-daw Bouda Pya-daik / Shwedagon [Pagoda] Buddha Museum', were installed at the entrance gates as encouragement to both local and foreign visitors (fig. 1.11). The term of respect 'daw' to address the *zedi* or stupa points to the practice of seeing the body of the stupa and the Buddha as mutual.<sup>149</sup> It is also used to address the Buddha, monks and royalty.

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<sup>146</sup> Secretary, Buddha Museum Advanced Display Group, 'Shwedagon Pagoda Museum. Advanced Renovation Work Plan [in Myanmar]', 22–23. U Maung Maung Gyi, interview with the author, 29 August 2015.

<sup>147</sup> Thant Myint U and Moe Moe Lwin, 'Yangon Heritage Strategy. Combining Conservation and Development to Create Asia's Most Liveable City' (Yangon Heritage Trust, 2016), 110, [http://www.yhtliveableyangon.org/wp-content/uploads/Yangon\\_Heritage\\_Strategy\\_ENG\\_Small.pdf](http://www.yhtliveableyangon.org/wp-content/uploads/Yangon_Heritage_Strategy_ENG_Small.pdf).

<sup>148</sup> Fieldwork observations, August and December 2015, February 2016.

<sup>149</sup> Snodgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stupa*, 362.



Figure 1.11 Installing a new signboard for the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum, 9 February 2016. Photograph: Heidi Tan, courtesy Shwedagon Pagoda Board of Trustees.

The Myanmar term ‘Bouda’ in the new title also conflates the idea of the Buddha and the Buddhist faith.<sup>150</sup> However, reference to the faith was relatively recently introduced. The term ‘Buddhism’ or *bouda-bada* (lit. ‘religion of the Buddha’) was adopted according to Alexei Kirichenko in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to refer to the doctrinally-centred concept of Buddhism that was founded on the local belief system known as *thathanadaw* (M). This came about in order to validate its place alongside other faiths in Burma particularly Islam and Christianity.<sup>151</sup> However, as discussed below, the new displays employed taxonomies that expounded quite literally on the theme of the ‘Buddha’ rather than the religion per se. These new frames of reference consolidated the museum’s aims to become more ‘systematic’, and implied a shift away from being a museum *in* the pagoda towards becoming a museum *of* the pagoda. This distinction points to functional concerns, specifically to produce displays that break with old associations of a storeroom and present narratives about the pagoda.

However, it also raises the question about what a museum of the pagoda should address and how it should do this (see *Objects of Merit-making and the ‘Systematic’ Pagoda Museum*). Chris Arthur asks whether museums of religion should confine themselves to the material expressions of religion, or whether such museums can in

<sup>150</sup> The term ‘Buddhism’ was a 19<sup>th</sup> century construct that emphasised the textual evidence of the Buddha’s teachings. 16<sup>th</sup> century European travellers had identified the religion as ‘*baudhamatham* or Buddha’s point of view’. Himanshu Prabha Ray, ‘Narratives of Faith: Buddhism and Colonial Archaeology in Monsoon Asia’, *Asia Research Institute. Working Paper Series No. 99*, 2007, 4, [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1317147](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1317147).

<sup>151</sup> Alexei Kirichenko, “From *Thathanadaw* to Theravāda Buddhism: Constructions of Religion and Religious Identity in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Myanmar,” in *Casting Faiths. Imperialism and the Transformation of Religion in East and Southeast Asia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 33.

fact have a religious function by exhibiting the intangible dimensions of religion.<sup>152</sup> As the discussion below demonstrates, the complexities of addressing the sacred also surfaced at the renovated pagoda museum. For example, visitor responses demonstrated that for some the pagoda museum is a place to practice rituals, while for others it is also a place to scrutinise rare examples of sacred objects such as Buddha images. However, the pagoda museum demonstrated that while it was predominantly concerned with the display of material expressions, these differing responses were not mutually exclusive and could be accommodated. While the lived experience of individuals or the 'transcendent core' of religion, according to Arthur, is so often missing in museums of religion,<sup>153</sup> the pagoda museum, as the new name suggests, aimed to make the Buddha present precisely to maintain the lived experience of merit-making (see this chapter: *A Place for Ritual and Transformation*).

The new name, colloquially referred to as 'Buddha Museum' when it opened in March 2016,<sup>154</sup> hints at the predominance of Buddha images in the collection – three of the eight themes on the second floor are dedicated to 'Buddha Statues' for example. While most pagoda museums are simply named after the site, a few of the surveyed examples identified closely with their collections whether through themes (e.g. the Mahavamsa or Great Life Stories, Buddhist art and culture) or specific objects. For example, the recently opened 'Treasure Staging Place and Stone Inscription Building' at Phaung Daw Oo Temple, has a modest collection of shrines and ceremonial furnishings displayed around a single modern inscription stone (see Chapter Two: *The 'Outer Museum'*). The museum's close identification with important objects or collections shares a familiar trajectory of development with early European museums. For example, British legislation of 1753 constituted the Ashmolean Museum as synonymous with the Tradescant donations where the terms 'museum' and 'or collection' were used in tandem. However, the museum was identified with the collection as distinguished from the building, which was referred to as a 'general repository'.<sup>155</sup> The Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum likewise had earlier replaced its designations as a 'building' and then a 'hall' to identify specifically with the pagoda in 1992 as the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum, and eventually with the Buddha, as a 'Buddha museum' in 2016. As the next section demonstrates, the affirmation of its

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<sup>152</sup> The discussion relates to the representation of multiple faiths at the St. Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art in Glasgow. Arthur, 'Exhibiting the Sacred', 9.

<sup>153</sup> Arthur, 25.

<sup>154</sup> MITV News, 'Buddha Museum: Shwedagon Officially Opens Newly Upgraded Facility'.

<sup>155</sup> Geoffrey Lewis, 'Enabling Legislation for Museums', in *Manual of Curatorship. A Guide to Museum Practice*, ed. John Thompson M.A., 2nd ed. (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann Ltd, 1992), 70.

collection of Buddha images and other sacred objects brought forth visitor responses that manifested their own sense of a ritual premise for the pagoda museum.

### A Place for Ritual and Transformation

Although different from the temple-inspired Buddhist Art Museum built at the Kaba Aye Pagoda some forty years earlier, the municipal-style museum was nonetheless internally programmed in ways that were similarly intended to appeal to an audience of devotees. The second or uppermost floor with a main hall flanked by smaller showrooms exuded the light spacious quality of the neighbouring open-sided pavilions. Experienced from within, this modern interpretation of traditional post-and-beam construction included a raised panelled ceiling at the centre of the main hall supported by concrete beams and teak-clad columns. The extensive use of teak included a luxurious varnished parquet floor that provided welcome relief underfoot from the heat of the marble platform outside. Flourescent-lit teak showcases filled the main hall and lined the surrounding corridor (fig.1.12 left).



Figure 1.12. Main hall of the museum (left) with shrine along the eastern corridor (right), 13 December 2013. Photographs: Heidi Tan, courtesy Shwedagon Pagoda Board of Trustees.

Prior to 2015, an informal shrine to the Five Buddhas (the four Buddhas of this era and the future Buddha Mettaya) along the eastern corridor invited visitors to pray and meditate, while staff made daily offerings of water, cooked rice, and flowers. Donation boxes in front of the images encouraged donations towards the maintenance of the pagoda (fig.1.12 right). Numerous windows allowed daylight to flood in behind the shrine, creating a bright and breezy atmosphere. A simple plastic mat demarcated the area for worshippers to kneel and provided a minimal amount of protection to the floor. The shrine is also used more formally by staff for annual offerings of robes and food, a



practice that is also found in state museums as discussed in Chapter Three (see *Ritual Authenticity Revealed*).<sup>156</sup> The spaciousness of the shrine, in contrast to the tightly packed rows of showcases with dense displays of gifts, offered other ways of experiencing the museum. It was both a place for learning, for rituals, and for socialising.

Visitors' responses to the renovated displays on the second floor revealed the museum's consolidation of its role as a museum of the pagoda. The architectural concept of the open-sided pavilion was harnessed to greater effect in a way that recalls Carol Duncan's concept of the 'iconographic programme', the architecture and its decorative elements as well as the display of collections, gave expression to the museum's intentions and shaped the ways that visitors responded. The programme further transformed the meaning of objects and visitors' experience of them.<sup>157</sup> However, as discussed below, the responses revealed that visitors carried a range of intentions and beliefs with them during their visit to the pagoda. At times they responded to the iconographic programme; at other times to their own needs and interests as they mapped their own paths towards and around the museum. As Duncan's visitors performed secular forms of the 'museum ritual' and experienced heightened emotive states,<sup>158</sup> so the pagoda museum visit comprised distinctive rituals of merit-making including veneration, meditation and circumambulation. These repeated and spontaneous ritual actions conformed in part to a definition of ritual as 'a set of fixed actions...performed regularly, especially as part of a ceremony'.<sup>159</sup> However, apart from the shrine where prolonged sitting was allowed, the informal momentary performance of rituals of merit-making elsewhere in the museum made it difficult to observe the ceremonial or more 'structured' aspect of ritual.<sup>160</sup>

### Devotion in the Re-framed Shrine

By August 2015, the open space in front of the altar to the Five Buddhas had also been enclosed by glass walls which protected them from the dusty renovation works. The spacious vista of the gallery was now intersected by large sheets of glass from floor to

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<sup>156</sup> These rituals had been undertaken for the past decade. Daw Nyo Nyo Win, personal communication, 8 February 2016. At the Bagan Archaeological Museum the Waso ceremony is also conducted in the Buddha Images Showroom. Daw Baby, interview with the author, 19 August 2015.

<sup>157</sup> Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 27. Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, 'The Universal Survey Museum', *Art History* 3, no. 4 (December 1980): 451.

<sup>158</sup> Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 2, 12–13.

<sup>159</sup> Cambridge Dictionary. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/ritual>

<sup>160</sup> Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 12.

ceiling, creating a similar effect to the encased shrines of images of Thagyamin, chief of the local spirits or *nats* and the guardian spirit Bo Bo Gyi in the south-western corner of the pagoda.<sup>161</sup> This newly enclosed space was identified in the plan as ‘Devotional Place’ or *Pu-zaw Wut-pyu Khan* (M). The name connotes a place for activity; *pu-zaw* means ‘to worship’ and ‘to make a devotional offering’, *wut-pyu* refers to ‘do obeisance’, ‘attend respectfully to a person’ and ‘show hospitality’. The space will accommodate potentially larger numbers of devotees in future as well as more elaborate rituals. Hence its enclosure was intended to protect against pests that had previously been attracted by offerings of food.<sup>162</sup>

The creation of an enclosed shrine room is unusual among pagoda museums which typically have open shrines for visitors to pray, meditate and make offerings. The most obvious result of the renovation was that the transparent walls framed the activities within. As visitors stood outside separated by millimetres of glass, they seemed to be not just looking, but watching and scrutinising. Their gaze turned intermittently from the new technologies of display to the ritual behaviour within.



Figure 1.13. Shrine room titled ‘Devotional Place’ enclosed with glass and metallic frames, 30 August 2015. Photograph: Heidi Tan, courtesy Shwedagon Pagoda Board of Trustees.

<sup>161</sup> They were installed in glass cases during the early 1970s. Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 92.

<sup>162</sup> Rats and pigeons had been attracted to the space previously. Daw Nu Mra Zan, interview with the author, 23 September 2017.

Activities that were so familiar outside around the stupa now felt as though they had been put on display, defined by the new title of the room as 'devotional' (fig.1.13). The constructed nature of the room is apparent when viewed from the outside. The delineation of the room with metallic frames suggests that like the showcases lining the route either side, it is also a space that manifests qualities of the exhibition-making process. Rachel Souhami's study of exhibition-making acknowledges that an exhibition is a 'cultural product' that is marked by the processes of re-making and of translating concepts (see Chapter Three: *Merit-making on Display*).<sup>163</sup> Responses to the shrine discussed below endorsed this notion of the exhibit as product, that was necessarily subject to scrutiny in the context of the museum in a way that it might not have been elsewhere in the pagoda. As discussed in Chapter Three, Souhami's notion of the viewer's own 'field of vision' which is personal and transitory as they move around within an exhibition was also evident in the shrine room where even the relatively small space generated a range of responses (see Chapter Three: *Merit-making on Display*).<sup>164</sup> From within, seated on the floor under the gaze of the Buddhas, the shrine was a multi-sensory and immersive experience punctuated occasionally by faintly audible sounds from the hall outside. Where sunlight had previously streamed in around the images, curtains were now drawn at the hottest time of day, thus darkening the room to reveal a twinkling halo of electric lights around each image. Ritual behaviour in the shrine was noticeably quiet as devotees sat in silent meditation or softly uttered recitations accompanied by the clicking of wooden prayer beads. Unlike the shrines outside where a wider range of offerings can be made, here they were restricted to water, fresh flowers, Victory Leaves or *thapye-pan* (M) and plain cooked rice. However, outside another 'field of vision' was framed by the glass walls as devotees observed the rituals within. This relationship of observer and observed is attributable to the practice of sharing merit as discussed earlier, where those who rejoice in another's merit, also cultivate merit.

The accessibility of the shrine avoids some of the ambiguity that Yui Suzuki noted amongst confused visitors at the Horyuji Temple's museum known as 'Great Treasure Repository'.<sup>165</sup> A single ancient statue of Avalokiteśvara occupies a space at the centre of the temple where visitors would expect to engage in 'venerable gazing'.<sup>166</sup> Yet despite the elaborate ritual ambience, visitors were confounded in their encounter

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<sup>163</sup> Souhami, 'Exhibition Production as Processes of Translation', 50–51.

<sup>164</sup> Souhami, "Exhibition Production as Processes of Translation," 50-51.

<sup>165</sup> The museum was established in 1941 and was relaunched in 1998. Suzuki, 'Temple as Museum, Buddha as Art: Hōryūji's "Kudara Kannon" and Its Great Treasure Repository', 129–30.

<sup>166</sup> Suzuki, 138.

with the statue which was displayed within a glass showcase, labelled prominently and presented as an aesthetic rather than devotional object. It was displayed at the centre of a gallery that resembled a worship hall yet visitors were denied direct access to it.<sup>167</sup> Suzuki attributes the sense of disjuncture to the ‘museum effect’, whereby objects such as the statue are turned into art.<sup>168</sup> In contrast to this example, the shrine was highly accessible and gave no indication that the five Buddhas were to be seen as anything other than devotional objects.

Yet, the stark re-framing of the shrine that now required visitors to enter its confines, drew renewed attention to the Buddha images within and raised questions in the minds of certain visitors. The group of images had been in the collection since the Hall of Ancient Buddha Images was built in 1976 if not earlier, but as visitor U Thein Lin noted, more information on them should have been provided. He wanted to know for example if the images were replicas, or whether they had ever been kept together with relics.<sup>169</sup> His concerns, like Suzuki’s visitors’, highlight the importance of ritual efficacy over art historical authenticity in the context of the pagoda museum.



Figure 1.14. Shrine at Gandhakuti Daik, 24 August 2015 (left); shrine room, Uppatasanti Pagoda Museum, 26 August 2015 (right). Photographs: Heidi Tan.

Displays encountered at other pagoda museums demonstrated the variants ways in which shrines may be conceived as both informal and formal spaces of exhibition in the context of the pagoda museum. Souhami’s understanding of the visual language of

<sup>167</sup> Suzuki, 138–39.

<sup>168</sup> Alpers, ‘The Museum as a Way of Seeing’, 26–27.

<sup>169</sup> The Five Buddha images were mentioned as part of the growing collection in the Museum Objects List. See Appendix 1.3. U Htein Lin, interview with the author, 18 August 2016.

exhibition-making revolves around 'not only *what* is seen but also *how* viewers are invited to see it', hence the notion of framing is significant as it defines the contents within and the way these are viewed. She offers the analogy of the filmic mode of framing the exhibition or *mise en scène* which is constituted by certain key elements including the use of space.<sup>170</sup> The way that viewers experience the shrines differs in terms of the 'depth of field of vision', or the space between the viewer and objects. This is observed at the Kyanthagyi Pagoda in Mandalay, where visitors to the Gandhakuti Daik or Perfumed Chamber Building encounter an extensive teak showcase with an abundant display of small gilded Buddha images flanking a large seated image on its own pedestal. The formal arrangement according to iconographic attributes and size was the result of the assistance given by the DOA with the installation in 2012 (fig.1.14, left).<sup>171</sup> Notably, the configuration had inspired the development of an informal altar at the foot of the centre section which was festooned with tinsel, flowers and Victory Leaves, glasses of water, prayer mats, a donation box, and a photo to commemorate the donors. Aligned with the main door, the 'shrine' invites visitors in and accommodates ritual so narrowing the space between the devotee and Buddha images, even as the offerings proliferate and obfuscate the display.<sup>172</sup>

In contrast to this example, is the austere and exclusive shrine room at the Uppatasanti Pagoda Museum in Nay Pyi Taw. Adjacent to the main hall which displays commemorative photographs of the official opening in 2009 and diplomatic gifts, is a secure airconditioned room for the accommodation of special visitors and private worship (fig.1.14, right).<sup>173</sup> The room is arranged around a teak altar with small images on open display and neatly arranged on fabric-wrapped plinths with laminated captions that reflect the influence of the DOA. Offerings are limited to flowers and cups of water and ritual paraphernalia is kept out of sight. However, spatial distance is created by the tall altar and plinths which raise the images so that they cannot easily be seen from a seated position on the floor below. The furnishings, in this case identified as 'décor' by Souhami, contextualise the images as sacred and therefore respectfully elevated.<sup>174</sup> Notably, the height of the main Buddha image was comparable with the paintings of the

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<sup>170</sup> Souhami, 'Exhibition Production as Processes of Translation', 50–51. See Chapter Three: Merit-making on Display.

<sup>171</sup> Anonymous interview with the author, 24 August 2015. The donors were Dr. U Thein Aung and Daw Mya Mya Than. The large collection was made during the course of the doctor's work as he travelled around the country.

<sup>172</sup> Fieldwork, 29 September 2015.

<sup>173</sup> The curator Daw Khin Khin Than studied for the Postgraduate Diploma in Museology that was set up and taught by Daw Nu Mra Zan at the National University of Arts and Culture in Yangon in 2001. Daw Nu Mra Zan arranged the displays and wrote the captions at this new museum. Daw Khin Khin Than, interview with the author, 26 August 2015.

<sup>174</sup> Souhami, 'Exhibition Production as Processes of Translation', 53.

temples displayed at the Bagan Archaeological Museum (see Chapter Three: '*Art Gallery of Bagan Period Monuments*').

In comparison with these two examples, the shrine room at the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum was situated somewhere between; transparent and accessible unlike the enclosed Uppatasanti shrine room, with an altar that remains open unlike the informal altar that obfuscates the display at the Gandhakuti Daik. It remained accessible to those entering the museum from the main platform and sat along the eastern wall of the building, an auspicious position that allowed rituals to unfold in a more conventional sequence. As Naing Soe pointed out it is customary to pay homage to the Buddha when entering a friend's home. It is like asking permission to enter. In the same way the shrine room allowed one to do that before proceeding to visit the rest of the museum.<sup>175</sup>

The shrine is the only place in the museum where sitting is allowed. Its use for self-directed perceptual learning is not unlike the interactive displays that have been adopted by museums elsewhere with Buddhist art collections. For example, the Newark Museum's Tibetan altar display that was created in 1935, and renovated in 1990 with a ritual consecration performed by the Dalai Lama, invited visitors to pray and meditate with the inclusion of a prayer cushion. In 2010 the Rubin Museum of Art opened a Tibetan Buddhist Shrine Room to provide an 'immersive environment' in which to understand the context for Tibetan Buddhist art.<sup>176</sup> However, the formal nature of these reconstructed displays means that the visitor relies heavily on interpretives. The Rubin's display can only be viewed from one side and both were inactive when I visited them in 2015.<sup>177</sup> Although the Newark shrine had been reactivated from time to time, the lack of a regular community of users adds to the perception that such shrines are 'non-active'.<sup>178</sup> Curator Katherine Paul also acknowledged the very real challenges faced by the Tibetan community to visiting the museum from outlying areas of New York.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Naing Soe, interview with the author, 18 August 2016. See Appendix 1.1, no. 2.

<sup>176</sup> Newark Museum, 'Tibetan Buddhist Altar', 2018, <http://www.newarkmuseum.org/tibetan-buddhist-altar>. Rubin Museum of Art, 'Six Inspirational Objects You'll Find in a Tibetan Buddhist Shrine Room', 15 September 2015, <http://rubinmuseum.org/blog/6-inspirational-objects-youll-find-in-a-tibetan-buddhist-shrine-room>.

<sup>177</sup> Fieldwork observations, 12, 14 February 2015.

<sup>178</sup> Clarke, 'Planning the Robert H.N. Ho Family Foundation Gallery of Buddhist Sculpture, 2009-2014', 71.

<sup>179</sup> Clark, 'Exhibiting the Exotic, Simulating the Sacred: Tibetan Shrines at British and American Museums', fn. 24.

However, even pagoda museum shrines such as the two illustrated above, were observed to be intermittently active. The shrine at the Shwedagon Pagoda's museum by comparison had an almost continuous stream of visitors. Shrines and their sacred contents need devotees to activate them, thus confirming Ronald Grimes' assertion that the sacred and sacred objects can be thought of as 'a moment in a cultural and historical process, rather than as an allusive "thing in itself"'.<sup>180</sup> That moment was identified by Ivan Gaskell in the consecration of the Newark Museum's altar, which marked the museum's new sense of responsibility to the local Tibetan community and towards sacred objects that could be understood as other than aesthetic, art-historical or educational.<sup>181</sup> The creation of conditions in which the sacred can be invoked was also contingent on the individual visitor and their spiritual needs. Daw Baby Ohn, a regular visitor to the pagoda, was pleased with the calm ambience. Compared to previous visits, she felt the new shrine was now more conducive to prayer and meditation. It also provided an additional space for meditation which she usually undertakes in quieter more enclosed spaces at the pagoda. These she said, were better for meditation on the Buddha's nine special qualities or *goundaw* (M), a practice that was advocated by the Alodawpyi Sayadaw in Bagan (see Chapter Three: *Narrative Two: Consecration of the Buddha*). The condition of quiet concentration, she said, is a way to cultivate more respect for the Buddha. Significantly, she stressed that the attitude in one's heart is more important than relying on the power of the statues, regardless of the materials they are made of.<sup>182</sup>

The iconographic programme clearly appeals to this visitor for its potential to help her achieve her goals of personal transformation through the solitary practice of meditation, which differs from the public rituals of merit-making and their worldly connotations.<sup>183</sup> The special qualities of the Buddha are often recited in the belief that they give protection.<sup>184</sup> This way of cultivating the Buddha's presence is as much a part of meditation practice as the rituals of merit-making. As Jacob Kinnard notes, visualization of an image is part of this kind of meditation such that 'the absent Buddha is made present'. He also cites Buddhaghosa's recognition of meditation on the Buddha's

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<sup>180</sup> Grimes, 'Sacred Objects in Museum Spaces', 419.

<sup>181</sup> Gaskell, 'Sacred to Profane and Back Again', 160.

<sup>182</sup> Daw Baby Ohn, interview 18 August 2016. She meditates for 45 to 60 minutes at the pagoda. She also pointed out that the day we met was the full moon day of Wagaung, also known as 'Metta Day' an auspicious moment for practicing *metta* or compassion (Appendix 1.1, no.1).

<sup>183</sup> Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*, 105.

<sup>184</sup> These qualities are recited in the belief that they give protection. Melford E. Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism*, Expanded ed. (Philadelphia (USA): Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1978), 45.

qualities as a way to attain many positive personal attributes including merit.<sup>185</sup> Her personal quest for quiet spaces is not unique to Daw Baby Ohn, as many lone meditators can be found in the shrines, which like the museum reside in the liminal spaces set apart from the realm of rituals around the stupa. This practice is rooted in the emergence of lay meditation movements around the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century when, following the decline of monasteries, lay practitioners sought to support monks of their own choosing and gain access to the exclusive spiritual instruction normally only available to monastics.<sup>186</sup> As discussed in Chapter Three, encouragement to meditate on the nine special qualities was actively encouraged at the Alodawpyi Temple in Bagan, where the main shrine is fronted by a text panel that gives guidance on the ritual (see Chapter Three: *Narrative Two: Consecration of the Image*).

This specific interest in the use of the shrine for meditation clearly demonstrates how visitors' embodied knowledge informs their visit to the museum. Like the responses from U Htein Lin and Naing Soe discussed above, Daw Baby Ohn's understanding of the pagoda museum is that of a liminal space with spiritual authenticity. However, at least one visitor remained ambivalent about the shrine's authenticity, saying that it was too prescriptive yet also did not live up to their expectations of how a shrine should function. Soe Win Naing felt that the glass walls created distinctions between visitors and closed down possibilities for learning in what was previously an open display. To enter was a prescription to pray and precluded the non-religious visitor.<sup>187</sup> In this way, the glass walls were deceptively obstructive, unlike the open-sided directional shrines around the stupa which encouraged the fluid movement of devotees. As he questioned its authenticity he noted that the plinths for the images were perceptibly low compared to the carefully proportioned altars elsewhere in the pagoda. One implication, he noted, was that the low plinths allowed female devotees greater access to the altar than convention allowed.<sup>188</sup> The pagoda museum shrine room thus demonstrates a two-fold means to re-make the shrine; on one hand as an exhibit to be viewed as a 'ritual mise en scène' from outside, while on the other, a sacred space to be experienced from within. The spatial division in this sense reflects the museum's dual objectives to encourage study and veneration (see *Objects of Merit-making and the 'Systematic Museum'*). The sense of ambiguity that comes from this dual role is therefore

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<sup>185</sup> Jacob N. Kinnard, 'The Field of the Buddha's Presence', in *Embodying the Dharma: Buddhist Relic Veneration in Asia*, ed. David Germano and Kevin Trainor (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2004), 129.

<sup>186</sup> Ingrid Jordt, *Burma's Mass Lay Meditation Movement. Buddhism and the Cultural Construction of Power* (Ohio University Press, 2014), 26.

<sup>187</sup> Soe Win Naing, interview with the author, 18 August 2016.

<sup>188</sup> Soe Win Naing, interview with the author, 18 August 2016. See Appendix 1.1, no. 3.



contingent on who is looking and from which perspective. The manifestation of the sacred becomes a matter of degree depending on one's position relative to the glass wall. Gaskell notes that the multivalency of art objects means that their sacred qualities are mutable depending on where they are exhibited. Likewise, both art museums and places of worship can be experienced as ambiguous spaces that are dependent on the viewer's beliefs.<sup>189</sup> The archaeological museum presents another example, where the religious disposition of visitors to Bagan manifested particularly during high season when the Buddha Images Showroom at the Bagan Archaeological Museum became a site for rituals that activated the sacred qualities of the sandstone images (see Chapter Three: *Merit-making on Display*).

### Liminal Moments on Ritual Paths

In the renovated main hall a dense grid of abundantly arranged showcases was now replaced with sacred objects from the stupa surrounded by displays of Buddha images and model stupas (see fig.1.15, below). A pathway around the hall was indicated by a series of small arrows placed in a clockwise sequence that complemented the sequentially numbered showcases. These densely arranged displays were grouped as 'Buddha images', 'Stupas' and 'Gold Robe Plaques' on the plan of 2015 (fig.1.15). Parallels with the iconographic programme of the stupa were revealed in the way visitors were cued into this clockwise orbit although this orientation for circumambulation of the stupa is customary rather than compulsory.<sup>190</sup>

A similar dynamic was observed within the Yadana Man Aung Temple (see Chapter Two) and the Bagan Archaeological Museum (see Chapter Three). However, despite the continual movement of visitors around the path, other patterns of ritual behaviour within the museum were less easy to observe compared to the frequent prostrations, chanting and forms of 'bodily offerings' that were performed around the stupa.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Gaskell, 'Sacred to Profane and Back Again', 149–50.

<sup>190</sup> Donald Martin Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan. Buddhist Plain of Merit*, First published 2005 (Bangkok: River Books, 2013), 60. For variations on patterns of circumambulation at the Shwedagon see Moore, 'Unexpected Spaces at the Shwedagon Pagoda, Myanmar', 183.

<sup>191</sup> Moore, 'Unexpected Spaces at the Shwedagon Pagoda, Myanmar', 184.

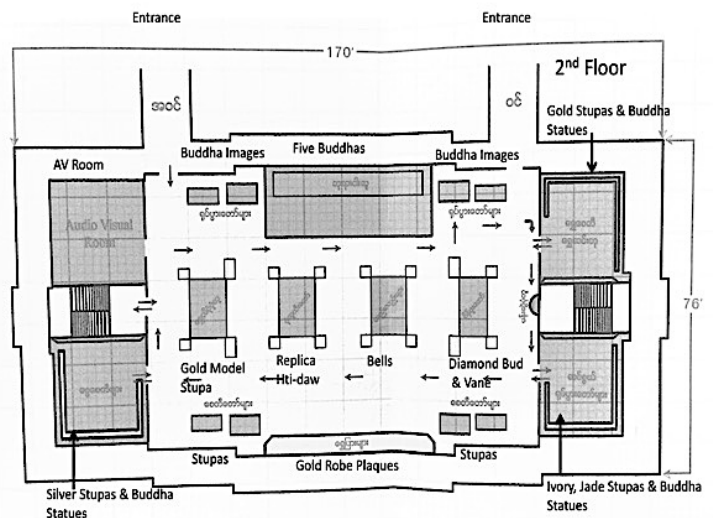
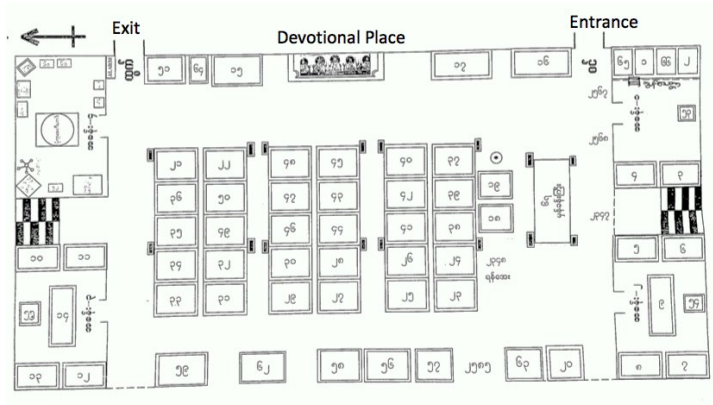


Figure 1.15. Existing plan of second floor (above), new plan (below), 30 August 2015. Plans courtesy of Shwedagon Pagoda Board of Trustees.

Elizabeth Moore’s study of the Shwedagon Pagoda noted that pilgrims followed four well defined ritual pathways; circumambulation of the stupa, veneration of the Four Buddhas in the directional shrines, wish-offerings at the planetary post associated with their birth, and paying homage to cult images such as the powerful monk Bo Bo Aung.<sup>192</sup> However devotees also created their own pathways around the stupa and its complex of prayer halls and pavilions including the zone defined as the ‘outer platform’, where she observed other kinds of activities including meditation, socialising with snacks, and resting in the shade of trees and pavilions.

<sup>192</sup> Moore, 183.



Figure 1.16. Shwedagon Pagoda. View from the Victory Ground. 10 February 2016. Photograph: Heidi Tan.

She compares this area to the inner platform nearest to the stupa, which is marked by intense light, heat and ritual activities.<sup>193</sup> This spatial distinction is underscored by the notion of the stupa as field of merit surrounded by liminal zones which recede into darkness at sunset, as the stupa continues to glow (fig.1.16).

The Museum resides within these cooler recesses where rituals often in modified form take place alongside other activities such as socialising and informal learning. The visit to a pagoda museum that occupies its own site may therefore be experienced as a momentary sequence within a wider network of pathways taken around the platform. This differs from the temple museum in Southern Shan State where pathways around the temple's core and the Inner Museum are largely overlaid and the rituals of visiting both temple and museum are conflated (see Chapter Two: *Rituals of Visiting*). Ritual behaviour in the museum was observed as an extension of ritual visiting within the pagoda at large, although more fleeting and mitigated by museum protocols. The momentary nature of rituals observed in the museum recalls the process of liminality that Duncan ascribes to the secular ritual of visiting the art museum, the space conventionally situated within monumental buildings that evoke ancient ritual sites.<sup>194</sup> She observes the nature of ritual as the framing of a time or place, and its liminal quality – defined by Victor Turner – as a momentary step away from daily life, in this

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<sup>193</sup> Moore, 195.

<sup>194</sup> Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 9.

case to contemplate and learn.<sup>195</sup> Duncan acknowledged there could be limitations to mapping Turner's work within non-Western cultures onto the secular art museum. However, his definition of 'liminality' enables us to think about the pagoda museum as a spatial and temporal frame marked by merit-making rituals. Derived from '*limen*' or a marginal state, 'liminality' according to Turner is a threshold in space and time, or a point of mid-transition experienced within rituals.<sup>196</sup> The dual space/time quality of liminality relates in this case to the momentary experience of rituals within the pagoda museum, embodied by the space and time of the Four Buddhas of this era. Circumambulation or the cyclical movement of visitors around the main hall and momentary rituals were a response to the iconographic programme.<sup>197</sup> With sacred objects re-established at the centre of the hall, visitors moved around these as well as criss-crossed between adjacent showrooms, much as they would around the stupa and its surrounding buildings. The displays thus replicate the pagoda museum's situation relative to the stupa and its wider significance as a pilgrimage centre, the implication being that the museum like the pagoda was a threshold where pilgrims could gain experience of the sacred in hopes of achieving an 'inward transformation of spirit or personality'.<sup>198</sup>

Although shaped by museum protocols, rituals were observed as liminal moments between socialising and viewing exhibits, where visitors determined when such moments would occur. They also stopped at multiple points surrounding the centre of the hall, where large volumes of Buddha images were displayed. These were arranged in linear sequences according to materials – gilded wood, gilded bronzes, and images of foreign origin. The displays recalled the abundance of images at the shrines around the stupa, yet the highly ordered configurations of images radiating outwards and cascading across multi-tiered plinths were also subject to a curatorial agenda premised on creating a 'systematic' museum (see fig.1.17).

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<sup>195</sup> Duncan, 10–11. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 13–15.

<sup>196</sup> Victor Turner, 'Frame, Flow and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality', *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 6, no. 4 (December 1979): 465–66, <https://doi.org/10.18874/jjrs.6.4.1979.465-499>.

<sup>197</sup> The cyclical pattern of circumambulation differs significantly from the linear pattern of processions in the medieval cathedral cited by Duncan. Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 12.

<sup>198</sup> Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 197.



Figure 1.17. Metal Buddha images in showcase number 2, 19 August 2016. Photograph: Heidi Tan, courtesy Shwedagon Pagoda Board of Trustees.

A stark difference with the arrangements of images at pagoda shrines is apparent in Bastian's observations. In her study of the museumification of Buddha images, she described the clustering of images within the northern shrine as demonstrating an 'aesthetic of accretion'.<sup>199</sup> The logical outcome of repetitive giving and devotion, such clustering is also explained as the repeated reiteration of the moment of Enlightenment, represented by the earth-touching gesture or *bhūmisparśa mudrā*. She cites Justin McDaniel's analogy of the individual image 'lost amongst a forest of other images' and the 'associative power' that it gains from being within the group.<sup>200</sup> Bastian's experience of clustering at the shrine was a multisensory one that combined sound, the olfactory senses and a strong sense of 'visual overload'. Yet she also recognised within this the expression of 'religious fervour' that led to an 'overwhelming spiritual experience'.<sup>201</sup> The sense of fervour was palpable at the northern shrine, where rows of standing images emerged from its depths, and looked down at devotees who knelt at their feet to apply gold leaf (fig.1.21). The shrine at the Kaba Aye Pagoda Buddhist Art Museum discussed earlier also emulated the forest analogy, with its open display of standing Buddhas densely arranged in tiers (fig.1.2, right).

However, the display of seated images was configured quite differently. Tiered images in the showcase rose above eye level and tacitly encouraged veneration, as viewers

<sup>199</sup> Bastian, 'Exhibiting Buddhism: The Museumification of Burmese Buddha Images', 31.

<sup>200</sup> Bastian, 31. Justin Thomas McDaniel, *The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk. Practicing Buddhism in Modern Thailand* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 164.

<sup>201</sup> Bastian, 'Exhibiting Buddhism: The Museumification of Burmese Buddha Images', 32.

were placed in a position of respect before them.<sup>202</sup> Ordered iconographically, stylistically and by size, each image was evenly spaced and made simultaneously visible. Visitors responded by slowing down to scrutinise individual images, while others quickly scanned the group before putting their hands together in a momentary gesture of respect and moving on. A similar kind of visual scanning, with liminal moments of ritual, was observed at the Bagan Archaeological Museum where pilgrims on tight schedules were forced to survey long lines of images. As they walked, they paid homage with gestures of prayer or made brief contact with the knees of the images (see Chapter Three: *Merit-making on Display*). Thus, liminal moments of ritual were accommodated as the new 'systematic' impetus took effect. Visual clarity aided processes of safekeeping and encouraged the constant circumambulatory movement of visitors around the hall. In contrast with the barricaded displays discussed earlier, the new displays supported museum protocols which discouraged any form of lingering including sitting and sleeping, activities which are frequently encountered at other pagoda museums (see Appendix 1.5).<sup>203</sup>

Of particular interest to some visitors were the groups of multiple tiny metal images or *htarpana* that had been previously enshrined. Soe Win Naing, a glass mosaic artist who works regularly at the pagoda observed that they would have remained invisible for long periods of time while enshrined within a stupa.<sup>204</sup> The 'associative power' of the large group as mentioned above therefore once infused a sacred site. Metal images that have emerged after earthquakes from within temple walls, large brick Buddha images, or stupa reliquaries, are thought to have been interred to increase the spiritual efficacy of the temple.<sup>205</sup> In the context of the pagoda museum, Buddha images were both gifts as well as reminders of the recipient of the gifts, whose field of merit continues to motivate rituals of veneration. John Strong notes that distinctions were made in ancient India and in some Theravāda countries between gifts to the monastery and gifts to the Buddha, whereby the latter which included images, stupas and relics, actually belonged to the Buddha. In this way, such gifts ensured the

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<sup>202</sup> A general principle of ritual veneration is that sacred objects should be placed above the self. Kevin Trainor, *Relics, Ritual and Representation in Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 160.

<sup>203</sup> The list of prohibitions included no consumption of alcohol or betel-chewing, keeping silent in order to study the displays, no sitting, eating or sleeping, acceptance of security checks, no weapons and taking personal responsibility for one's own belongings. Head, Committee for Renovation, 'Shwedagon Pagoda. Opening of Renovated Buddha Museum and Maha Bodawin Showroom [in Myanmar]', trans. Yamin Htay (Shwedagon Pagoda Board of Trustees, 18 March 2016).

<sup>204</sup> Soe Win Naing, interview with the author, 18 August 2016. See Appendix 1.1, no.3.

<sup>205</sup> Sylvia Fraser-Lu and Donald Martin Stadtner, eds., *Buddhist Art of Myanmar* (New York; New Haven: Asia Society Museum in association with Yale University Press, 2015), 126.

maintenance of rituals.<sup>206</sup> By making visible images that were previously invisible, the pagoda museum maintains the cycle of merit-making, and images remain active as it is believed that they acquire power through being worshipped.<sup>207</sup>

The pagoda museum's role as a place for making objects visible that had not been seen before was also raised by U Mya Thaung at Yadana Man Aung Temple (see Chapter Two: *Potential for Personal Transformation*). His comments referred to rare forms of lacquerware but applied equally to Buddha images. The need to 'see' images in particular was raised by Ma Ohnmar Myo. She observed that relevance to religious life is one reason for visiting any museum, even the state museums, which are generally otherwise seen as places for foreign visitors and academics. For most visitors, the pagoda museum is part of their visit to the pagoda and is a place for 'seeing' ancient Buddha images.<sup>208</sup> The pilgrims' appropriation of the Bagan Archaeological Museum for this purpose is a case in point (see Chapter Three: *Buddha Images Showroom*).

### Venerating the Buddha

The iconographic programme of the new displays incorporated objects retrieved from the highest and therefore most sacred levels of the stupa, as well as a gold model of the Shwedagon Pagoda at the centre of the main hall. At one end was a tall cascading display of hundreds of small bells or *hsweh-leh* (M) retrieved from King Mindon's spire (1871) in the renovation of 1999.<sup>209</sup> These royal donations also included the diamond bud reliquary and vane or *hnget-mana* (M), literally 'bird resting place', that had originally been installed on the spire in 1889.<sup>210</sup> The veneration of these sacred objects is motivated by the belief in the stupa as living representation of the Buddha. Its symbolism is understood in a figurative sense, where the whole form is read as the seated image and the head of the Buddha is thereby associated with the highest level of the stupa.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Strong, *Buddhisms*, 163.

<sup>207</sup> Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*, 149.

<sup>208</sup> Ma Ohnmar Myo, interview with the author, 23 February 2016.

<sup>209</sup> Moore, 'Ritual Continuity and Stylistic Change in Pagoda Consecration and Renovation', 6.

<sup>210</sup> Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 90, 96.

<sup>211</sup> Moore, 'Unexpected Spaces at the Shwedagon Pagoda, Myanmar', 183.



Figure 1.18. Daw Mya's replica gold stupa displayed in the main hall, 25 February 2017. Photograph: Su Latt Win, courtesy Shwedagon Pagoda Board of Trustees.

At the centre of these displays was the gold model stupa placed directly under the tiered roof in the position normally occupied by an important seated Buddha image (fig.1.18). The royal donations and stupa had long attracted gestures of veneration and the stupa's potency was later acknowledged by the keeper U Maung Maung Gyi who mentioned that he had enshrined relics in the upper section some time before the renovation.<sup>212</sup> The display was further enhanced by narratives related to the Buddha's biography; paintings lined the lower register of the recessed ceiling, while hand-painted blue and white ceramic tiles depicting the last Ten Lives of the Buddha, known as *nibat-taw* (M) or Dasaratha Jātaka, were embedded in the pillars flanking the stupa. They had been mounted respectfully above eye-level on each of the columns since the museum's opening in 1992. Included above them on the pillars were the portrait of the donor (dated 1908) and a gilded mirror.

The iconographic programme of the main hall was thus significantly imbued with the sacred qualities of these objects. Yet an unintended response to the display demonstrated that within the context of the pagoda museum the iconographic programme can have unexpected effects that exceed the elevated emotions cited earlier by Duncan in relation to encounters within the art museum.<sup>213</sup> Previously displayed with the portrait of its donor Daw Mya, the stupa surrounded by the Buddha's biographies was deemed worthy of more respect. This was revealed in August 2016 when a group of visiting monks objected to seeing the portrait of the female donor

<sup>212</sup> U Maung Maung Gyi, interview with the author, 22 September 2017.

<sup>213</sup> Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 27.



mounted in proximity to the tiles.<sup>214</sup> The gilded mirror was eventually allowed to remain while the portrait had to be taken down. Donor dedications especially for highly valued objects typically remained on display, whereas the donor portrait had assumed a separate status of its own that undermined religious propriety and the sacred stories of the Buddha. The lengthy label drafted by Daw Nu Mra Zan reported on Daw Mya's donation of 1964. It included a prayer hall and had been made on her behalf by her husband Mr. Masani, two years after her demise. The possibilities for sharing this unusual story – the label was careful to mention her cross-cultural marriage to this member of the Parsi community – had by late 2016, still to be realised.<sup>215</sup>

Another example of auspicious objects were the gold plaques, many of which had been brought into the museum's collection after the renovation of the stupa in 1999.<sup>216</sup> The new display was installed behind glass walls. Titled: 'Gold Robe Plaques', the room remained locked but attracted gestures of prayer from outside (fig. 1.19, left). This moment of respect signified the numinous quality of the gold sheets. As the term 'robe' in the title suggests, the sheets evoke the sections of the Buddha's robe, one of the items considered relics of use or *paribawga* (see this chapter: *Gilding for Protection*). This association brings the Buddha into view, a reminder as Spiro noted that the stupa is worshipped not only as a memorial but the embodiment of the Buddha.<sup>217</sup> Their sacred quality derives also from their proximity with the upper levels of the stupa and associations with royal donors, many of whom are included in their inscriptions. By 1903, a large number including royal inscriptions were attached to the upper section of the stupa according to U Maung Maung Gyi.<sup>218</sup> Installed chronologically, the display offered a narrative of recorded instances of pagoda patronage, although dates had yet to be included in the labels.<sup>219</sup> However, material and social distinctions associated with different levels of the stupa were made with copper plaques given by a range of other donors and collected from the lower levels of the stupa displayed downstairs.<sup>220</sup> The gold sheets were a reminder that high status is attributed to meritorious past lives. A royal patron's expression of status and therefore merit was evident also in the

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<sup>214</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan, personal communication 19 August 2016. This response corresponds to the rule that forbids women to enter the inner spaces of shrines or ascend the upper levels of the stupa.

<sup>215</sup> The portrait remained uninstalled while the story remained documented in the museum's record book. Daw Nu Mra Zan, personal communication 19 August 2016. Win Kyaing, 'Le-Zu Dat-Poun Shwedagon Zedi-Daw. Museum Objects List. Record Book (Part 1) [in Myanmar]', 10.

<sup>216</sup> Elizabeth Howard Moore, "Pagoda Desecration and Myanmar Archaeology, 1853–86," in *Materializing Southeast Asia's Past: Selected Papers from the 12th International Conference of the European Association of Southeast Asian Archaeologists*, vol. 2 (Singapore: NUS Press, 2013), 243.

<sup>217</sup> Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*, 204.

<sup>218</sup> 2,703 sheets were identified. Maung Maung Gyi (Mandalay), *Images of Shwedagon (Interesting Places and Events)*, trans. Htun Yee (Alin-tha Sapay, 2012), 148.

<sup>219</sup> Personal communication, Daw Nu Mra Zan, 23 September 2017.

<sup>220</sup> Moore, 'Pagoda Desecration and Myanmar Archaeology, 1853–86', 243.

donations that periodically included gold equivalent to their own weight (see *Gilding for Protection*).



Figure 1.19. Display of gold robe plaques (left); *Ivory, Jade Stupas and Buddha Statues Showroom* (right), 19 August 2016. Photographs: Heidi Tan, courtesy Shwedagon Pagoda Board of Trustees.

The veneration of the Buddha at this point also calls to attention the liminal moments devotees have when confronted with the sight of the stupa. Often experienced from a distance as a brilliant beacon of reflected light, the fleeting moment of recognition is frequently observed as devotees pay homage even while travelling at speed along the roads surrounding the pagoda. The projection of light recalls the metaphor of sharing merit offered by the fifth century Buddhist philosopher Buddhaghosa. The burning lamp, or merit, is shared when offered as a source to light other lamps, so producing an exponential illumination.<sup>221</sup> The cumulative light produced by the gold sheets on the stupa reflected the merit that had been made and shared with others, just as the sound of bells when struck after donations are made enable the merit to be shared with those within hearing distance.<sup>222</sup> A similar radiance is discussed in relation to the main Buddha images in the eastern shrines of the Yadana Man Aung Temple in Southern Shan State (Chapter Two: *Materialising Light in the Eastern Prayer Hall*) and the Alodawpyi Temple in Bagan (Chapter Three: *Alodawpyi Wish Fulfilling Buddha*).

In comparison to the hall, more lingering was observed in the smaller showrooms at either end. Dramatically lit displays gleamed behind expanses of glass. In the darkened atmosphere visitors moved up close to pay respect and to gaze at hundreds of relics contained like gems in transparent reliquaries lined up within a long wall case. On the opposite wall were multiple Buddha images carved in jade and ivory, some flanked by

<sup>221</sup> Pe Maung Tin, 'Introduction', in *The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Myanmar*, Third (Yangon, Myanmar: Unity Publishing House, 2008), xii.

<sup>222</sup> Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 183.

pairs of elephant tusks (fig. 1.19, right).<sup>223</sup> One visitor U Htein Lin, who had been a monk for 20 years, was particularly interested in the displays of ivory and carvings. He had often viewed these on previous visits but would have liked more information to be provided. Although the new lighting brought clarity to the displays and he felt that the museum was now "...much more like a museum", he also felt that the relics should have been installed in a place where he could pay homage.<sup>224</sup> No further reason was given, but the animated chatter of younger visitors distracted by their own reflections in the glass showcase would have been inappropriate within a shrine around the stupa. The intense illumination offered another mode of seeing the sacred and the effects of abundance, where a sheet of light over the whole group brought attention to the relics as a collective field of merit. The intense light prompted U Thein Lin to recount another dimension of the sacred, the colours of the Buddhist flag which are believed to derive from the sacred hues of relics.<sup>225</sup> While electric lights added to the artifice of the display, for this visitor, they aided his recollection of the Buddha. For many, the colourful pulsating lights employed in relic displays and shrines provide yet another way to raise this kind of attention as observed at Yadana Man Aung Temple, where both radiant and unexplained forms of light were present (see Chapter Two, *Materialising Light in the Eastern Prayer Hall*).

### **Meritorious Curating and the Volunteer-Keeper**

The analysis of the museum's spatial attributes as revealed by the rituals of visiting highlight the agency that visitors bring to their engagement with the site. The other key attribute of the pagoda museum lies with the curatorial practices and prerogatives that have shaped the collections and displays. This section analyses how curating in the pagoda museum is understood to be a 'meritorious' practice, through observations of the work undertaken by U Maung Maung Gyi, a volunteer at the pagoda since 1979.<sup>226</sup> He was a key member of the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum Advanced Display Group that was tasked in 2013 to undertake the renovation. The group included trustees, volunteer expert advisers and representatives from the Ministry including Daw Nu Mra Zan, Museum Consultant and retired Deputy Director-General of the Department of

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<sup>223</sup> Fieldwork observations, 19 August 2016.

<sup>224</sup> U Htein Lin, interview with the author, 18 August 2016. See Appendix 1.1, no.6.

<sup>225</sup> U Htein Lin, interview with the author, 18 August 2016. See Appendix 1.1, no.6.

<sup>226</sup> A biology graduate, he developed a passion for history and in 2012 published his own compilation of old photographs of the Shwedagon Pagoda. U Maung Maung Gyi, interview with the author, 5 February 2016. Maung Maung Gyi (Mandalay), *Images of Shwedagon (Interesting Places and Events)*.

Archaeology, National Museum and Library at the MOC.<sup>227</sup> She was invited to join the group by then Minister for Religious Affairs, Thura U Myint Maung, on the basis of her experience assisting various pagoda museums since 2000.<sup>228</sup>

While a hierarchy of custodial duties and responsibilities is evident among volunteers and trustees at the Shwedagon Pagoda, at smaller pagodas the museums are run as part of the general care of the pagoda often by a single trustee (see Chapter Two). The work of volunteers and trustees is part of a long tradition of lay support for stupa-building and maintenance in the Burmese Buddhist tradition. The history of lay custodianship is now thought to have its origins in Bagan where a coalescence of communities in resource-rich areas fuelled the intense programme of pagoda-building. As the kingdom expanded at this time (11<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries), communities settled around networks of rice granaries known as *shwe-gu* or 'golden caves'. Elizabeth Moore and Win Maung suggest that the current system of pagoda trusteeship originated in early networks of lay support from these communities with officials from Bagan as overseers.<sup>229</sup> Trustees' records of the pagoda provide a long history of royal donations and renovations going back to the first reconstruction of the Shwedagon stupa by the Mon ruler King Banya Oo in 1372.<sup>230</sup> While records typically focus on royal patronage, little is known of the early custodians who would have facilitated and managed the gifts made by donors. Official roles attached to the safekeeping of donations would have been required for pagodas alongside the palace treasuries and monastic scripture libraries, acknowledged to be the earliest forms of museums in Myanmar.<sup>231</sup> For example, Win Pe notes that the Mon Queen Shinsawbu appointed numerous staff, craftsmen, performers, security personnel and officials to take care of offerings at the pagoda during her reign (ca.1453–1470).<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Her career started as a teacher in secondary schools during the 1970s in her home state of Rakhine, and turned to museums when she helped in the establishment of the Rakhine State Cultural Museum and Library in 1985. Nu Mra Zan, interview with the author, 21 August 2016. Secretary, Buddha Museum Advanced Display Group, 'Shwedagon Pagoda Museum. Advanced Renovation Work Plan [in Myanmar]', 24.

<sup>228</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan, personal communication, 16 June 2018. These included the Sixth Buddhist Synod Memorial Museum, Lokhachantha Abhya Labamuni Pagoda Museum, Uppatasanti Pagoda Museum, Maygawady Monastic Museum, Mahamuni Pagoda Museum and the Shwemawdaw Pagoda Museum in Bago (see Appendix 1).

<sup>229</sup> Win Pe, *Shwe Dagon*, 108; Elizabeth H. Moore and (Tampawaddy) Win Maung, 'The Social Dynamics of Pagoda Repair in Upper Myanmar', *The Journal of Burma Studies* Vol.20, Number 1 (June 2016): 152–53.

<sup>230</sup> Moore, 'Ritual Continuity and Stylistic Change in Pagoda Consecration and Renovation', 22, n.23.

<sup>231</sup> Nu Mra Zan, 'Museums in Myanmar', 22.

<sup>232</sup> Win Pe, *Shwe Dagon*, 19,107-8.

It was not until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that a formal trusteeship system emerged. A trustee board was set up in 1869 motivated by the need to facilitate the donation of a new hti-daw by King Mindon in 1871.<sup>233</sup> The following year the British government appointed five additional trustees.<sup>234</sup> The period 1890 to 1920 was a crucial period as British disinterest in the public administration of religion further strengthened the basis for lay volunteer associations such as the pagoda trustee boards. In 1885, the Supreme High Court of Justice gazetted the appointment of nine members of the board.<sup>235</sup> In 1898 Burmese residents were themselves able to elect a new board of nine trustees under the policy: 'New Scheme for Regulating the Shwe Dagon Pagoda Trust'.<sup>236</sup>

The lay custodianship that was established at this time became part of the nationalist movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and was the basis for successive lay activism during the period of Independence. For example, trustee associations proliferated with the support of the first prime minister U Nu, a devout Buddhist and practitioner of vipassanā or 'insight' meditation. The Shwedagon Pagoda is still organised on the basis of nine departments overseen by a slightly larger trustee board appointed with the approval of the Department of Religious Affairs.<sup>237</sup> Like other pagoda museums, it is subject to the policies of the department now under the amalgamated Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture (MORAC).<sup>238</sup> In addition to the perpetuation and propagation of the Buddhist faith, its policies also aim to cultivate the 'moral conduct and character of people by preserving and promoting [the] traditional and cultural heritage of Myanmar'.<sup>239</sup>

The trustee board consults a parallel committee of advisory monks or aw-wada-sariya sayadaws on ritual matters such as pagoda renovations and the consecration of Buddha images.<sup>240</sup> Although monastic involvement is largely absent in the daily

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<sup>233</sup> The board dismantled the existing umbrella spire and sent the relevant parts to Mandalay for incorporation into a new spire. The Head of the *Hti* Committee (Maha Mindin or Popa Wundauk) then presented this to the British High Commissioner as the king was prohibited from overseeing the donation in person. See "Ritual Continuity and Stylistic Change in Pagoda Consecration and Renovation," 24, n.23; and *Shwedagon*, 185.

<sup>234</sup> Win Pe, *Shwe Dagon*, 108.

<sup>235</sup> W.F. Agnew, 'Scheme for the Regulation of the Trusts Connected with the Shwe Dagon Pagoda in the Cantonment of Rangoon.' (1885).

<sup>236</sup> Win Pe, *Shwe Dagon*, 127.

<sup>237</sup> 'Department of Religious Affairs', Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, 2005, [http://www.mora.gov.mm/mora\\_department2.aspx](http://www.mora.gov.mm/mora_department2.aspx), accessed October 16, 2016.

<sup>238</sup> Religious affairs and culture were merged in March 2016. Htoo Thant and Ei Ei Toe Lwin, 'NLD Reduces Government Ministries'.

<sup>239</sup> Ministry of Religious Affairs, 'Religious Organisations', Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, 2005, [http://www.mora.gov.mm/mora\\_department2.aspx](http://www.mora.gov.mm/mora_department2.aspx).

<sup>240</sup> U Maung Maung Gyi, interview with the author, Yangon, 5 February 2016.

management of the pagoda museum, its involvement is sought particularly on matters of ritual care, for example for 'eminent Buddha images'.<sup>241</sup>

### The Volunteer-Keeper

When asked how he would define his job at the museum, U Maung Maung Gyi eschewed the term 'curator' and said that he was simply a 'volunteer', a role that implies a meritorious gift of time and labour without financial remuneration. He clarified this later saying '[I] continually labour for Buddha. I feel very satisfied working like this'.<sup>242</sup> As noted earlier the cultivation of merit is one of the practices that will survive the 5,000-year period of decline (see *A Space of Safekeeping and Abundance in a Field of Merit*). To offer one's labour is therefore a contribution to the sustenance of this practice and the faith or *sāsana* defined by Turner as 'the life of the Buddha's teachings after he is gone...the condition of possibility for making merit and liberation'.<sup>243</sup>

The designation 'volunteer' conveys little of the range of responsibilities detailed below, that he has assumed for the past 37 years.<sup>244</sup> 'Curator' like 'volunteer' is also limited in that it does not capture his status within the pagoda. The term 'curator' connotes a duty of care as mentioned in the Introduction, although it is also used as a generic term for a wide range of functions within museum practice.<sup>245</sup> Its historical usage in the European context ranges from 'curatore', the 'guardian' of Roman law or bureaucrat of public works<sup>246</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> century English parish priest. In the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century the 'cabinet curator' or custodian of private cabinets of curiosities and wunderkammer (lit. 'wonder chamber')<sup>247</sup> emerged with the age of scientific and colonial exploration.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> The State Sangha Mahanayaka Committee which oversees all monastic matters issued directives in 1982 and 1992 that entrusted local township authorities and monasteries to oversee such matters Aung Thein Nyunt, 'Preservation of Cetiya or Pagodas in Myanmar', in *Promotion, Protection and Preservation of Buddhist Culture and Heritage*, vol. Part II (Lumbini, Nepal: Theravada Buddhist Academy, Sitagu International Buddhist Academy, 2014), 58. See also: Moore and (Tampawaddy) Win Maung, 'The Social Dynamics of Pagoda Repair in Upper Myanmar', 154.

<sup>242</sup> U Maung Maung Gyi, interview with the author, 1 October 2017.

<sup>243</sup> Turner, *Saving Buddhism: The Impermanence of Religion in Colonial Burma*, 1.

<sup>244</sup> The author's role as research student and curator from a Singapore museum and the presence of museum consultant Daw Nu Mra Zan may also have provoked this modest response.

<sup>245</sup> John Thompson M.A., *Manual of Curatorship. A Guide to Museum Practice*, 2nd Edition (Butterworth-Heinemann Ltd, 1992).

<sup>246</sup> David Balzer, *Curationism. How Curating Took Over the Art World and Everything Else* (London: Pluto Press, 2015), 24–26.

<sup>247</sup> "wunderkammer, n.1". OED Online. August 2018. Oxford University Press.

<https://en.oxfordictionaries.com/Definition/Wunderkammer>, 29 August 2018.

<sup>248</sup> Oliver Impey and Arthur Macgregor, *The Origins of Museums. The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Europe*, 2nd ed. (London: House of Stratus, 2001), xvii.

The term also has limited usage in the state museums and remains difficult to translate since official designations are based on a career path structured according to managerial roles within the civil service hierarchy. Daw Nu Mra Zan nonetheless clarified that correlations can be made between conventional titles and their curatorial equivalents. For example, the designation Staff Officer (*U-zi Aya-shi*) is equivalent to Assistant Curator, Assistant Director (*Let-thauk Hnyun-kya-Ye-Hmu*) is equivalent to Curator and Deputy Director (*Dutiya Hnyun-kya-Ye-Hmu*) is equivalent to Senior Curator.<sup>249</sup> In smaller state museums the latter may also head the institution as observed in the case of Daw Baby at Bagan Archaeological Museum (Chapter Three).

The term 'keeper' was adopted at the British Museum around 1820.<sup>250</sup> Furthermore, the role of 'keeper' by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe developed through a sequence of custodianship, acquisition and exhibition that is more in keeping with the work at the pagoda museum.<sup>251</sup> For the purpose of this chapter, the term 'keeper' and 'keeping' is used in relation to the work of safekeeping and looking after the collection. However, U Maung Maung Gyi's preferred designation 'volunteer' also reflects more accurately the meritorious dimensions to this work. In order to recognise this underlying premise for his work the conjoined term 'volunteer-keeper' is used hereafter.

U Maung Maung Gyi is one of five volunteers at the museum, although he has authority over and responsibility for selecting new donations and auditing the existing collection.<sup>252</sup> He also received assistance from a small group of younger staff members at the museum building, in the preparations for the museum's renovation.<sup>253</sup> His various roles are noted in the introductory notes to the museum's Record Book where he is acknowledged as a scholar and member of the Upper Level Group.<sup>254</sup> The latter enables him to gain exclusive access to the upper terraces and the eastern shrine of the wish fulfilling Padamya Myetshin (Ruby-eyed Buddha) thought by some to

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<sup>249</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan, personal communication, 2 March 2018. Parallels exist in Singapore museums which recognise these curatorial designations for operational purposes, while roles are structured according to civil service administrative rules.

<sup>250</sup> In 1756, the first officers at the British Museum were librarians. Marjorie Caygill, 'Appendix 3. Curatorial Staff. 1756-May 2002', in *The British Museum. A History* (London: The British Museum Press, 2002), 380.

<sup>251</sup> Charles Newton's letter of 1856 is one of the earliest insights into the role of a keeper where custodianship, acquisition, exhibition, interpretation and publication were outlined in order of priority. David Mackenzie Wilson, *The British Museum. A History*. (London: The British Museum Press, 2002), 147.

<sup>252</sup> Two others who were observed at work in the storerooms include a retired jeweller U Nyan and goldsmith, U Myint Lwin. Fieldwork, 29 August 2015.

<sup>253</sup> They are Myo Myint Thuzar and Yazar Ko Ko, who studied with Daw Nu Mra Zan and Thu Thu Aung Swe, who had studied librarianship.

<sup>254</sup> Win Kyaing, "Le-zu Dat-poun Shwedagon Zedi-daw. Museum Objects List. Record Book (Part 1) [in Myanmar]," 3. See Appendix 1.3.

represent Mettaya the future Buddha and by others Bo Bo Aung, the highly revered wizard-monk (*weikza*).<sup>255</sup> The area is where only male devotees with a special pass can meditate amidst heightened levels of auspiciousness<sup>256</sup> while CCTV footage of the Buddha image is broadcast to the eastern directional prayer hall below. Custodial access to the terrace is significant as the octagonal base of the stupa has been a rich source of copper tiles collected by the museum as evidence of local patronage during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>257</sup> U Maung Maung Gyi is also identified as leader of the museum's 'Object Checking Group' which undertakes inventory checks on the collection and is referred to as 'Museum Inspection Expert' (*Pya-daik Sit-se-ye Pinya-shin*). He is co-signatory to the museum's record books with Daw Nyo Nyo Win, head of the museum whose official designation is Museum Department Officer (*Pya-daik Htana-Hmu*), and the Head of Office U Htun Aung Ngwe.<sup>258</sup>

### Respect for Buddha's Belongings

Preparations for the renovation included the extensive re-gilding of Buddha images and important objects such as the scissors that had been used at the opening ceremony of the museum in 1992. The rationale for cleaning and re-gilding became clearer when U Maung Maung Gyi conveyed his thoughts on the significance of the gifts:

In the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum all the objects belong to the Buddha. Therefore, we have to pay respect. There are objects that are not original...the material is the same...same ball-pen for example...but offered to Lord Buddha, we have to pay respect and take care. Obama offered a small clock, (President of the USA), but we have to take care, not for the President only...it belongs to Buddha. You know what I mean?<sup>259</sup>

The stark comparison between mundane objects and the recent donation from President Obama points to the ethos of respect that underscores the meritorious nature of curating in the pagoda museum. It also alludes to a rationale for the continual accumulation of gifts that contributes to the heterotopic quality of the museum discussed earlier. Yet the contradictions of the ethos are immediately apparent, as spatial constraints had necessitated the rationalisation of the collection (see below: *Objects of Merit-making and the 'Systematic' Pagoda Museum*). The contradictions are

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<sup>255</sup> Moore, Mayer, and Win Pe, *Shwedagon*, 125.

<sup>256</sup> Win Pe, *Shwe Dagon*, 104–5.

<sup>257</sup> Moore, 'Pagoda Desecration and Myanmar Archaeology, 1853–86', 243.

<sup>258</sup> Fieldwork observations, 5 February 2016.

<sup>259</sup> U Maung Maung Gyi, interview with the author, 1 October 2017.



borne out by the differing treatment given to materials of higher value namely metal objects, which received substantial cleaning in order to make them shine.

The uneasy dissonance between what were construed on the one hand as Buddha's belongings and on the other as museum objects surfaced at the point of cleaning and gilding practices. These did not go unchallenged by Daw Nu Mra Zan when it became apparent that metal objects were being cleaned with an assortment of tools and commercial cleaning materials such as wire brushes and Brasso. Negotiations about the methods and extent of cleaning that could be deemed appropriate were also attempted. Freshly applied and existing stickers with hand-written accession numbers were visible on the surfaces of many objects, despite a request by Daw Nu Mra Zan for them to be removed for conservation reasons. A justification was put forward on the basis that the visibility of stickers made the four-yearly inventory checks easier to conduct. The alternative of putting the stickers in a less obtrusive position, if only for aesthetic reasons, also met with resistance. The matter was discussed with the Head of Office but remained unresolved.<sup>260</sup>



Figure 1.20. Staff member Thu Thu Aung Swe and U Nyan polish brass objects, 18 May 2014 (left). U Myint Lwin cleans silver boxes (right), 8 February 2016. Photographs: Heidi Tan, courtesy Shwedagon Pagoda Board of Trustees.

In February 2016 extensive cleaning was done with the help of two other senior volunteers, retired goldsmith U Myint Lwin and U Nyan. A group of recently donated Cambodian silver boxes of various zoomorphic forms was being cleaned with an electric buffer and alumina oxide solution to clean the tarnished surfaces. The value invested in making objects shine like new is a defining attribute of pagoda museum practice that continued to challenge the conservation-driven protocols espoused by

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<sup>260</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan interview with author, Yangon, 2 Feb 2016.

state museum curators (fig.1.20).<sup>261</sup> Another example of problematic ritual cleaning was cited by U Aung Htun Hla, curator of the Mrauk-U Archaeological Museum, who had been helping to inventorise the collection at the Bandula Monastery in Mrauk-U.<sup>262</sup> The washing of Buddha images with sandalwood water during the annual water festival presented challenges in the longer-term, as did the frequent re-arrangement of the displays resulting from their movement during these times.

Some sense of the clash of perceptions and practices can be seen in the terms used to refer to the idea of 'renovation'. For example, the five-yearly programme known as 'All Round Perpetual Renovation' or *bet-soun yeh-sheh pyu-pyin mun-man-gyin* (M) refers literally to 'repair' and improve' or *pyu-pyin mun-man* (M). A preferred term suggested by Daw Nu Mra Zan is to 'repair and preserve' or *pyu-pyin htein-thein* (M), which points to museological conventions around 'conservation' that seek to minimise or arrest processes of decay, through scientifically-driven protocols based on minimally invasive treatments.<sup>263</sup>

These divisive distinctions between state and pagoda museums take place against the history of conflict between the state and international bodies such as UNESCO. Renewed engagements during the period of research have encouraged conservation practices yet the state museums have remained under-resourced with a single conservator who rotates between museums around the country. At the national museums in Yangon and Nay Pyi Taw, treatments to individual objects had largely been ad hoc and undertaken with international partners in preparation for exhibitions, as recently documented by Aye Aye Thinn.<sup>264</sup> However, a case is starting to be made for the recognition of renovation as a means to keeping cultural heritage alive. The discourse on the renovation of temples at Bagan that had previously stymied its acceptance for UNESCO World Heritage status was recently acknowledged in the

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<sup>261</sup> Fieldnote observations, Shwedagon Pagoda, 2 Feb 2016. In April 2018 the renovated showrooms at the Mahamuni Pagoda were opened. These included large showcases with newly cleaned silverware. Daw Nu Mra Zan, personal communication, 2 May 2018.

<sup>262</sup> The monastery had requested the DOA to assist with the inventorying of the collection around 2013. U Aung Htun Hla, interview with the author, 7 January 2016 (see Appendix 1, A.1).

<sup>263</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan, 16 June 2018.

<sup>264</sup> Such preparations were undertaken by the Asia Society for example, before the exhibition *Buddhist Art of Myanmar* in 2015. See: <https://asiasociety.org/new-york/exhibitions/buddhist-art-myanmar>. The National Museum in Nay Pyi Taw also documented this work. See: Aye Aye Thinn, 'Exhibition, Conservation, and Documentation at the National Museum (Nay Pyi Taw)', in *New Horizons for Asian Museums and Museology*, ed. Naoko Sonoda (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2016), 125–27, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-0886-3\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-0886-3_8). In addition to helping regional state museums, conservator Kyaw Shin Naung also works with objects retrieved from public buildings. For example, U Ba Kyi's mural painting on plaster which had been installed at Mingaladon Airport in 1958 was conserved and re-installed at the National Museum in Yangon in 2015. Personal communication, 26 February 2017.

Nomination Dossier for Bagan. It notes that despite criticism of the previous restorations and reconstructions of monuments, the monuments nonetheless retain their authenticity in terms of the ‘...use, function and spirit of Bagan, connected to merit-making’.<sup>265</sup> It further claims that the rebuilding of temples is a meritorious act that not only respects the core ideals known as the Three Jewels of Buddhism but also rejuvenates the good kamma associated with their original donation.<sup>266</sup>

Keeping practices such as cleaning and re-gilding Buddha images are likewise manifestations of merit-making and therefore the authenticity of the pagoda museum. The renovation of images, for example, through encasement, repair and re-gilding provides an historical precedent for these activities. For example, a royal order for 24 July 1638, included the collection of old images from various religious sites to be repaired within the hall at the Shwezigon Pagoda in Bagan, after which a consecration ceremony was to be held and the images were subsequently to be returned to their original places.<sup>267</sup> Contrary to this precedent, images that are donated or brought into to the museum’s collection are re-gilded and remain there for study and veneration in order to sustain the rituals of merit-making (see *A Crowned Buddha from the Northern Shrine*). At Yadana Man Aung Temple, images in varying states of repair are kept on display to receive gold leaf from devotees during festivals (see Chapter Two), while at the Bagan Archaeological Museum replica images installed in the temples ensured the continuity of merit-making and mitigated the need to re-gild the originals which remained in the museum (see Chapter Three). These activities and the safekeeping of the collection constitute a curatorial practice as meritorious and an authentic part of a living Buddhist heritage that international conventions have long sought to recognise.<sup>268</sup> Although the museum’s Record Book acknowledges ritual cleansing, the validity of meritorious keeping practices and their significance remains largely unstated.<sup>269</sup> Significantly, state museum curators conceded the importance of ritual propriety, particularly where their own practices are concerned. Several admitted to having unusual experiences, such as suffering headaches or feeling unwell, which they

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<sup>265</sup> Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, ‘Nomination Dossier for Inscription on the World Heritage List. Bagan. Volume I: Nomination Dossier’ (UNESCO, Undated), 14, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1588/documents/>.

<sup>266</sup> The Three Jewels refer to the Buddha, his teachings or the Dhamma, and the monastic community, the Sangha. Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, 153.

<sup>267</sup> Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885. Part One, A.D. 1598-1648*, 78, 104.

<sup>268</sup> UNESCO, ‘Nara Document on Authenticity, Report of the Experts Meeting.’ (UNESCO, 1 November 1994), <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/nara94.htm>. UNESCO, ‘The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention’, UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2016, 18–20, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/>.

<sup>269</sup> Win Kyaing, ‘Le-Zu Dat-Poun Shwedagon Zedi-Daw. Museum Objects List. Record Book (Part 1) [in Myanmar]’, 1.

attributed to the mishandling of sacred images. The power of such images was alluded to when they noted the unexplainable resilience of the Buddha Images Showroom during the Nargis storm in 2008, when the rest of the National Museum had suffered much damage.<sup>270</sup>

The negative, if not dangerous consequences of inappropriate behaviour are noted by Koanantakool in relation to any objects that are taken from sacred monastic grounds. For example, ceramic pieces taken from a stupa had resulted in illness and domestic strife for the tourist who had removed them, and this prompted their restitution to Thailand.<sup>271</sup> Collective rituals conducted in the state museums were often approved and led by managers to redress any improprieties in the handling of sacred objects (see Chapter Three: *Consecration of the Seated Buddha*). At the Shwedagon Pagoda during the installation of new displays a lack of facilities required that large volumes of freshly gilded Buddha images were laid out on a cotton sheet on the floor. Much time was spent preparing each showcase with the author invited to participate in their arrangement, as the discussion moved between the aesthetics of the layout and how exhibition installation facilities could be improved. Daw Nu Mra Zan drafted and re-drafted sketches of the layouts with assistance from volunteer Daw Rupa Thein, while a contractor took measurements to construct plinths.<sup>272</sup> While aware of the risks of working on the floor, it became apparent that this also contravened religious protocol which requires that Buddha images are kept at a respectable level off the ground. This was remedied by careful methodical handling, limited physical movement around the images, and an acknowledgement that a consecration ceremony or *anekaza tin-bweh* (M) would be held at a later date.<sup>273</sup> This example of the adaptations required of both conservation and religious protocols in the pagoda museum raises the point made by Kreps about the nature of curatorship. She observed in the context of the Thai monastery museum, that local curatorship is primarily a construct or 'social practice', defined by the curator's relationship with objects.<sup>274</sup> The examples above reinforce U Maung Maung Gyi's principle of respect and demonstrate that this basis for relationships with sacred images is a shared attribute of curating both within pagoda and state museums. A meritorious curatorial practice is therefore an extension of social

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<sup>270</sup> Personal communication, National Museum staff and Daw Nu Mra Zan, 8 October 2013.

<sup>271</sup> Paritta Chalermpong Koanantakool, 'Contextualising Objects in Monastery Museums in Thailand', 157.

<sup>272</sup> Daw Rupa Thein had worked at the Myanmar Motion Picture Museum which opened in 1996 with assistance from the National Museum. Fieldwork observations, 9 February 2016.

<sup>273</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan, personal communication, 2 February 2016. Later that week Daw Neu Neu Win the head of the museum confirmed that she wanted to organise a consecration ceremony the following March. Daw Neu Neu Win, personal communication, 10 February 2016.

<sup>274</sup> Kreps, 'Thai Monastery Museums. Contemporary Expressions of Ancient Traditions', 236–37, 245.

practice in which the volunteer-keeper improves sacred objects for display, which in turn makes possible the cultivation of further merit by those who see them.

### Gilding for Protection

This relationship was demonstrated repeatedly in the re-gilding of Buddha images prior to their installation in the new displays. In January 2016 a donation of Buddha images included one of immediate interest to U Maung Maung Gyi – a seated image adorned with a variety of gemstones.<sup>275</sup> The encrustation around the torso of the image was thought to be motivated by *yadaya*, the practice of making substantial offerings under the advice of an astrologer, for example to avert an unwanted force such as a curse.<sup>276</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan later reflected that she had wanted to display the image, but it was deemed too precious to be left exposed, and was gilded.<sup>277</sup> This tangible expression of protection manifested in the display where the image remained unlabelled and disguised among numerous gilded images in the main hall. This use of the group to subsume special objects recalls Candlin’s observations of the micromuseum of clocks in which a crowded display concealed several rare and high value pieces which only experts would be able to identify.<sup>278</sup>

Yet gilding can also mark an image as special, especially where it is displayed as singularly different from other objects, as discussed below (see *A Crowned Buddha from the Northern Shrine*). Unlike the occasional re-gilding of images in the museum, images in the shrines are subject to rapid accretions of gold especially during festivals. Images at the front of the northern shrine for example, are focal points for offerings of gold leaf (fig.1.21). The fervent gilding of famous images is discussed in Chapter Two, *Phaung Daw Oo Buddhas* and Chapter Three, *Replicas for the Wish Fulfilling (Alodawpyi) Pagoda*.

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<sup>275</sup> U Maung Maung Gyi, interview with the author, Yangon, 5 February 2016

<sup>276</sup> Tun Aung Chain and Thein Hlaing, *Shwedagon*, 24, 92.

<sup>277</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan, interview with the author, 21 August 2016.

<sup>278</sup> The museum cited was Cuckooland in Cheshire. Candlin, *Micromuseology*, 170–71.



Figure 1.21. Gold leaf offerings at the northern shrine, 10 February 2016. Photograph: Heidi Tan.

U Maung Maung Gyi's initiation of the re-gilding process demonstrates another duty of care in a curatorial practice that is premised on a long history of gilding. The meritorious value of gold is rooted in the ancient history of Myanmar, also known as Suvannabhumi or Land of Gold (based at Thaton) in the account of the merchant brothers who brought Buddha's hair relics from India.<sup>279</sup> The historical use of gold as the material of choice among royal donors is mentioned in trustees' records dating to the 15<sup>th</sup> century and onwards. Queen Shinsawbu was the first donor to gild the Shwedagon Pagoda in 1476 with 40 kilograms of gold equivalent to her own weight. As well as raising the height of the stupa to 40 metres, she donated four goldsmith shops and an overseer of gold work. In 1768 the next royal donation of gold was made by King Hsinbyushin, who gave 77 kilograms of gold equivalent to his own weight and also raised the stupa to its current height of 99 metres. Lay donors also gilded the stupa – the first record of lay donations dates to 1610 when gilding was undertaken by the 'people of Dagon' led by Sayadaw Inga-Boke following an earthquake.<sup>280</sup>

<sup>279</sup> Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 78.

<sup>280</sup> Win Pe, *Shwe Dagon*, 19, 26, 127. Moore, 'Ritual Continuity and Stylistic Change in Pagoda Consecration and Renovation', 4, 22–23.

The association of gilding with encasing and raising the height of the stupa suggests that gold and other metals were not simply decorative but contributed to the protection of the stupa. Sujata Soni discusses parallels between the need to protect a stupa, its enshrined relics and certain Buddha images.<sup>281</sup> While oral history refers to multiple encasements of the Shwedagon stupa in silver, tin, copper, lead, marble and iron, inscriptional evidence reveals that similar methods were undertaken in relation to the enshrinement of reliquaries within hollow stupas at Bagan. Multiple caskets constructed of precious materials were nested within one another including sandalwood, crystal, red sandalwood, gold, silver, gilt-and-jewels, ivory, red copper and stone.<sup>282</sup>

Government patrons continued the tradition of gilding during the 1990s. The programme of All Round Perpetual Renovation that was introduced in 1995 culminated in the hti-daw ceremony of 1999 in which highly visible donations of gold and other precious materials were made.<sup>283</sup> Gold plaques were attached below the umbrella finial to the upper and mid sections of the stupa, while gold leaf and foil sheets were applied to the octagonal terraces and copper plates clad the upper terraces.<sup>284</sup> When subsequently retrieved from these areas for display in the museum, objects such as the gold robe plaques received gestures of homage as noted earlier (see *Venerating the Buddha*). U Maung Maung Gyi's role in collecting and studying the historical plaques mentioned earlier, sustains the practice of gilding the stupa. By making them accessible for study and veneration in the museum, new spaces are created on the stupa for donors to gild. By contributing to the protection of the stupa donors also increase their own merit which in turn affords protection for themselves and others. The protective value of the merit associated with gilding is seen in the way a donor may share merit with a deceased relative to aid and protect them in their next life.<sup>285</sup> Wendy Thuzar's vivid memories of her grandmother's donation of jewellery at the time of the hti-daw raising ceremony in 1999, included three generations of women collectively hoisting a trolley of jewellery up to the Shwedagon Pagoda's finial. After the demise of her mother in early 2016, she travelled back to Yangon from Singapore to donate gold plaques for the stupa in advance of the next major renovation in 2019. She reminisced how lucky her grandmother had been to undertake such a 'noble' deed and how this

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<sup>281</sup> Sujata Soni, *Evolution of Stupas in Burma. Pagan Period: 11th to 13th Centuries A.D.* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1991), 37–47.

<sup>282</sup> Soni also notes the practice in Thailand of covering gold Buddha images in plaster as a form of protection. Soni, 43–44, 47.

<sup>283</sup> Moore, 'Ritual Continuity and Stylistic Change in Pagoda Consecration and Renovation', 7–8, 24. The total value of gold donated for the hti-daw as gold plates and gold leaf amounted to 8,413.875 million Myanmar kyats.

<sup>284</sup> Moore, 19.

<sup>285</sup> Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*, 126.

formative experience had inspired her to do the same for her mother. The gift implied that merit was made not only for herself, as the intention to honour her mother would be inscribed on the plaques and taken to the higher realms of the stupa.<sup>286</sup>

## Objects of Merit-making and the ‘Systematic’ Pagoda Museum

This section analyses how objects were intended to be understood after their transition as gifts to the pagoda to become museum ‘objects’. As new objects were brought into the collection and others were restituted from long periods in storage, yet others were re-installed in new thematic displays predicated on the reclassification of the collection. As the analysis below will show, new taxonomies were devised in line with museum’s aims, which brought new order to the displays. Moreover, the reconfigured groups of objects bound together by typological or material attributes, or identified as significant relative to particular themes, demonstrated that new meanings could be constructed that augmented the ways of seeing discussed earlier. Eileen Hooper-Greenhill defines the ‘object’ not as something inherently meaningful but rather as ‘a thing, an intention, or a target for feelings or actions’. The notion of an object as a focal point that engages a response of some kind, assumes that objects are therefore subject to interpretation based on the respondent’s existing experience and knowledge.<sup>287</sup> That meaning can be derived in different ways was demonstrated repeatedly in the visitor responses to the displays on the second floor, whether these were based on the experience of rituals that were practiced in relation to Buddha images, or conceptual knowledge that referenced ideas about the Buddha. The examples discussed below demonstrate how both ‘functional’ and ‘formal’<sup>288</sup> qualities were recognised in objects that were held sacred. This range of meanings observed of sacred objects in Western museums by Ronald Grimes is also recognised by Hooper-Greenhill, who established the notion of the ‘polysemic’ condition of objects, as vital to the museum’s function as a place to construct knowledge.<sup>289</sup> As will be discussed, this condition of multiplicity is recognised in the Work Plan’s dual aim to promote the study *and* veneration of its collections.<sup>290</sup> The plan revealed how objects and the way they were classified were essential to bring about these objectives.

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<sup>286</sup> Wendy Thuzar Wynn Tint, interview with the author, 26 May 2018.

<sup>287</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 104–6.

<sup>288</sup> Grimes, ‘Sacred Objects in Museum Spaces’, 423.

<sup>289</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 77.

<sup>290</sup> Secretary, Buddha Museum Advanced Display Group, ‘Shwedagon Pagoda Museum. Advanced Renovation Work Plan [in Myanmar]’, 22.



The notion of a more 'systematic' institution had already emerged in 1992 when the museum's inaugural leaflet stated that the keeping and arrangement of archival materials such as maps, photos and historical records should be done 'systematically' (*sanit-tagya*), so that these would be easier to study.<sup>291</sup> Later, the same idea was applied to the museum's collection. The introduction to the museum's Record Book of 2006 recounts that its predecessors had struggled to store and display the growing collection at the Hall of Ancient Buddha Images, which had eventually acquired the appearance of a 'storeroom'.<sup>292</sup> The Record Book implies that 'systematic' displays would facilitate more efficient practices of safekeeping and care. It notes that an Object Checking Group established in 1992 was tasked with the safe transferral of objects to the new museum where they were to be checked and mounted in 'systematic' displays. Significantly, it noted that this process included the proper renewal or 'cleansing' of Buddha images and model stupas.<sup>293</sup> The term '*yaung-daw-hpwint*' was used to refer specifically to ritual cleansing which uses perfumed water.<sup>294</sup> Moreover, it noted that a 'systematic' list of objects transferred in 1998 had been computerised, and that by 2003 it had been some time since the objects had been cleaned or 'systematically arranged'. This historical account therefore defines 'systematic' as a range of processes including safekeeping, inventory lists, cleanliness and orderly displays. The museum's developmental starting point therefore is by implication the storeroom, the conditions of which are the antithesis of systematic i.e. insecure, undocumented, dusty, and disorderly. Negative connotations about the storeroom included its security. In 2015, it was felt that to keep everything on display and therefore in the public eye would be safer. Yet paradoxically, this also undermined the aim to become more selective.<sup>295</sup>

The book elaborates on how systematic displays would be achieved through a process of reducing the number of objects on display using criteria that had been drawn up in 2003. It also notes that one of the challenges was that repetitious and high value objects, could not be refused, destroyed or transferred elsewhere.<sup>296</sup> The implication was that to do so would be to deny donors the opportunity to make merit. Significantly, the list included the classification 'traditional fine art' an elaboration of the earlier

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<sup>291</sup> Board of Trustees, Shwedagon Pagoda, "Four Relics Shwedagon Pagoda. Museum, Scripture Library and Archive. Opening Ceremony [in Myanmar]", 1.

<sup>292</sup> Win Kyaing, "Le-zu Dat-poun Shwedagon Zedi-daw. Museum Objects List. Record Book (Part 1) [in Myanmar]," 1.

<sup>293</sup> Win Kyaing, 2–3.

<sup>294</sup> Su Latt Win, personal communication, 16 January 2017.

<sup>295</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan's advice that a storeroom would be needed on site, was nonetheless heeded and a space on the lower floor of the building was approved by December 2015. Daw Nu Mra Zan, 30 December 2015.

<sup>296</sup> Win Kyaing, 'Le-Zu Dat-Poun Shwedagon Zedi-Daw. Museum Objects List. Record Book (Part 1) [in Myanmar]', 4.

reference made to 'art objects' in the inaugural leaflet of 1992.<sup>297</sup> The term *anu pin-nya* is used here for 'fine art'. However, this was later elaborated as traditional arts and crafts, known as the 'Ten Flowers' or *pan seh-myo*, within the renovated displays on the ground floor.<sup>298</sup> The list included:

1. Objects that are not of Myanmar
2. Objects that are not ancient
3. Objects not considered traditional fine art
4. Objects that have no aesthetic merit
5. Duplicate objects of the same size and form

The list of unacceptable criteria clearly leaves much room for the interpretation of objects that would be considered appropriate for the collection, particularly with regards to how those that were 'ancient' or have 'aesthetic merit' could be conceived. The displays on the second floor as observed above, did not address these issues either, as information and chronological arrangements were largely absent. Also, although the list gives the impression of exclusivity, the categories of objects that remain acceptable are left open to interpretation, namely objects 'of Myanmar', ancient objects, traditional fine arts, and objects with aesthetic merit. In practice, there are many kinds of objects that do not conform to these criteria, and duplicate objects abound. Many more are accepted on the basis of their material value and are often recycled. For example, a bundle of silver wire and an old silver fork received in February 2016 were sent for smelting in order to make gold leaf.<sup>299</sup> This process was undertaken by the Gold Jewellery Department<sup>300</sup> so that the gold leaf could then be used to gild the pagoda.

The list of acceptable objects for display was refined in 2013 when the Work Plan proposed greater selectivity as part of the museum's aim to achieve 'international museum standards'. Categories of highly valuable objects were deemed acceptable for display in order to encourage study and veneration:

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<sup>297</sup> Official opening leaflet, 14th July 1992.

<sup>298</sup> The term appeared in European accounts around the late 16<sup>th</sup> century and a repertoire of art forms was patronised by the court since at least the Bagan period (11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> centuries) if not earlier (see Glossary). Charlotte Galloway, "Le Arti E L'artigianato Tradizionali Birmani Al Servizio Del Buddismo", in *Dana. L'Arte Birmana Del Dono. Capolavori Della Collezione Peppler.*, ed. C. Coderey (Milano: Edizione Gabriele Mazzotta, 2013, 21). At different times additional art forms have included lapidary, canework, glass mosaic work and embroidery. See also San Win et al, "The Mon Cities of Lower Myanmar: From Thaton to Bago.", in *Cities and Kings. Ancient Treasures from Myanmar.* (Singapore: Asian Civilisations Museum, 2016, 46).

<sup>299</sup> Donations are periodically sent from the Gold Jewellery Department for inspection by U Maung Maung Gyi, who then seeks approval from the Head of Office to accept them. U Maung Maung Gyi, interview with author, Yangon, 2 February 2016.

<sup>300</sup> U Htun Aung Ngwe, interview with the author, 29 August 2015. This was also done to make plaques for the Sule Pagoda, according to trustee U San Win. Interview with the author, 12 August 2015.

1. Historical objects related to the Shwedagon Pagoda and its history
2. Cultural objects that demonstrate Buddhist history
3. Buddhist fine art
4. Fine art
5. Rare gold and silver jewellery
6. Rare objects
7. Objects identified by the trustees as rare and highly valuable<sup>301</sup>

Notably the list refers to ways in which some of these categories would be interpreted. There is emphasis on the value of objects that refer to broader themes and concepts such as history and art. The inclusion of ‘the Shwedagon Pagoda and its history’ as well as ‘Buddhist history’ indicates that a systematic pagoda museum should address narratives of place and religion. Greater emphasis is given to art, with the addition of ‘Buddhist fine art’, although ‘art’ was eventually subsumed within other thematic categories. Finally, the rarity value of objects is given much emphasis with authority conferred on trustees to assess rarity. These assumptions were built into a further list that proposed new themes and typologies of objects for display:

1. The Shwedagon Pagoda
2. Miniature stupas
3. Images
4. Adorned images
5. Religious donations (e.g. silver trees, flag posts)
6. Colonial art
7. Foreign donations
8. Buddha footprints
9. Burmese art and customary objects
10. Jewellery and currency (e.g. old Burmese coins)<sup>302</sup>

These two lists indicate that objects can be interpreted in multiple ways; for example, stupas and images may be historically linked to the Shwedagon Pagoda and/or demonstrate aspects of Buddhist history and/or be considered Buddhist fine art. The category ‘Religious donations’ conforms with these categories, yet many of these highly crafted objects are also composites that include antique jewellery or pieces worn previously by the donor and could fit into the category ‘Rare gold and silver jewellery’. This category of religious donations was eventually identified as ‘Specially Adorned Devotional Donated Items’ for the purpose of titling the display (see this chapter: *Special Devotional Objects*).

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<sup>301</sup> Secretary, Buddha Museum Advanced Display Group, ‘Shwedagon Pagoda Museum. Advanced Renovation Work Plan [in Myanmar]’, 22.

<sup>302</sup> Secretary, Buddha Museum Advanced Display Group, 25–26.

However, a third list made by Daw Nu Mra Zan in consultation with U Maung Maung Gyi, identified the distribution of thematic and typological categories across three floors of the museum. The list emphasised a hierarchy of value whereby the most sacred objects collected from the Shwedagon Pagoda remained on the second floor, a distinction that according to Daw Nu Mra Zan, accorded them more respect.<sup>303</sup> The list for the first floor placed Buddha footprints, awards, and devotional items at the top of the list, while thematic categories such as Foreign donor's gifts were relegated below. Notably, the former category, 'Colonial art', was subsumed within a new theme on the history and architecture of the pagoda. On the ground floor, a single theme related to handicrafts and utilitarian objects hinted at the large volume that these categories would occupy. The list comprised the following:

- Second Floor:
1. Shwe Dagon Pagoda's Gold Robe Plaques
  2. Diamond Bud and Vane of Shwe Dagon Pagoda
  3. Bells of Shwe Dagon Pagoda
  4. Devotional Place
  5. Gold Stupas and Buddha Statues
  6. Ivory, Jade Stupas and Buddha Statues
  7. Silver Stupas and Buddha Statues
  8. Audio Visual Room

- First Floor:
1. Buddha's Footprint and Varieties of Donated Gems
  2. Honourable Titles and Medals
  3. Specially Adorned Devotional Donated Items
  4. Foreign Visitors' Contributions
  5. Shwe Dagon Pagoda's History and Architecture

- Ground Floor:
1. Myanmar Traditional Handicrafts and Customary Utilities
  2. Audio Visual Orientation Room<sup>304</sup>

Contrary to the criterion established in 2003 for cultural exclusivity, sacred objects from overseas continued to be displayed. Furthermore, in addition to the first-floor display of 'Foreign Visitors' Contributions', sacred objects from other regions of Asia were displayed on the second floor as well, thus validating their polysemic quality. Curators are frequently challenged to acknowledge the multiplicity of meanings or viewpoints in the interpretation of objects within exhibitions. As Stephanie Moser observed, this is particularly the case for 'object-led' displays where one set of meanings conferred by

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<sup>303</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan, personal communication, 2 February, 12 July 2016.

<sup>304</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan, 2 February, 12 July 2016.

the group circumvents others that are more implicit to individual objects.<sup>305</sup> This tendency was observed again in the display 'Foreign Visitors Contributions' on the first floor, where a more diverse group of objects many with inscribed names, dates and titles commemorated institutional ties and political engagements. These included a model stupa presented by the King of Nepal in 1985 and a dish made for the King of Thailand's 84<sup>th</sup> birthday given by the abbot of Bodhgaya Temple in India. A gift from President Obama after he toured the pagoda during his second trip to Myanmar in November 2014 demonstrated a more personalised gesture of giving. On his return to the United States he sent the trustees a clock inscribed simply with his name.<sup>306</sup> Like other diplomatic gifts, it speaks to the complexities of political relations at that moment in time, yet the inscribed name does more than record a visit. It personalises the gift and commemorates the donor, whose fame imbues the gift with significance beyond the metonymic values usually associated with previous use or ownership. The ambivalent presence of the clock, placed off-centre and well below other gifts, betrays nothing of the excitement among staff about his gift that I observed during fieldwork in 2015. The display further demonstrates Moser's assertion that other meanings are sublimated within a dominant theme. In this case the significance of the objects as gifts consigns the myriad stories associated with them to oral tradition.<sup>307</sup>

Three other examples demonstrate more specifically how meanings were negotiated within the overarching paradigm of merit-making. The first was a rare crowned Buddha image that accorded with U Maung Maung Gyi's own collecting interests. The second was the group of guardian figures, uneasy vestiges of a colonial legacy, and the third were the miniaturised devotional objects which donors imbued with their personal possessions.

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<sup>305</sup> Stephanie Moser, 'THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAIL: Museum Displays and the Creation of Knowledge', *Museum Anthropology* 33, no. 1 (1 March 2010): 29, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1379.2010.01072.x>.

<sup>306</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan, interview with the author, 30 August 2015.

<sup>307</sup> Head of Office, U Htun Aung Ngwe recalled a story of a friend's ancestor, who is said to have rowed across the Yangon River from Twante accompanied by musicians, in order to donate a set of silver. U Htun Aung Ngwe, interview with the author, Yangon, 5 February 2016.

## A Crowned Buddha from the Northern Shrine

By August 2015 U Maung Maung Gyi's proposed transfer of a crowned Buddha image from the northern shrine to the museum had received preliminary approval.<sup>308</sup> This assertion of his scholarly interests emerged after he had spotted the image high up within the dark recesses of the northern shrine (fig.1.21). Set against a wall of glass mosaic work and flanked by multiple painted marble images, it was modest by comparison with tarnished gilding and traces of painted facial features (fig.1.22, left). By January 2016 the image had been transferred for safekeeping to the trustees' office and then taken to the museum. Shortly after, it was re-gilded by the Gold Jewellery Department which administers the stocks of gold leaf and undertakes this work (fig. 1.22, right).<sup>309</sup>

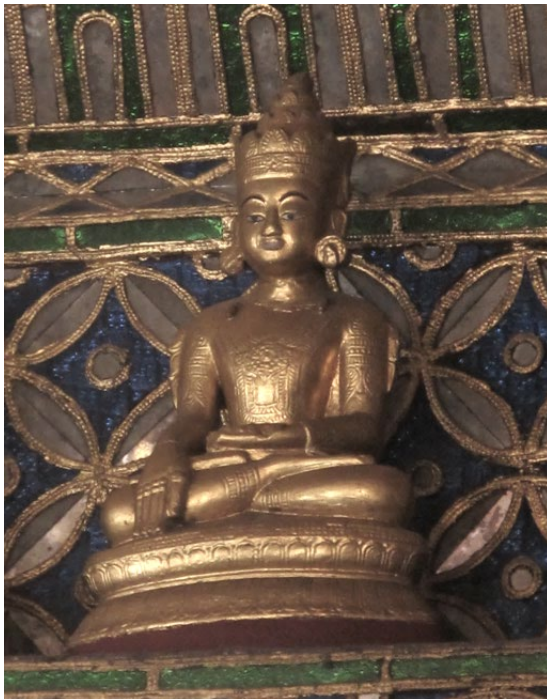


Figure 1.22. Crowned Buddha image in the northern shrine, 4 September 2015. Photograph: Moe Aung Lwin (left). The image re-gilded after transfer to the museum, 5 February 2016. Photograph: Heidi Tan courtesy of Shwedagon Pagoda Board of Trustees (right).

U Maung Maung Gyi's interest was in the rarity of the sandstone image with an unusual four-tiered crown. Closer inspection revealed ornate jewellery finely carved into the sandstone which remained visible on the ungilded base. He suggested on the basis of these material and stylistic attributes that the image probably dated to the Nyaungyan

<sup>308</sup> Final approval was needed from the new Head of Office, U Htun Aung Ngwe. U Maung Maung Gyi, interview with the author, 29 August 2015.

<sup>309</sup> U Maung Maung Gyi, interview with the author, 5 February 2016.

period (1597–1752).<sup>310</sup> The elaborate form was clearly a challenge to produce in soft sandstone and was better suited to other materials, as demonstrated by the existence of wood and bronze examples from later periods.<sup>311</sup> He confirmed that there were no records of the donation, but suggested that it may have been contemporaneous with the image.<sup>312</sup> It exhibited extensive signs of wear and tear with a repair to the neck where the head may have been detached at one point and significant losses to the earplug tassels. In many respects the image conformed to a number of the criteria set out in the museum’s display priorities – its material, workmanship and style affirmed that it belonged to the repertoire of the Ten Flowers of Myanmar fine arts, it was ancient and rare, and it fitted into any one of the several classifications in the refined list of highly valuable objects related to pagoda history, Buddhist fine art or Buddha images.

Other kinds of meanings associated with crowned images indicate that they are highly venerated. For example, they are often associated with the supreme power of the Buddha illustrated in the story of his appearance as a *cakravartin* or World Conqueror in order to convert the boastful King Jambupati. Alexandra Green suggests that the crowned Buddha is even more auspicious when depicted at the moment of Enlightenment, as this example demonstrates through the ‘earth-touching’ gesture or *bhūmisparśa mudrā*.<sup>313</sup> The supreme power of the Buddha conveyed in the story is evident in crowned images in small shrines around the pagoda, a number of which are adorned with precious stones and jewellery, and are renowned for granting wishes (see Chapter Two: *A Wish Fulfilling Buddha*). Several of these were cast in bronze and had strikingly painted eyes or glass inserts that further enlivened them. Photo portraits of at least six images also resided in the Photo Gallery.<sup>314</sup> Tun Aung Chain and Thein Hlaing acknowledge the historical practice of royal association with the Buddha, and cite King Alaungpya’s identification with the title: ‘Embryo Buddha’. They identify two potent

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<sup>310</sup> U Maung Maung Gyi, interview with the author, 29 August 2015. A subsequent opinion dates it to between late Nyaungyan or early Konbaung period (1752–1885) perhaps sometime around 1700. Art historian Nan Kyi Kyi Khaing suggested that its features indicate different styles and periods. While the crown is a Mon style, the face appears closer to earlier Inwa style images (ca.1450) while the large earrings are more in keeping with the Nyaungyan period. Nan Kyi Kyi Khaing, interview with author, 20 August 2016.

<sup>311</sup> A cleaned alabaster image exhibited at the Asian Art Museum in Berlin dated 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century has an identical crown formed of leaf-like finials, complete ear-plugs, and the remains of ribbons on the upper arms. Georg Noack and Ines de Castro, *Myanmar. The Golden Land* (Stuttgart: Linden-Museum Stuttgart, 2014), Pl.137. See also Fraser-Lu and Stadtner, *Buddhist Art of Myanmar*, Pl. 34,38.

<sup>312</sup> Little is known of historic donations as they were largely unrecorded unless the donor had attached an inscription. U Maung Maung Gyi, interview with the author, 5 February 2016.

<sup>313</sup> Alexandra Green, ed., *Eclectic Collecting. Art from Burma in the Denison Museum* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), 204.

<sup>314</sup> I thank Soe Win Naing for drawing these images to my attention. Fieldwork, 19 August 2016.

crowned Buddhas in the eastern hall and vicinity, known for granting wealth, and another at the shrine of Sun and Moon in the southwestern corner.<sup>315</sup> However, there was little evidence in the way this smaller sandstone image had been displayed either at the shrine or the museum to suggest that it held any special associations of power. It may once have been consecrated as indicated by the painted facial features prior to re-gilding. The ritual of consecration once included the painting the eyes of the Buddha in Myanmar.<sup>316</sup> For example, King Mindon is recorded as consecrating the monumental marble Buddha image at Kyauktawgyi Pagoda by painting its eyes.<sup>317</sup> And the royal ritual is still commemorated in Mandalay by communities claiming royal descent.<sup>318</sup> Several other images in the collection had clearly painted eyes and lips. However, many do not recognise this practice today and the crowned image was left unrestored with faintly visible remains of black outlines around the eyes.<sup>319</sup>

The image was eventually displayed in the showroom titled: 'Ivory, Jade Stupas and Buddha Statues'. The rationale for this was that its sandstone form would conform to the classificatory scheme and that it would complement the jade and marble Buddha images in the displays. Another more pressing reason for its inclusion was the increased security provided in this area for objects of greater value (fig.1.23).<sup>320</sup> How visitors will respond to the display in future remains to be seen. It resides opposite the imposing relic display discussed earlier and awaits a label.

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<sup>315</sup> Tun Aung Chain and Thein Hlaing, *Shwedagon*, 23, 61, 64, 78.

<sup>316</sup> Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*, 205.

<sup>317</sup> Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 294. Schober, 'Religious Merit and Social Status among Burmese Buddhist Lay Associations', 207.

<sup>318</sup> Juliane Schober, 'Mapping the Sacred in Theravada Buddhist Southeast Asia', in *Sacred Places and Modern Landscapes. Sacred Geography and Social-Religious Transformations in South and Southeast Asia* (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona State University, Program for Southeast Asian Studies, Monograph Series Press, 2003), 17.

<sup>319</sup> Kate Crosby states that the practice existed elsewhere in the region except for Myanmar. Crosby, *Theravada Buddhism*, 51. A number of informants including U Maung Maung Gyi when asked said that they did not have any knowledge of the practice. U Maung Maung Gyi, interview with the author, 5 February 2016.

<sup>320</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan, interview with the author, 21 August 2016.





Figure 1.23. Crowned Buddha displayed in the museum, 19 August 2016. Photograph: Heidi Tan, courtesy Shwedagon Pagoda Board of Trustees.

Placed high on a tier of plinths the image was juxtaposed with smaller objects away from the glare of spotlights, somewhat like its original position at the back of the shrine. Yet as it shone prominently, the fresh gilding drew attention to both its unusual form and its significance as sacred. Louise Tythacott observed the way secular museum displays often keep rare sacred objects away from closer scrutiny through the use of cases, plinths and barriers, and thus draw attention to their aura. She adds that: 'The aura bestowed upon objects within museums, thus, is not so dissimilar to the potency attributed to sacred images in temples'.<sup>321</sup> The display demonstrates how in the pagoda museum, the construct of the 'aura' goes a step further to include gilding that confers respect and radiance. The new display thus validates the multiple meanings of sacred objects, in both 'functional' and 'formal' terms.<sup>322</sup> The new gilding and arrangement within the display speak to its ritual function and spiritual value, while the formal material and stylistic attributes confer rarity. In this sense, the crowned Buddha fulfills the museum's dual intentions to make sacred objects accessible for veneration as well as study.

However, visitor responses to the new taxonomies of display in this case require further monitoring. A sacred object that had remained in the pagoda for many decades, if not

<sup>321</sup> Tythacott, 'Curating the Sacred: Exhibiting Buddhism at the World Museum Liverpool', 117.

<sup>322</sup> Grimes, 'Sacred Objects in Museum Spaces', 423.

centuries, was re-displayed to conform to the museum's criteria to show rare objects. Yet, unfamiliar to many and without means of interpretation, its rarity remained implicit and easily overlooked.<sup>323</sup> This attempt to introduce other meanings distinguishes the museum from other pagoda museums and remains challenging to implement. As a comparison, age as well as potency were both deemed significant in the case of a crowned Buddha image at Yadana Man Aung Temple. However, greater priority was given to its wish fulfilling powers and the image was kept within its shrine, rather than displayed within the temple's museum (see Chapter Two: *A Wish Fulfilling Buddha*).

### 'Unsuitable' Objects

A number of architectural elements and statues from the pagoda had remained in storage for many years as they had previously been deemed 'unsuitable' for display.<sup>324</sup> These were uncomfortable reminders of the colonial period which had been dismantled from the pagoda during the late 1990s. As the Record Book noted they were stored as they were 'not authentic Myanmar traditional art'.<sup>325</sup> The plans for themed showrooms on the first floor included a room titled: *Colonial Fine Arts*. Objects included carved reliefs of winged cherubs, coats-of-arms related to royal visits, and a pair of rampant lions dated 1903 commemorating the Delhi Durbar attended by King Edward VII.<sup>326</sup> The title of the room was changed to *Shwe Dagon Pagoda's History and Architecture* and finally to *Historical Objects of Shwedagon Pagoda*.<sup>327</sup> This broadening of the title allowed for the inclusion of archaeological and other materials that could not be confined to the colonial period.

A group of painted cast-iron door guardians was commissioned for the front and side entrances to the Hall of Buddha's Footprint (1920). The larger than life-size figures loomed above visitors when raised on plinths outside the hall.<sup>328</sup> However, by December 1997 they were removed due to their colonial connotations (fig.1.24).<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> Text panels drafted for displays on the second floor were eventually withheld due to insufficient space. Daw Nu Mra Zan, personal communication 19 August 2016.

<sup>324</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan, interview with the author, 12 December 2013.

<sup>325</sup> Win Kyaing, 'Le-Zu Dat-Poun Shwedagon Zedi-Daw. Museum Objects List. Record Book (Part 1) [in Myanmar]', 6.

<sup>326</sup> Peter H. Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display. English, Indian, and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 242..

<sup>327</sup> The term 'colonial fine art' had been provided by museum secretary, U Win Kyaing, with subsequent changes made by Daw Nu Mra Zan in line with the museum's refinement of the displays in 2003 which excluded foreign art. See this chapter: *The 'Systematic Museum'*.

<sup>328</sup> For illustrations see Tun Aung Chain and Thein Hlaing, *Shwedagon*, 45.

<sup>329</sup> Moore, Mayer, and Win Pe, *Shwedagon*, 50.



Figure 1.24. Guardian figures from the Hall of Buddha's Footprint (above) and detail of a figure with gold leaf on chest (below), 22 September 2017. Photographs: Heidi Tan, courtesy Shwedagon Pagoda Board of Trustees.

The figures had been kept in store for almost two decades but in 2017 had been put on display with a caption that identified them simply as 'Indians'.<sup>330</sup> Their muscular bodies clad in loin-cloths are distinctive from other more stylised forms of statuary such as the tattooed Shan bell-bearers often found at pagodas.<sup>331</sup> Wide-eyed and brandishing what appear to be whips, they evoke a fearsome if somewhat diminished appearance, without their original plinths. Door guardians portrayed as fearsome and 'other' abound in Buddhist art traditions, but a linguistic parallel suggests a relevant metaphor of guardianship that drew on racial stereotypes to stoke fear during the colonial period. Significantly, the Sanskrit term for 'cowherd' is '*gopaka*', derived from the term '*gopaya*' or 'guardian', 'to guard, protect, preserve'. The Pali term for '*gopaka*' includes 'watchman', while '*gopanā*' refers to 'protection, care, watchfulness'.<sup>332</sup> The similarity of these terms to the Myanmar term for 'pagoda trustee' or 'gaw-paka' suggests an Indic origin for the term.<sup>333</sup> The donor of the hall, U Ya Thi, was himself a trustee, although the extent of his involvement in the commissioning of the figures remains unknown.<sup>334</sup>

<sup>330</sup> Fieldwork observation, 23 September 2017. They had been identified as southern Indians or simply 'two Indians'. Win Pe, *Shwe Dagon*, 93. Aung Than, *Shwedagon*, Pl.10. The more controversial term 'kala yoke' was the term used to describe the images when they were still in situ in 1975. Hsu Shin Maung, *The Shwedagon Pagoda [in Myanmar]* (Rangoon: Sarpay Beikman, 1975), 299. The term had long been in use to refer to foreigners who included Armenians, Jews, and Europeans. Seekins, *Historical Dictionary of Burma (Myanmar)*, 288.

<sup>331</sup> Manipuri figures were also bell bearers. Vincent Clarence Scott O'Connor, *Mandalay and Other Cities of the Past in Burma* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1996), 416.

<sup>332</sup> T.W. Rhys Davids and William Stede, *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary* (Chipstead, Surrey (Britain): Pali Text Society, 1921), 85.

<sup>333</sup> Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary. Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899), 368.

<sup>334</sup> Tun Aung Chain and Thein Hlaing, *Shwedagon*, 45.

Within the context of 'Myanmarization' of the state in the 1990s as discussed by Juliane Schober, the removal of these 'difficult' representations of the colonial and 'otherness' from the pagoda is not surprising.<sup>335</sup> The history of ethnic relations and heightened periods of tension during the colonial period (1824–1948) and after is well documented.<sup>336</sup> However, other kinds of meanings had emerged by 2016. Informally conveyed stories revealed their relationships within the context of the museum, as staff remained intrigued by the age and potency of the figures. Old photographs illustrate the figures positioned with their 'whips' arched towards each other, to which U Maung Maung Gyi suggested they may have held a lamp over the entrance to the hall.<sup>337</sup> Others recounted their beliefs in the power of the figures, particularly when they were dissatisfied in some way. For example, previous attempts to move them had resulted in injury and illness to staff members and had thus justified keeping them in storage for a long time.<sup>338</sup> Traces of gold leaf on the chest of one of the figures and the worn surface of their bellies suggests that they have been touched and venerated in the past (fig. 1.24, right). In contrast to this, the accession number stuck to the chest of another figure in the group, marks the transition of the images into the museum and the imposition of new frames of reference. These formerly 'colonial' now 'historical' figures were presented as objects of merit-making, yet clearly held meanings that remained contingent on belief and personal experience. Placed on open display, they offered a close encounter similar to the historic Khmer statues at the Mahamuni Pagoda, which are renowned for curing illnesses.<sup>339</sup> The comparison demonstrates the wide disparities between pagoda museums with regards to ritual and other forms of touching or handling objects. While ritual touching was allowed in order to access the potency of the well-worn Khmer statues, visitors could only observe the traces of haptic engagement with the guardian figures, or glean further information about them from staff members.

This example demonstrates how the ritual efficacy of the guardian figures underscores Hooper-Greenhill's definition of the museum object as a 'target for feelings and actions'.<sup>340</sup> Although presented as 'historical objects', the figures commanded a range

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<sup>335</sup> Schober notes that 'otherness' was itself being transformed through missionary work amongst non-Buddhist ethnic minorities in peripheral regions at this time. Schober, *Modern Buddhist Conjunctures in Myanmar*, 91.

<sup>336</sup> For an account of the complex relations between different Indian communities living in Rangoon and Lower Burma see Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 55–56.

<sup>337</sup> U Maung Maung Gyi, interview with the author, 23 September 2017.

<sup>338</sup> Museum staff member in conversation with Su Latt Win, 23 September 2017.

<sup>339</sup> A large text panel at the Bronze Statues Museum at the pagoda provides an account of the history and significance of the images. Fieldwork observations, 24 August 2015 (see Appendix 1, A.8).

<sup>340</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 104–6.

meanings that were conveyed through feelings of fear and awe. The 'systematic' pagoda museum is therefore understood as a place to seek out a range of meanings, whether they are formally or informally constituted. This recalls Koanantakool's observation that the monastery museum should be understood through its exhibits and their stories which are contextualised, or draw meaning, from the legacies of the monastery itself.<sup>341</sup> In this case the story of 'dissatisfied' guardian figures invoked their treatment as museum objects and their subsequent display provided the opportunity for speaking of their significance as numinous objects of merit-making. The unexpected nature of this encounter with the guardian figures demonstrated that the 'systematic' approach to classifying and theming the displays remained open to possibilities for understanding objects in other ways. Rather than rely on interpretives that might otherwise limit such possibilities, the experience was augmented by a range of contextualising elements discussed earlier, including watching rituals unfold around objects, the use of intense lights, signs of veneration such as re-gilding and ritual touching, and the stories conveyed informally by staff.

### Special Devotional Objects

Groups of miniature relics of use in silver and gold were previously displayed together with Buddha images. By 2016, they were installed in a new showroom titled *Specially Adorned Devotional Donated Items* on the first floor. The lengthy appellation and a text panel that described the customised crafting of these objects confirms the 'inherently multiple' and 'contingent' nature of certain ethnographic objects acknowledged by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett.<sup>342</sup> Each of the relics is symbolic of a biographical moment in the Buddha's lives; for example, the meaning of the Bodhi tree is contingent on the moment of Enlightenment and is one of 28 different trees associated with the same moment repeated for each of the lineage of 28 Buddhas.<sup>343</sup> Art is created through the associated rarity value implicit within established categories of collecting and the singular mode of display in Western art museums.<sup>344</sup> Yet these gifts were presented as a class of 'devotional' objects, each group accompanied by a text panel in Burmese and English, that alluded to different interpretive possibilities, from their formal qualities as composite objects created with the donors' personal jewellery and tresses of hair, to their function as symbols related to religious allegories. For example,

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<sup>341</sup> Paritta Chalermpong Koanantakool, 'Contextualising Objects in Monastery Museums in Thailand', 156.

<sup>342</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 23.

<sup>343</sup> Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 15.

<sup>344</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 25.

the miniature flag posts ('tagondaing') were described as a reminder of the monk Ashin Pindola who used his supernatural powers to retrieve an alms bowl from a tall pole, thus converting a wealthy man from Rajagriha who had challenged him. The panel explains how the miniatures replicate the towering posts found at pagodas which are adorned with auspicious figures and mythical animals, as well as gold and silver (fig. 1.25).<sup>345</sup>

The illustrated panel was one of several in the showrooms downstairs some of which made reference to comparable objects in the National Museum collection. The references to craftsmanship, valuable materials and religious allegories demonstrate an acknowledgement of the museum's increasingly diverse audiences and the need to interpret the objects of merit-making through wider frames of reference. Just as Gaskell observes a museological shift towards validation of the sacred quality of religious objects among museums more generally, so is there a shift in the pagoda museum's receptiveness towards the polysemic possibilities of its ritual objects.<sup>346</sup>



Figure 1.25. Miniature dagun-dain with tress of hair (left), and necklaces (right), 27 February 2017. Photographs: Su Latt Win, courtesy Shwedagon Pagoda Board of Trustees.

Grimes notes of the Western art museum that texts themselves become 'objects of thought, "things" to think about', while in the original context of the temple, the sacred

<sup>345</sup> Fieldwork observations, 22 September 2017.

<sup>346</sup> Gaskell, 'Sacred to Profane and Back Again', 160.

object ‘*embodies* a story, reminding devotees of what they already know’.<sup>347</sup> While Grimes makes a clear distinction between different forms of knowledge-making associated with the museum (thinking), and temple (embodied knowledge), it cannot be assumed that visitors to the pagoda museum do not also want to ‘think’ in other kinds of ways about ritual objects. Two of the six visitors surveyed in the showrooms upstairs said that more information should be provided about the provenance, age, and use, of certain sacred objects. Similar requests were heard from visitors at the Bagan Archaeological Museum where interpretives were also limited and different ways of knowing were observed (see Chapter Three: *Merit-making on Display*).

In the case of the flag posts, the sense of embodied meaning referred to by Grimes is evident in the way an object can become ‘animate’,<sup>348</sup> an extension of the donor through the addition of personal items such as tresses of their own hair and items of jewellery (fig.1.25, left). The gifting of hair by female donors is an ancient practice that continues today. It is recorded at Bagan in at least one inscription of 1442,<sup>349</sup> while wishing trees, or *padethabin*, covered with tresses of hair were offered at the Shwedagon Pagoda around 1900.<sup>350</sup> Hair donations are still undertaken to raise funds – for example, a major donation of hair funded the building of a road to a monastery in Monywa around 2010.<sup>351</sup> The latter demonstrates how donors infuse some equivalence of themselves just as Queen Shinsawbu donated gold worth her own weight. Personalised miniature relics of use were also individual expressions of creativity and a measure of the donor’s agency in shaping their own merit-making ritual.

Personal accounts of the practice of *dāna* were minimal in the interpretives, yet memories of these were readily shared by one informant. In an unexpected moment the elder staff member Daw Than Khin pointed out several objects that had belonged to her family members. They included her grandmother’s silver-plated English porcelain tray, thought to be over a century old, which had been used in her childhood and several items of jewellery. As she reminisced, she gestured to a tiny gold bracelet that had been worn by her granddaughter who had died at a young age from dengue fever. The donation had been made in her memory, an act which she acknowledged could

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<sup>347</sup> Grimes, ‘Sacred Objects in Museum Spaces’, 422.

<sup>348</sup> Grimes, 425.

<sup>349</sup> Emil Forchhammer and Taw Sein Ko, *Inscriptions of Pagan, Pinya and Ava. Translation with Notes.* (Rangoon: Superintendent, Government Printing, Burma, 1899), 37–38.

<sup>350</sup> Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 21.

<sup>351</sup> There is reportedly a strong market for hair among Chinese buyers. The road was named Shwesabin Lan (Golden Hair Road). Interview with the author, 2 February 2016.

help to transfer merit to her in her next life.<sup>352</sup> The moment between looking and listening gave a longer pause for thought and to form a mental image of the young girl in another life.

The spontaneous moment was a reminder of the informal way in which knowledge can emerge as a human response to another's interests and a genuine desire to share personal memories. The candidness conveyed a sense of authenticity akin to a chat with an old friend and diverged completely from the formality of the text panels. The objects were momentarily reframed as personal possessions that had long been handled and worn by family members. Similar moments are discussed by Candlin at micromuseums where interactions with owners took various forms from private tours to informal conversations.<sup>353</sup> She observed too the memorialisation of a family member as implicit to the gift. At the British in India Museum in Lancashire, many items of personal use that signalled the achievements of the donors' ancestors, she suggests, could be conceived like relics imbued with the 'nature and substance' of their owners.<sup>354</sup> The donations had also been kept together in the displays, Candlin notes, as observed in the displays before renovation. Yet she also draws an analogy with the cemetery where such donations are like gravestones that 'do little more than signify that someone has lived', where a service is provided that enables donors to express family loyalties and leave their treasures behind when no other museums would ordinarily take them.<sup>355</sup> While the memorialising significance of the gift is familiar in this case, an analogy cannot so easily be made with the cemetery. Donor credits like gravestones are commemorative but they are often absent in pagoda museums and one reason for this is that donations do not simply stand for commemorative acts. As objects of merit-making they speak of more than a person's life or death; they celebrate the donor's merit and signal a fortuitous rebirth. In so doing, they offer others the opportunity to rejoice in this and thereby cultivate more merit. As gifts, they are imbued with the meritorious intentions of their donors, and thereby resonate with others seeking to make and transfer merit. Daw Than Khin's actions demonstrate that like Candlin's donors, family members will always seek out their donations and the memories of their loved ones, but she was also keen to mention the original intention to transfer merit. In

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<sup>352</sup> Daw Than Khin, personal communication, 22 September 2017. I am grateful to Daw Nu Mra Zan for her interpretations at this moment.

<sup>353</sup> The Vintage Wireless Museum in West Dulwich in London was more like a private home where the owners introduced their world, while others engaged more informally with interested visitors. Candlin, *Micromuseology*, 44–45.

<sup>354</sup> The reference to substance is drawn from Annette Weiner's study of 'inalienable possessions' and their metonymic value in relation to ancestors. Candlin, 104–5.

<sup>355</sup> Candlin, 115.



the following chapter royal gifts were credited not only with the ruler's name but also details of his original meritorious intention to donate the gift to a prominent monk (see Chapter Two: *Royal Manuscripts and Lacquer*). In Chapter Three, extensive donor credits alluded to meritorious acts by including the names of deceased family members or by mentioning the meritorious intentions of the temple patron (see Chapter Three: *Authenticity in the Making of Alodawpyi Buddha*). However, as Buddha's belongings the mere presence of the gifts in the pagoda museum causes the cycle of merit-making to continue and thereby maintain the practice of generosity that sustains the faith.

## Conclusion

This chapter identified evidence for keeping practices in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when gifts were donated to the monastery following the first diplomatic encounters with the West and its museums, and the establishment of the first colonial museum, the Phayre Museum, in 1872. Connections between the colonial museum and sites of safekeeping at the Shwedagon Pagoda remain tenuous – by 1919 when the Paribawga Daik was mapped, the Phayre Museum had already been disbanded. Yet several more successful small-scale site museums such as the Pagan Museum were established during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and Taw Sein Ko's work with local monasteries in Bagan set a precedent for collaborative ways of working. By the time of Independence (1948) several other small-scale pagoda museums had been set up and Luce's deposits with the Shwebonpwint Pagoda Museum and Library in 1948 for example, demonstrated ongoing working relations between the Archaeological Survey and spaces of safekeeping at religious sites. By the mid-1950s exhibitions held in the precincts of the pagoda were seen as a means to augment the National Museum's small collection. The pagoda museum that opened in 1964, known later as the Buddhist Art Museum, set a larger more formal precedent which aimed to promote the study of Buddhist art and culture. Its commemorative function and government patronage provided a precedent for the monumental pagoda museums of the 1990s namely the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum and the Mahamuni Pagoda's Maha Buddhavamsa Museum. Further study of the collections of pagoda museums is needed to ascertain if distinctions can be made as has been done in Thailand where large monastery collections have been awarded 'national museum' status.<sup>356</sup> However, the different forms of pagoda museums in existence by the late 1960s demonstrates evidence of a diverse field

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<sup>356</sup> Paritta Chalernpow Koanantakool, 'Contextualising Objects in Monastery Museums in Thailand'. Kreps, 'Thai Monastery Museums. Contemporary Expressions of Ancient Traditions'.

which offers comparative data for the further study of museums at sacred sites in the region.

The chapter identified and analysed a number of unique attributes of the museum at the Shwedagon Pagoda that elicit an understanding of pagoda museums as a museological phenomenon. It demonstrated that a pagoda museum is necessarily a unique spatial entity that develops from within the ritual context of the pagoda and that the purpose-built Shwedagon Pagoda Museum was the culmination of a series of documented spaces for the safekeeping of gifts that had existed since at least the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The monumental pavilion-like form was an expression of civic architecture designed for a national site of merit-making, which was closer in scale and scope of ambitions to the Buddhist Art Museum of 1964, than the modest single-storey pagoda museums of the 1950s.

Furthermore, the chapter demonstrated that the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum before renovation was a unique addition to the corpus of museums, including micromuseums, that share the spatial quality of heterotopias. Situated remotely on a gated plot at the threshold of the pagoda platform, the museum evokes the heterotopic ideal of ever-accumulating objects and time.<sup>357</sup> However, the museum's unique inner world of abundant and diverse objects differs in that it is encapsulated not by the mundane world outside but by the pagoda and cosmological time spanning the eons associated with the Buddha and his three predecessors. This inner world prior to the renovation revealed a unique mode of display in which the effect of abundance was observed. Predicated on the intention to safeguard the collection, this effect presented another way of seeing that augments the 'museum effect' proposed by Alpers.<sup>358</sup>

The chapter also demonstrated that the effect of abundance in pagoda museum displays was predicated on the conditions of merit-making, in which the displays themselves inspired and sustained the practice of generosity. This self-sustaining role of the pagoda museum was underpinned by the relationship between donors and the stupa's field of merit. The underlying conditions of merit-making give pagoda museums a highly focussed or monothematic quality; an attribute that has been identified of many small-scale museums. However, rather than attribute this quality to material objects as

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<sup>357</sup> Candlin, *Micromuseology*, 182–83. Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias', 355.

<sup>358</sup> Alpers, 'The Museum as a Way of Seeing', 26–27.

Candlin does in her observation of these micromuseums, the monothematic quality of pagoda museums is premised on the contingent ritual of merit-making.<sup>359</sup>

After renovation, new spatial qualities were revealed through the ways devotees engaged with the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum. Significantly, they implemented their own embodied knowledge of pagoda-visiting that demonstrated a less prescribed response to the 'iconographic programme' than was attributed to the Western art museum by Duncan.<sup>360</sup> The programme within the main hall – the shrine room, the most sacred objects at the centre, and surrounding Buddha images and reliquaries – was encountered as a series of liminal moments focussed around the merit-making rituals of meditation, circumambulation and veneration. The pagoda museum was therefore an annex to the sacred space of the pagoda and its field of merit. Yet from its marginal position at the 'threshold' of the platform the museum was also a place where visitors could define their own sense of 'inward transformation' in the liminal moments of ritual or scrutinising sacred objects and mulling over their interpretive possibilities.<sup>361</sup> Questions raised about the authenticity of the shrine room for example, demonstrated that like the shrine displays in Western museums, the pagoda museum remained as ambiguous and as challenged by the complexities of exhibiting the sacred as the secular Western museum.

Another unique attribute of the pagoda museum is the work of the volunteer-keeper, the term defined as most appropriate to the role of safekeeping. Defined by U Maung Maung Gyi in terms of a service to the Buddha, and therefore meritorious, the role is part of the historical legacy of lay custodianship and is premised on conventional duties of care focussed on safekeeping and continually 'improving' the appearance of sacred objects. It is underpinned by an ethos of respect for the collection which is understood by U Maung Maung Gyi as belonging to the Buddha. The chapter demonstrated that a meritorious form of curating is a social practice in which relations between the keeper, visitors and collection are prioritised.<sup>362</sup> For example, curatorial agency was demonstrated in the re-gilding of Buddha images for the renovated displays, an act which itself enabled others to partake in the merit that has been earned. Put simply, a keeper's work is meritorious in that it supports the ongoing display of gifts for others to see, make merit, and thus perpetuate the ritual cycle of merit-making.

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<sup>359</sup> Candlin, *Micromuseology*, 154–55.

<sup>360</sup> Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 8.

<sup>361</sup> Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 197.

<sup>362</sup> Kreps, 'Thai Monastery Museums. Contemporary Expressions of Ancient Traditions', 236–37, 245.

Finally, the extensive renovation marked a significant transition for the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum, as it demonstrated an interest to re-order the displays and bring new meanings to the collection. The aims to improve safekeeping measures and avoid associations with storeroom-like conditions, resulted in a shift away from the eclectic displays and the heterotopic quality observed in 2015. The 'systematic' approach to reconceptualising the displays was object-led and demonstrated the value of the interpretive role that was introduced by Daw Nu Mra Zan, with which the polysemic quality of objects could be engaged.<sup>363</sup> The new plan, predicated on the study and veneration of the collection, rationalised the displays to prioritise rare and high value objects. The new displays remained abundant yet ordered according to new thematic and typological categories.

However, the responses to the displays of rare objects such as the crowned Buddha from the northern shrine and the 'Indian' guardian figures demonstrated that in the absence of interpretive panels their historical significance remained muted while their numinous qualities were more immediately recognised by visitors and staff and they became a 'target for feelings'.<sup>364</sup> The new category of 'devotional objects' likewise drew on the contingent meanings related to the function of Buddha's relics of use. Yet as composite objects made with elements of the donors' personal jewellery, they were a creative response to the need to cultivate, transfer, and share merit. In this respect the pagoda museum may be understood as the place where objects are kept visible and therefore activated in the self-sustaining cycle of merit-making.

The next chapter will demonstrate how an earlier variant of the pagoda museum produced a different set of attributes contingent on the Shan cultural context and Buddhist practice.

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<sup>363</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 77.

<sup>364</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, 104–6.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Yadana Man Aung Temple, Southern Shan State**

## Introduction

This chapter will analyse the pagoda museum's forms and practices as observed at Yadana Man Aung Temple in Southern Shan State during 2016 and 2017.<sup>1</sup> It will focus on a variant form of the pagoda museum that is physically embedded within the ritual space of the 'temple' or hollow stupa known as *pahto* (M). The term 'temple' is used to distinguish the form from the solid stupa discussed in the previous chapter. However, the term 'pagoda' is widely used to refer to either in Myanmar.<sup>2</sup> The chapter will analyse the spatial qualities of two museums situated within the temple with comparative examples in Shan State and beyond. The keeping practices that are subsumed within the custodial duties of the *gaw-paka* or trustee U Mya Thaug, are examined in relation to the incremental changes that had taken place in previous years, during seasonal cleaning in 2016 and during the festival of Thadingyut in 2017.

Situated in the town of Nyaung Shwe known locally by its Shan name, Yawnghwe, the temple sits on the northern shore of Inle Lake.<sup>3</sup> It represents a new architectural style that emerged during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in the region then known as Upper Burma and the Shan States which were administered separately under colonial rule.<sup>4</sup> The temple epitomises the way Shan cultural identity was forged through a history of conflict, trade and tributary relations between these regions. As the name suggests, Yadana Man Aung or the 'Victorious' (*aung*) 'Jewel' (*yadana*) that commemorates the Buddha's victory over the evil *Māra* (*man*), invokes Buddha's relics and those of King Mindon's that imbue the temple with the power of a relic stupa. It also commemorates the donor of the temple the Shan ruler *Sawbwa* Sao Maung (1848–1926), whose hereditary title *Sawbwa* (M) or *Saopha* (Sh) meaning 'lord of the heavens', signified the Shan's historically negotiated relations with the Burmese king.<sup>5</sup> Comprised of more

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<sup>1</sup> The chapter is based on fieldwork undertaken in the area over 7 days from 11–12 January, 25–26 February, 14–16 August 2016, with interpreter U Taw Myat Aung from Taunggyi, Shan State. Additional observations were made over 5 days, 25–30 September 2017, assisted by local interpreters Than Htay and Win Naing Htwe.

<sup>2</sup> Whilst most sites visited are signposted as 'hpaya', the term 'pagoda' is often used more broadly to designate either solid or hollow forms and is probably a legacy of colonial convention. Taw Sein Ko and Chas. Duroiselle, eds., *Epigraphia Birmanica. Being Lithic and Other Inscriptions of Burma*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (Rangoon, Burma: Superintendent, Government Printing, Burma, 1919), 41.

<sup>3</sup> Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 308. The Shan name Yawnghwe or 'highlands and valleys' differs markedly from the Burmese Nyaung Shwe or 'gold *bodhi* tree'. Sao Saimong, 'The Phaungtaw-Ū Festival', *Journal of the Siam Society* 68, no. 2 (July 1980): 76.

<sup>4</sup> Michael W. Charney, *A History of Modern Burma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 65.

<sup>5</sup> Seekins, *Historical Dictionary of Burma (Myanmar)*, 391. The title Maharaja was also sometimes used by the more powerful sawbwas, whose chief consort were known as Mahadevi. Susan Conway, *The Shan. Culture, Art and Crafts* (Bangkok: River Books, 2006), 18.

than twenty independent kingdoms, Shan-Burmese relations had long been contentious following their arrival from southern China around the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> Sao Sai Mong attributes the introduction of Buddhism to King Bayinnaung (r.1551–1581) during his rule over the Upper Burma region. However, Shan beliefs in a shared origin with Burmese rulers go back further in time to the Buddha's own Sakya clan in India.<sup>7</sup> As discussed below, the temple commemorates the Sawbwa's meritorious work in various ways, one of which is through this association with the Buddha, alluded to by the likeness that is drawn by Yadana Man Aung Buddha. The other is by the establishment of museums which reaffirm this association through their orientation towards the sacred centre of the temple.

The first of two museums at Yadana Man Aung Temple was established in 1947 under the patronage of Sao Maung's nephew, Sao Shwe Thaike (1896–1962), the last Sawbwa of Nyaung Shwe and first President of Burma (1948–1952).<sup>8</sup> Set up in the same year that Luce advocated for a Burma Provincial Museum and on the eve of Independence (1948), the museum was smaller than other modest-sized pagoda museums established around this time in Prome, Rangoon and Mandalay, with an overriding dedication to safekeeping.<sup>9</sup> The next phase of the museum development took place in 1958, a time of collective support for the temple amid great economic and political uncertainty. Burma's civil war following Independence subjected the Shan States to periods of martial law. The increasing authority of the Burmese military as they sought to control insurgency in the region, led to the loss of the sawbwas' authority in 1958–59.<sup>10</sup> The establishment of museums at Yadana Man Aung Temple along with the promotion of festivals presented a means of protecting Shan cultural identity during these tumultuous times.

The first section, *The Royal Temple Sanctuary*, seeks to identify historical and stylistic developments that gave rise to this unique form of the hollow temple and its auspicious qualities as a royal relic-temple. Architectural patterns of enclosure that reflect a history

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<sup>6</sup> Patrick Pranke and Donald M. Stadtner, 'Foundation Myths of Myanmar', in *Buddhist Art of Myanmar* (New York; New Haven: Asia Society Museum in association with Yale University Press, 2015), 15–16.

<sup>7</sup> The Mongmau and Hsipaw chronicles are cited. Sao Saimong, 'The Phaungtaw-Ü Festival', 74–75. Pranke and Stadtner attribute Shan chronicles to the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and assert that much is borrowed from Burmese legends. Pranke and Stadtner, 'Foundation Myths of Myanmar', 16.

<sup>8</sup> Mya Thaug, *A Short History of Yadana Man Aung Temple (in Myanmar)* (Nyaung Shwe Township, Southern Shan State, 2005), 10.

<sup>9</sup> Early pagoda museums include: Shwesandaw Pagoda's 'Colonial Era Prayer Hall and Museum' (1900) and later a museum building (1954) in Prome; Kyantha Ya Pagoda's Tooth Relic Museum (1945) in Mandalay; Shwebonpwint Pagoda Library and Museum (1948) in Prome; and Botahtaung Pagoda Museum (1953) and Alein Nga Sint Pagoda Museum (1954) in Rangoon.

<sup>10</sup> Charney, *A History of Modern Burma*, 77–78.

of conflict as well as cultural borrowing provided the context for the museums as protected spaces that augmented the sanctuary-like environment of the temple.

The second section, *Museums Within the Walls*, analyses the spatial qualities of the designated 'Museum' also known as the 'Outer Museum' (1947) situated within the south-eastern perimeter wall, and the so-called 'Inner Museum' embedded within the walls of the main temple (1958). Their distinctive features are considered relative to the notion of the 'museum effect' and its manifestations in pagoda museums with similar attributes such as the new 'staging hall' at neighbouring Phaung Daw Oo Temple. The Inner Museum in particular is discussed in terms of the embedded form that frames the ritual spaces of the main temple.

The third section, *Rituals of Visiting the Inner Museum*, analyses the way the spatial qualities of the Inner Museum in particular are experienced as part of the iconographic programme of the temple as a whole. Consideration is given to the liminal presence of the museum and how this affects patterns of visiting that intermittently diverge from as well as join the ritual circumambulatory routes around the temple. The conflation of ritual and social space along these routes raises questions of how the 'sacred' may be represented or experienced in the temple museum; a question that has been addressed both within Buddhist museums in Asia and among growing numbers of 'secular' Western museums with Buddhist collections.<sup>11</sup> Analysis of the eastern prayer hall and the use of light suggests there are well established patterns of representing and invoking the sacred in and around the museum. Liminal moments in the life of a devotee reveal further qualities of the Inner Museum as experienced within its vestibules or transit points between the prayer halls. Consideration is given to the effect of a momentary encounter with the Buddha's biography, both for the devotee and the sustenance of a heritage founded on Shan Buddhist practice.<sup>12</sup>

The fourth section, *Meritorious Keeping and the Trustee-Keeper* examines keeping practices in relation to the aims envisaged for the museums by trustee U Mya Thaug and how these have shaped his engagement with objects in the Inner Museum. Modes of display that express the quality of material abundance and the shrine are analysed in

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<sup>11</sup> Saloni Mathur and Kavita Singh, eds., *No Touching, No Spitting, No Praying: The Museum in South Asia*, Visual & Media Histories (New Delhi: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2015), 207.

Tythacott, 'Curating the Sacred: Exhibiting Buddhism at the World Museum Liverpool', 127–28. Clark, 'Exhibiting the Exotic, Simulating the Sacred: Tibetan Shrines at British and American Museums', 4, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Nicola Tannenbaum, *Who Can Compete Against the World? Power-Protection and Buddhism in Shan Worldview* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Association for Asian Studies, 1995), 120.



comparison with those of the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum prior to renovation to consider how the temple museum manifests other forms of the 'museum effect'.

The fifth section, *Objects as Auspicious 'Contact Points'*, analyses moments of sensory engagement with historically important objects in the Inner Museum through the work of U Mya Thaug and the notion of objects as 'contact points' as conceived by Jeffrey Feldman.<sup>13</sup> It considers the material qualities of objects closely associated with royalty and the temple's patrons, and how meanings can be drawn from the embodied knowledge of the trustee and his visitors through sensory contact with these materials. It further analyses the active use of ritual objects in the Thadingyut festival when the town hosts the visit of the Phaung Daw Oo Buddhas, to contrast fluid keeping practices with the more formalised museum at the Shwedagon Pagoda.

## The Royal Temple Sanctuary

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century a uniquely eclectic architecture that combined Shan, Burmese and European elements had come to be associated with royal temples and monasteries in Upper Burma and the Shan States. The Yadana Man Aung Temple was, like other manifestations of Shan culture, an expression of a unique Tai cultural identity that emerged through a history of migration, trade and tributary relations with the Burmese court.<sup>14</sup>

One of the striking aspects of the Yadana Man Aung Temple is the thickness of its high outer walls with fortress-like crenellations that allude to a history of conflict and symbiotic relations with the Burmese court in Mandalay. Built in 1866 by the hereditary ruler, the Sawbwa of Nyaung Shwe Sao Maung (1848–1926), the pagoda walls became the means for the public display of seized arms each of which carried a tiered crown. According to a pagoda trustee's notes, 1,000 small umbrella finials around the outer walls and tiered levels of the main tower are said to have been made using guns

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<sup>13</sup> Jeffrey David Feldman, 'Contact Points: Museums and the Lost Body Problem', in *Sensible Objects. Colonialism, Museums, and Material Culture* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2006), 245–67.

<sup>14</sup> The Tai ('Shan' was the name given to them by the Burmese), had migrated from southern China into mountainous border regions of northern Thailand, Laos and Burma by the 11<sup>th</sup> century if not earlier, where they practiced wet-rice cultivation and established groups of villages known as *muong* that were governed by rulers known as *saopha*. For a recent article on the Shan art see: Conan Cheong, 'The Art of Shan State' (Singapore: Asian Civilisations Museum, 2016), 74–86. Some say the Shan have been present for over 2,000 years, see Sai Aung Tun, 'Shan-Myanmar Relations as Found in the Hsipaw Chronicle', in *Texts and Contexts in Southeast Asia* (Yangon: Universities Historical Research Department, Yangon University, 2001), 3, <http://shanyoma.org/index.php/other/99-history-shan/207-shan-myanmar-relations-as-found-in-the-hsipaw-chronicle>.

obtained in 1862 from Sao On the chief of Indein, after Intha fighters had fought against Nyaung Shwe.<sup>15</sup>



Figure 2. Western gate with crown finials, Yadana Man Aung Temple, Nyaung Shwe, 25 February 2016. Photograph: Heidi Tan.

The symbolic origins of the hti-daw, that of a victorious king's crown being placed on the spire of a stupa in Mon and Bamar culture, had a long history in this region.<sup>16</sup> In this case, the symbolic value of these finials also points to the special relationship between Sao Maung and the Burmese court in Mandalay, as the conflict was resolved with the help of 1,000 soldiers sent by King Mindon (r.1853–78).<sup>17</sup> A few guns, small cannons and a couple of the crowns still remain on display within the temple (fig. 2).

Surrounded by roads, the stark white-tiled walls keep safe the sacred space with its unusual octagonal stepped stupa, a form that may have Mon origins.<sup>18</sup> Installed within its gilded niches and embedded on its surfaces are multiple images of the Buddha in the round as well as in relief. This sense of multiplicity is prefaced by hundreds of niches in the outer wall which allow for candle offerings during the Thadingyut festival. From within the temple's compound numerous doorways in the outer wall lead into cloister-like spaces that are used for a variety of purposes including shrines, a designated museum, trustees' offices and living quarters, and storage.

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<sup>15</sup> San Ya, 'Nyaung Shwe Yadana Man Aung Temple. A Brief History [in Myanmar]', trans. Yin May Thawe, Undated, 3. See Appendix 2 and 2.1 for notes made by trustees including Yin May Thawe's grandfather U Tun Yee who was vice secretary of the pagoda treasury in 1969. Yin May Thawe, interview with the author, 15 August 2016.

<sup>16</sup> The practice is thought to originate in the 14<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> century conflicts between Mon and Bamar in the regions of Rakhine and present-day Thailand. Elizabeth Moore, 'Myanmar Religious Practice and Cultural Heritage', *The Journal of Sophia Asian Studies* No. 18 (2000): 286.

<sup>17</sup> San Ya, 'Nyaung Shwe Yadana Man Aung Temple. A Brief History [in Myanmar]', 3.

<sup>18</sup> For other unusual octagonal pagodas see Khin Maung Nyunt, *Sule Pagoda. The Heart of Yangon* (Yangon: Sule Pagoda Trustees, 2000), 68–70.

The sanctuary-like architecture with its embedded spoils of war further reflected the Sawbwa's close affiliations with Burmese royalty through the presence of royal relics enshrined at the centre of the temple. These included Buddha's relics as well as King Mindon's sword inlaid with rubies, an ancestral ruby and gold Buddha footprints.<sup>19</sup> The Sawbwa's ability to obtain and 'actualise' the Buddha's relics, that is materialise the Buddha's presence, demonstrated his power as temple patron and 'righteous political ruler' or *dhammarāja*, a role that mirrored royal power with the compassion of the Buddha.<sup>20</sup> The role is prescribed in canonical texts as one of two 'wheels of dhamma'; the first being the Buddha's First Sermon, the other the path of the *dhammarāja*.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, his ability to secure relics from the Burmese ruler imbued the temple with even more auspiciousness as King Mindon was revered for his numerous meritorious works, notably his patronage of the Fifth Buddhist Council in 1871 in which the canonical texts were revised and inscribed on 729 marble slabs at the Kuthodaw Pagoda in Mandalay.<sup>22</sup> Eventually Sawbwa Sao Maung's own ashes were enshrined with those of his chief consort Mahadevi Sit Nanyar in a pair of stupas at the north-west corner of the pagoda's compound.<sup>23</sup>

### Eclectic Architecture

Like other Shan chiefs Sao Maung had close connections with the Burmese court in Mandalay as he had been adopted at the age of five by King Mindon following his father's assassination.<sup>24</sup> He was appointed as Sawbwa by King Mindon in 1864 but in 1885 went to Mandalay to recover from injuries incurred in a battle and his half-brother Sao On took over. After the latter's death, Sao Maung was reinstated by the British in 1897 and ruled until 1926.<sup>25</sup> Shan and Burmese cultural borrowings were facilitated through intermarriage and the mentoring of Shan children in the ways of the court; part of a long-established tradition of Shan allegiance that had been introduced by the court of Inwa (Ava) in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In return for paying taxes and offering tribute and voluntary services Shan chiefs received regalia, titles and other forms of legitimation of

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<sup>19</sup> U Mya Thaug, interview with the author, 25 February and 14 August 2016. San Ya, 'Nyaung Shwe Yadana Man Aung Temple. A Brief History [in Myanmar]', 1. Nang Lao Hom, 'History of Yadana Man Aung Pagoda (in Myanmar)' (Unpublished, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> Donald K. Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*, 2nd ed., SUNY Series in Religious Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 95.

<sup>21</sup> Swearer, 95.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, *Religion and Politics in Burma*, 26.

<sup>23</sup> Nang Lao Hom, 'History of Yadana Man Aung Pagoda (in Myanmar)'.

<sup>24</sup> George Scott C. and J.P. Hardiman, *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States*, vol. Part II. Volume III (Rangoon: Superintendent, Government Printing, Burma, 1901), 383.

<sup>25</sup> Sao Sanda Simms, *Great Lords of the Sky: Burma's Shan Aristocracy* (Asian Highlands Perspectives 48, 2017), 296–97.

their rule.<sup>26</sup> Proximity to the court resulted in Sao Maung's influence and together with the senior minister Kinwun Mingyi (1822–1908) and a committee of monks, they undertook to restore royal shrines especially those around Mandalay Hill in the wake of King Thibaw's (r. 1878–1885) exile in 1885.<sup>27</sup>

As Donald Stadtner points out, cultural borrowings probably travelled in both directions. For example, features at royal temples such as the new octagonal tower of the Kyauktawgyi Pagoda in Mandalay built by King Mindon, but not finished until perhaps the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, is thought to have been inspired by the octagonal stepped tower at Yadana Man Aung Temple.<sup>28</sup> According to trustees' records the tower was originally conical but was built over with the octagonal form around 1912 following an earthquake.<sup>29</sup> This localised use of the octagon probably had much earlier Mon origins elsewhere in the country and according to trustees was said to emulate the crowns of ancient rulers.<sup>30</sup> Records list amongst the temple's attributes the multiple figures that reside around the tower: there are in total 366 niches with 304 Buddha images, and 32 figures of arhats (S) or *yahanda* (M)<sup>31</sup> Eight *yahanda* including the Buddha's disciples and son Yahula are placed at the corners of the prayer halls within the temple and are said to have miraculous powers.<sup>32</sup> This multiplicity of images was also observed within shrines and on the exterior of at least one temple in Kyaing Tong in eastern Shan State.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Sai Aung Tun, *History of the Shan State. From Its Origins to 1962*. (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2009), 111.

<sup>27</sup> The committee had to seek permission from Queen Victoria in 1890 to undertake this work, as the area around Mandalay Hill had become a British military cantonment. Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 287, 294, 307.

<sup>28</sup> Stadtner, 294.

<sup>29</sup> San Ya, 'Nyaung Shwe Yadana Man Aung Temple. A Brief History [in Myanmar]', 2.

<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth Moore, personal communication, 29 July 2018. See Tun Yee, 'What We Can Learn about Yadana Man Aung Pagoda [in Myanmar]', trans. Yin May Thawe, 19 November 1969, 2.

<sup>31</sup> San Ya, 'Nyaung Shwe Yadana Man Aung Temple. A Brief History [in Myanmar]', 2–3. See Appendix 2.1.

<sup>32</sup> Tun Yee, 'What We Can Learn about Yadana Man Aung Pagoda [in Myanmar]', 2. See Appendix 2.

<sup>33</sup> The proliferation of Buddha images within and around the main shrines was notable at monasteries and temples in Kyaing Tong. See Appendix 1. Thaug Hmu Kan Kyaung (B.46), Wat In (B.48) and Wat Jong Kam (B.49) in particular which has multiple images in niches on the exterior of its seven-tiered stupa. However, these temples are part of the Tai Khun religious tradition which Karlsson notes is distinctively different from Shan and Burmese Buddhism. Klemens Karlsson, 'Material Religion and Ethnic Identity: Buddhist Visual Culture and the Burmanization of the Eastern Shan State', in *The Spirit of Things. Materiality and Religious Diversity in Southeast Asia*, Studies on Southeast Asia 58 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 2012), 4.



Figure 2.1. Yadana Man Aung Pagoda, Nyaung Shwe (left), 26 February 2016. Mahamuni Pagoda, Mandalay (right), 24 July 2015. Photographs: Heidi Tan.

European influence continued into the late 19<sup>th</sup> century following the engagements made by the Kinwun Mingyi in Europe in 1872.<sup>34</sup> Sao Maung was involved in the restoration of the Mahamuni Pagoda after 1884 in which the engineer Hoyne Fox included Italian style arches and columns for a new arcade of prayer halls (fig.2.1).<sup>35</sup> The Sawbwa's temple is smaller in scale with a fortified appearance. Instead of an arcade that opens onto the courtyard, the arched doorways were enclosed to form windows and the arch motif is repeated in the multiple niches around the octagonal tower.<sup>36</sup>

A photograph published in the memoirs of Sao Sanda, daughter of Sao Shwe Thaike illustrates the enclosed appearance of the arcade with windows shuttered on the exterior.<sup>37</sup> The photo was taken perhaps a decade or so before major renovations and displays were undertaken in 1957.<sup>38</sup> She recalls visiting at this time during Thingyan or Buddhist New Year held in April, when the family would enter the east entryway and circumambulate through the wide passages of the temple. Her overriding memories were of making offerings and prayers to the Buddha in the eastern hall (fig.2.2, c.1), a vestibule with 'provincial style' mural paintings (fig.2.2, b4), and paying respects at the ancestral tombs of Sawbwa Sao Maung and Mahadevi before leaving to visit the town's monasteries (fig.2.2, e).<sup>39</sup> The vestibules or interstices between the prayer halls provide additional keeping places for the Inner Museum as discussed below (see *The Inner Museum*).

<sup>34</sup> Shway Yoe, *The Burman*, 132–33.

<sup>35</sup> Built by King Bodawpaya (r.1872-1819) in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the pagoda had been destroyed by fire in 1884. Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 262.

<sup>36</sup> The nearby monastery of Shwe Yan Pyay built in 1888 by Sawbwa Sao On (r.1886-1897) also has blind arches and columns rendered in relief along the outer walls of the stupa enclosure. Stadtner, 309.

<sup>37</sup> Sao Sanda, *The Moon Princess. Memories of the Shan States* (Bangkok; London: River Books, 2008), 64.

<sup>38</sup> Sao Sanda, personal communication, 16 February 2018.

<sup>39</sup> Sao Sanda, *The Moon Princess*, 65–67.

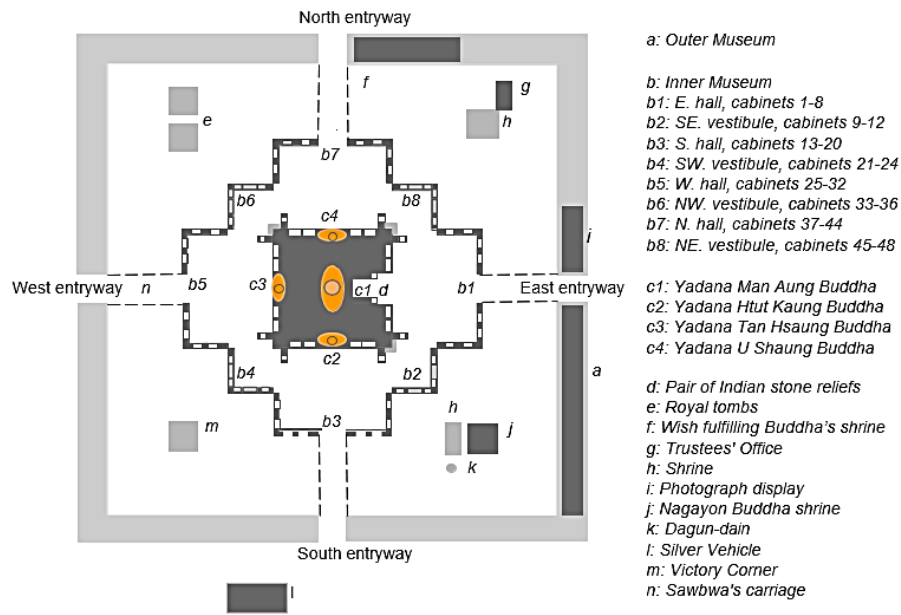


Figure 2.2. Plan of Yadana Man Aung Temple (not to scale) © Heidi Tan.

According to trustee U Mya Thaung the core of the temple sits at the intersection of covered passageways named after precious materials. The eastern entrance was referred to as the Ruby Stairway and was previously painted with red cinnabar or *hinthabada* (M), the southern entrance was gilded and hence called the Golden Stairway, the western entrance was the Silver Stairway and the northern entrance the Emerald Stairway (fig.2.2).<sup>40</sup>

### Museums Within the Walls

As discussed in Chapter One, the symbolic architectural framing or the iconographic programme of the pagoda museum shapes the displays and rituals of visiting. The innovative eclectic architectural style of Yadana Man Aung Temple and its status as a royal relic temple or dat-daw zedi inspired donations that were eventually displayed permanently within two museums; one within its outer perimeter wall and one within the walls of the main temple. The first, a cloister-like hall adjacent to the eastern entrance, is known as the 'Outer Museum' (fig.2.2, a). The second, a series of cabinets set into the walls of the prayer halls and vestibules that surround the core of the temple, is

<sup>40</sup> The plan in figure 2.2 is based on fieldwork observations and unpublished notes on the temple. Mya Thaung, 'History and Knowledge of Yadana Man Aung Temple (in Myanmar)', Undated.

known as the 'Inner Museum' and lines the circumambulatory route within the temple (fig.2.2, b). Situated within thresholds that demarcate outer and inner spaces of the temple, the museums are a part of the iconographic programme that frames the movement of devotees and their ritual pathways.

### The 'Outer Museum'

Like the museum at the Shwedagon Pagoda the space is identified by a bilingual sign: 'Pya-daik, Museum' (fig.2.2, a). According to trustee U Mya Thaug the museum was established in 1947 under Sao Shwe Thaik.<sup>41</sup> He refers to it as the *Apyin Pya-daik* or 'Outer Museum'.<sup>42</sup> The clutter of daily life creates an informal atmosphere around the eastern gateway. A shoe rack quickly fills up on busy days with shoes and slippers that overflow outside the doorway to the museum, while earthenware drinking-water pots opposite provide a welcome relief on hot days (fig.2.3, left). The gateway also doubles as a park for staff motorbikes and bicycles. Unlike the Shwedagon Pagoda, there is no foreign tourists' entrance fee to Yadana Man Aung Temple or its museum, although donation boxes remain a salient feature as found at other pagodas and novel ways of attracting donations are part of the museum experience.



Figure 2.3. Museum entrance with shoe rack and water pots (left). Wish fulfilling carousel (right), 16 August 2016. Photographs: Heidi Tan.

There is an air of leisurely spectacle in the cumbersome wish fulfilling carousel, a contraption often found in pagodas where visitors make wishes as they cast coins into

<sup>41</sup> U Mya Thaug, trustee, interviews with the author, 25 February 2016 and 14 August 2016. Lonely Planet describes it as a "...museum of treasures amassed by the monks over the centuries, including carvings, lacquerware and dance costumes." Lonely Planet, "Yadana Man Aung Paya in Nyaung Shwe, Myanmar (Burma)," Lonely Planet, accessed May 27, 2017, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/myanmar-burma/Nyaung-Shwe/attractions/yadana-man-aung-paya/a/poi-sig/1368772/1335729>.

<sup>42</sup> Mya Thaug, *A Short History of Yadana Man Aung Temple (in Myanmar)*, 10.

silver bowls mounted on a turntable (fig.2.3, right). This particular *sutaungpyi sekya* or 'wish fulfilling carousel' is apparently popular during festivals and with children who wish for good luck in their examinations, although according to U Mya Thaung the contraption attracts few donations these days and these are used to pay workers' wages, rather than to procure more gold leaf or other offerings for the temple.<sup>43</sup> Larger pagodas often house carousels and mechanical devices for soliciting donations in separate buildings.<sup>44</sup> A painting depicting the Buddha's First Sermon with his disciples on the rear wall is signed by the artist Kan Lwun (1915–1985) and dated 1969. This prefaces several of his works installed elsewhere around the temple and was reinstalled in an adjacent shrine during the Thadingyut festival of 2017 (fig.2.3, right).<sup>45</sup>

Just next to the carousel an old canon sits amidst baskets of paper offerings, while a damaged replica of the Alodawpyi Buddha from Bagan is propped on the ledge above. The prevalence of damaged images at pagodas suggests they are taken there in order to avoid the bad karma associated with other means of rehousing them.<sup>46</sup>

Koanantakool observed similar practices in Thailand where monasteries provided 'a zone of neutralization' for bringing not only damaged Buddha images but any other objects with supernatural power that would be a risk for donors to keep at home.<sup>47</sup>

The museum is a long cave-like room with sloping corrugated roof. Along the rear wall, brightly painted and gilded wooden figures that illustrate the Buddha's life stories are kept within a fenced enclosure illuminated by arches that remain open to the courtyard outside (fig.2.4). The Outer Museum is a unique adaptation of the peripheral walled enclosure which bears similarities to early 20<sup>th</sup> century sites such as the Pagan Museum and Maung Di Pagoda's storage facility, as well as other informal spaces with similar methods of safekeeping.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> U Mya Thaung, 14 August 2016.

<sup>44</sup> A separate pavilion decorated with elaborately carved wood panels known as the Hall of the Carousel operated at the Shwedagon Pagoda during the 1990s. Tun Aung Chain and Thein Hlaing, *Shwedagon*, 67.

<sup>45</sup> Other paintings hung permanently along the upper sections of entryways include a series that are dated to 1959 with illegible signature. These works have none of the vibrancy of colour or attention to detail found in Kan Lwun's works and may reflect a decline in the Sawbwa's patronage at this time. Andrew Ranard, *Burmese Painting. A Linear and Lateral History* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2009), 178–79, 349.

<sup>46</sup> Moe Aung Lwin, personal communication, 29 August 2015.

<sup>47</sup> Paritta Chalermpong Koanantakool, 'Contextualising Objects in Monastery Museums in Thailand', 161.

<sup>48</sup> Other sites include Kyaikhtisaung Pagoda and Monastery, Kyundaw Zedi and Monastery, and Maung Di Pagoda. See Appendix 1, B.17, B.19, B.29.





Figure 2.4 Outer Museum with display of painted wood and plaster figures (left), Dīpaṃkara Buddha with Thumeda (right), 16 August 2016. Photographs: Heidi Tan.

U Mya Thaug's publication lists several of the figures including the prostrate Thumeda, and the Four Sights (age, sickness, death and renunciation) that the young Prince Siddhartha encountered when he left the palace.<sup>49</sup> The story of Thumeda the Buddha-to-be, is one of the earliest of the Buddha's previous life stories where in an extreme act of generosity he lays down over potholes in the road to provide a bridge for Dīpaṃkara Buddha to walk over (fig.2.4, right).<sup>50</sup> Three of the 'Four Great Sights' encountered on Siddhartha's trip out of the palace appear in the form of the old man, the sick man and the corpse (fig.2.5, left). Yin May Thawe recalled how fear of the corpse provoked excitement among her siblings in anticipation of visits to the temple during their childhood in the 1980s.<sup>51</sup> A group of local characters includes two who wear longyis pulled up to reveal tattooed thighs, a traditional form of bodily adornment for men that Shan and other ethnic communities of this region still wear with pride (fig. 2.5, right).<sup>52</sup> These evocative almost life-sized reminders of the lessons of impermanence are rarely encountered at temples and when they are, they remain difficult to view in situ. For example, smaller carved and painted wood figures can still be found perched high up within the rafters of the eastern shrine at the Shwezigon Pagoda in Bagan.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Mya Thaug, *A Short History of Yadana Man Aung Temple (in Myanmar)*, 10.

<sup>50</sup> Crosby, *Theravada Buddhism*, 27.

<sup>51</sup> Yin May Thawe, interview with the author, 29 September 2017.

<sup>52</sup> Fine examples occasionally appear in overseas museums such as the one exhibited by the British Museum in 2014 which was dated to the late 1800s. Heidi Tan, 'Pilgrims, Healers, and Wizards: Buddhism and Religious Practices in Burma and Thailand - Exhibition Review, Buddhistdoor', accessed 26 July 2016, <http://www.buddhistdoor.net/features/pilgrims-healers-and-wizards-buddhism-and-religious-practices-in-burma-and-thailand>.

<sup>53</sup> The group typically includes a fourth figure of an ascetic. Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 224.



Figure 2.5. The old and sick man (left), local figure with tattoos (right), 16 August 2016. Photographs: Heidi Tan.

According to U Mya Thaug the figures were donated not long after the temple was built in 1866, although they have probably been moved around and restored many times. In the mid-1990s they were described as displayed in glass cases in a shrine.<sup>54</sup> However, Yin May Thawe recalled that they were displayed in the museum during the 1980s, while her father recollected a display in the south-eastern vestibule within the temple, perhaps during a period of renovation sometime after 2000.<sup>55</sup>

However, unlike the visual appeal of the abundant and eclectic displays at the Shwedagon Pagoda, it remains difficult to attribute the same kind of ‘visual interest’ to the group, meaning to say that there was little evidence of an intention to arrange the figures in a way that would impart meaning to a particular figure or groups of figures as observed in displays within the Inner Museum (see *Framing the Prayer Halls, Material Abundance, Displaying the Buddha’s Gifts*). Instead, the dozen or so sculptures appeared to have been temporarily stored here after the last renovation with large hand-painted labels that identified stories associated with the characters casually deposited on a ledge behind.

<sup>54</sup> U Mya Thaug, interview with the author, 14 August 2016. Joe Cummings, *Myanmar (Burma). A Lonely Planet Travel Survival Kit*, 6th ed., Lonely Planet Travel Survival Kit (Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia; Chiswick, London: Lonely Planet Publications, 1996), 313.

<sup>55</sup> Neither recalled their being displayed within glass cases. Yin May Thawe and U Soe Hla, 29 September 2017.

The siting of the museum near to the trustee's office for better security, in this case next to the eastern entryway, is reminiscent of the earliest keeping spaces at the southern entrance to the Shwedagon Pagoda. While the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum ultimately relied on a storeroom to separate the collection and create more selective displays, the Outer Museum like most small pagoda museums did not have a sufficiently large collection or the need to make such distinctions. In this respect it performed like its new counterpart that was built at neighbouring Phaung Daw Oo Temple during 2016. This variant on the temple museum – the Treasure Staging Hall and Stone Inscription Building – evoked the 'san kyaung' or 'staging hall' where the Phaung Daw Oo Buddhas stayed temporarily during Thadingyut Festival in Nyaung Shwe.<sup>56</sup> Established to house a newly donated inscription that commemorated the rebuilding of the temple (1951–1957), trustees had nonetheless seized the opportunity to re-house important ritual furnishings that had lain in less secure storage. The new museum was sufficiently spacious to house the large inscription surrounded by an enclosure of reinforced steel bars and glass in which lacquered altars, tiered plinths, chests, and ritual utensils, including the gilded 'thrones' to house the Phaung Daw Oo Buddhas were placed on the floor.<sup>57</sup>

The Outer Museum remained a liminal space where few were observed to visit even during the busy Thadingyut festival. However, the small group of objects, the museum's multiple openings onto the courtyard, and easy access unconstrained by protocols, muted the effect of an inner world and the heterotopic quality observed at the museum at the Shwedagon Pagoda. Instead, the images related to the Buddha's life stories connected them with a repertoire of murals situated along the entryways and within the temple's vestibules, where in liminal moments devotees gained insights into the relevance of the stories for their own lives (see *Liminal Moments in the Vestibules*).

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<sup>56</sup> Fieldwork undertaken with interpreter U Taw Aung Myat, 14 August 2016. François Robinne, 'The Monastic Unity. A Contemporary Burmese Artefact?', in *The Buddhist Monastery: A Cross-Cultural Survey*, Études Thématiques 12 (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2003), 84, [https://www.academia.edu/14240203/Monastic\\_unity\\_in\\_Burma?auto=download](https://www.academia.edu/14240203/Monastic_unity_in_Burma?auto=download).

<sup>57</sup> U Htun Aung, interview with the author, 14 August 2016. Total cost of the building by August was 1.1million Myanmar kyats, about 10,000 US dollars. The opening of the building was expected to take place during early October 2016.

## The ‘Inner Museum’

In contrast to the discrete space of the museum within the outer walls, a second space is referred to by U Mya Thaung as the *Atwin Pya-daik* or ‘Inner Museum’, a collection of 48 framed display niches embedded within the walls of the main temple. The construction of elaborate teak-frames give them the appearance of cabinets, many of which still bear hand-painted donor credits dated to 1958, the year of the museum’s installation.<sup>58</sup> A trustee committee had been established in 1953<sup>59</sup> presumably to undertake the project which according to U Mya Thaung received the largest support from U Htun Tin, relative of Sao Shwe Thaike.<sup>60</sup> Daw Myint Myint Thein recalls her family’s donation of a single cabinet in the north-eastern vestibule which was made in honour of her grandparents and parents whose names are mentioned alongside her own and her brother’s.<sup>61</sup>

The museum starts along the northern side of the eastern prayer hall where cabinets are numbered in a clockwise sequence as observed at the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum (fig.2.2, b). The deep-set cabinets have light-emitting windows at the rear protected by a double layer of grills inside and out. The depth of the cabinets results in intricate displays that draw the visitor in for closer inspection. Yet the glare of the sunlight pouring in from behind the displays also makes them difficult to view, like the glare of the ventilated windows in the cave-temples or *gu-hpaya* (M) at Bagan (fig. 2.6). Unlike the Shwedagon Pagoda, the temple is not remotely situated – the sounds of daily life and passing traffic permeate its precincts throughout the day. However, the encapsulating effect of the thick fortress-like walls brings a similar heterotopic effect to bear on the Inner Museum as discussed in the previous chapter.

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<sup>58</sup> U Mya Thaung, interview with the author, 25 February 2017. This is also mentioned in trustees’ records of 1969.

<sup>59</sup> San Ya, ‘Nyaung Shwe Yadana Man Aung Temple. A Brief History [in Myanmar]’, 3.

<sup>60</sup> Sao Sanda clarified that he was Sao Shwe Thaike’s brother-in-law, who had married the younger sister of his wife Sao Nang Yi, the Mahadevi of Yawnghwe. Personal communication, 16 February 2018.

<sup>61</sup> Donations are made when support is needed by the temple or on special occasions such as a family member’s birthday or an ancestor’s death anniversary. Daw Myint Myint Thein, interview with the author, 15 August 2016.



Figure 2.6. Inner Museum cabinets set into the walls of prayer halls (left). South-eastern vestibule with mural above cabinet and portrait of Sao Maung on the inner wall (right). 16 August 2016. Photographs: Heidi Tan.

Comparative examples of the hollow temple that were subsequently built have produced varying and at time uncomfortable results. In 1953 the Botahtaung Pagoda was rebuilt under the patronage of Prime Minister U Nu (1948–1956, 1957–1958, 1960–1962). Together with the Kaba Aye Pagoda (1952) these hollow stupas enabled visitors to view enshrined relics.<sup>62</sup> Re-built in 1953, the Botahtaung Pagoda enshrines a single hair relic and two bone fragments at the centre of an octagonally-shaped interior. Seven hundred objects recovered from the original underground relic chamber that had been exposed by Allied bombing in 1943 were re-installed in display cases that were set within the surrounding walls and protected with steel gates. The windowless temple is cave-like and popular with meditators who face the centre with backs turned to the displays much as they do at Yadana Man Aung Temple.<sup>63</sup>

A stark contrast is the monumental Maha Wizaya Pagoda built in 1980 next to the Shwedagon Pagoda by General Ne Win (1962-1988) and promoted by the then Ministry of Home and Religious Affairs as a symbol of national unity and peace.<sup>64</sup> It is also thought that the project was motivated by the need to practice *yadeya*, the prescribed rituals that seek protection and a reversal of bad karma, through magic rituals and worship of the local spirits or *nats*.<sup>65</sup> However, unlike the Inner Museum, the displays focus only on Buddha images which are installed in a separate vestibule surrounding the high-domed prayer hall with enshrined relics. Visitors are channelled

<sup>62</sup> Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 62, 65, 67, 86, 112.

<sup>63</sup> See Appendix 1, A.2.

<sup>64</sup> Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*, 99.

<sup>65</sup> Bruce Matthews, 'The Present Fortune of Tradition-Bound Authoritarianism in Myanmar', *Pacific Affairs* 71, no. 1 (1998): 19–20, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2760820>.

around this outer circumambulatory pathway past extensive displays of Buddha images (fig. 2.7).



Figure 2.7. Displays within the outer wall of vestibule (left); 'Yakhine' display (right), Maha Wizaya Pagoda, Yangon, 7 February 2016. Photographs: Heidi Tan.

Set against dioramic landscapes the displays collectively re-imagined the Theravāda Buddhist state, where regional differences were subsumed within collective practices of merit-making. For example, Chin, Kachin, Shan, Kayin and Rakhine regions were merged within a montage of famous pagodas and freshly gilded Buddha images from different regions (fig.2.7, right). This prescribed vision of unity is underscored by a history of oppression that the Shan State and other regions were subjected to particularly under military rule. The Shan State's right to secession from Burma was seen as a threat to national unity. In November 1962 the coup that had brought military rule under Ne Win also resulted in the brutal arrest of Sao Shwe Thaik, who reportedly died in prison together with other Shan leaders.<sup>66</sup>

The spatial qualities of the Inner Museum differ considerably from either of these examples. It is perceptibly brighter than the Botahtaung Pagoda's displays, it sits as part of the wide interconnected ritual spaces that encourage different kinds of activities and it is more human in scale than the Maha Wizaya's displays. Notably, the Inner Museum supports an informal ambience that does not prescribe how visitors should engage with its exhibits. Unlike the negative connotations of the pagoda built to right bad karma, the Inner Museum draws on the auspiciousness of the eastern prayer hall (see *Materialising Light in the Eastern Prayer Hall*). The window-like cabinets, around a square metre each, encourage intimate viewing with at most two or three visitors gathered around at any time. The collection of around 450 objects, just over half the size of the Botahtaung's, reflects daily lives, historical relationships with the court.

<sup>66</sup> Sao Sanda, *The Moon Princess*, 272.

Lacquer Buddha images in various states of repair were also displayed in the cabinets prior to 2006, but their accumulating numbers eventually led to dedicated displays of images along the opposite walls that demarcate the central core (see fig.2.22, right). This separation gave greater prominence to the many other kinds of gifts that have been made by donors and the sense of inclusivity that was seen in the abundant and eclectic displays at the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum before renovation. These range from the mundane (crockery, clocks and kerosene lamps), to the educational (plastic anatomy dolls, unusual figurines in different forms of ethnic dress, sawfish beaks), to traditional arts (lacquer and silver wares, wood and stone carvings), important heirlooms (King Mindon's manuscripts) and sacred objects (relics, small Buddha images, model stupas) (see *Displaying the Buddha's Gifts*).<sup>67</sup>

Unlike the Maha Wizaya's displays, the Inner Museum sits within view of the prayer halls and shrines, and is therefore connected visually and conceptually with the image of the Buddha. This connection establishes the relationship between donors, their gifts and the Buddha's field of merit, in which the gifts demonstrate both the means to the cultivation of merit and its end result. The gifts augment the evidence of the Buddha's presence or the 'transcendent core' that Chris Arthur alluded to as so elusive within representations of the sacred in museums in the west.<sup>68</sup> In the context of this auspicious temple, the 'museum effect' is also underpinned by these manifestations of the numinous as examined below (see *Rituals of Visiting the Inner Museum*).

This conflation of temple and museum has been conceived in terms of a sacred-secular distinction by Saloni Mathur and Kavita Singh. They identified the Maitreya Project's museum in Kushinagar in India as a site for the 'desecularised' museum through its incorporation within the construction of the body of the Buddha; a 500-foot figure of Maitreya the future Buddha, with 17 storeys that would include shrines, prayer halls, meditation rooms. Gifts include an important 'blood-relic' of the Buddha from the Meiktila Relic Museum in Myanmar.<sup>69</sup> This gift, they suggest, signals an inversion of the relationship between shrine and museum, where the conventional flow of objects to

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<sup>67</sup> U Mya Thauung notes there are showcases in all but one of the corner vestibules where homage can be paid to many kinds of ancient Buddha images. Mya Thauung, *A Short History of Yadana Man Aung Temple (in Myanmar)*, 11.

<sup>68</sup> Arthur, 'Exhibiting the Sacred', 25.

<sup>69</sup> Relics have been given as gifts in the past; the Bandula Monastery in Mrauk-U gifted one to the Buddha's Tooth Relic Temple and Museum which opened in 2008 in Singapore. Alvin Chua, 'Buddha Tooth Relic Temple and Museum', Singapore Infopedia. An electronic encyclopedia on Singapore's history, culture, people and events, 2018, [http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP\\_1668\\_2010-05-25.html](http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_1668_2010-05-25.html). McDaniel, *Architects of Buddhist Leisure: Socially Disengaged Buddhism in Asia's Museums, Monuments and Amusement Parks*, 136–38.

museums meant their being taken out of public circulation. In this case the museum will become the 'holding house' for sacred objects until they are ready to be returned to the shrine.<sup>70</sup> This idea of the museum as a temporary keeping space for objects until required for ritual use had yet to be tested by the Maitreya Project. However, visitors to the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum demonstrated that despite protocols, objects remained active in the sense that visitors engaged ritually with them. At the Inner Museum objects were more complicit in the rituals that took place immediately within the proximity of the prayer halls. They were also taken out intermittently for use, as discussed below.

The analogy of the Maitreya Project presents a radical example of the museum, conceived as secular in this case, yet recontextualised at the heart of the sacred space. The Inner Museum sits close to this example of the museum-in-the-Buddha, where closer proximity to the sacred centre distinguishes it from the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum. However, the temple museum's operations are motivated by conditions of merit-making, in which case it is arguable that a concept of the museum as secular never existed in the first place and hence it cannot be thought of as 'desecularised'. In the Theravāda Buddhist tradition a conflation of the secular and sacred, or worldly and otherworldly is seen in the royal patron's relationship with the Buddha which is constituted as a conflation of powers. As Donald Swearer observes, royal power represents the mundane (*lokiya*) and the ascetic's compassion the transmundane (*lokkutara*). However, the two are in effect 'mirror images or two sides of the same coin'.<sup>71</sup> In the temple this is seen in the enshrinement of auspicious relics from both the Buddha and the King within the Buddha that resides in the central shrine. The Inner Museum acknowledges both with a shrine to the Buddha's relics and a commemorative display of King Mindon's manuscripts on each side of the eastern hall. More revealing are the responses from devotees whose rituals of visiting are not only focussed on formal religious rituals, but include mundane activities. Etiquette requires dress and behaviour to be respectful while in the abode of the Buddha, yet this does not preclude informal activities and responses to the museum's displays.

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<sup>70</sup> Mathur and Singh, 'Reincarnations of the Museum. The Museum in an Age of Religious Revivalism', 205–7.

<sup>71</sup> Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*, 95.



## Rituals of Visiting the Inner Museum

Although the cardinal entrances to the temple enabled visitors to enter the Inner Museum at any of the four prayer halls, convention as noted by informant Naing Soe in the previous chapter was to pay respects at the main shrine on arrival. In doing so, a devotee's path took the central axis of the hall as its starting point, framed on either side by the Inner Museum. Rather than a 'holding house' for temporarily keeping objects as proposed by Mathur and Singh, the temple museum's gifts remain on view as offerings that actively endorse the Buddha's field of merit. The displays purposefully frame the space in which this field is experienced. This was particularly evident in the eastern prayer hall which like the inner platform at the Shwedagon Pagoda was imbued with light of various kinds and attracted the most intense ritual activity.

According to trustee U Mya Thaug, many believe in the wish fulfilling powers of Yadana Man Aung or Victorious Jewel Buddha that sits deep within the eastern shrine (fig.2.2, c1).<sup>72</sup> While devotees may choose to use any entrance, it is only by entering the eastern gateway that a glimpse of the image illuminated at the end of a long narrow corridor comes into view well before arriving in the eastern prayer hall. This vista establishes a visual connection in the same way that the wish fulfilling Buddha draws devotees into the Alodawpyi Pagoda in Bagan (see Chapter Three: *A Life in the Temple*). However, the monumental image remains only partly visible as it radiates light through the narrow portal to the sanctum (see fig.2.10). The entrance to the shrine is framed by multiple images of the Buddha – a pair of carved stone reliefs of crowned Buddhas in the style of the Pala period (8<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> centuries)<sup>73</sup> are said to be gifts to the Sawbwa during a trip to India – while tiny relief images of the Teaching Buddha radiate across the walls of the portal (fig.2.10, top left).

This gathering of multiple images around Yadana Man Aung Buddha establishes the eastern hall as the starting point for those that seek out the most auspicious attributes of the temple. For example, Sao Sanda describes visiting the temple as a child during the new year festival of Thingyan. After entering the eastern hall, prayers were said while looking up at the seated Buddha with a 'faint smile and gentle and benign face'.

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<sup>72</sup> U Mya Thaug, interview with the author, 25 February 2016. U Tun Yee also describes its auspicious attributes. See Appendix 2.

<sup>73</sup> U Mya Thaug, interview with the author, 26 February 2016. According to Stadtner they may have been brought back as souvenirs during the early 20th century or were presented by the Indian government to Sao Shwe Thaik when he was president of Burma. Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 309.

After about ten minutes the Sawbwa's family would proceed to the northern, western and southern altars. It was imperative for the family to visit the tombs of her great grand uncle Sao Maung and aunt Mahadevi on the north-western side of the courtyard to share merit with them, and then to her mother's tomb, situated behind the pagoda.<sup>74</sup> Vivid recollections of the eastern hall were aided by the pungent aroma of burning joss sticks, wax candles, jasmine and frangipani flowers.<sup>75</sup> During the festival in 2017, the temple was subject to many more scents, as pilgrims and visitors from afar took shelter and ate meals in the prayer halls.<sup>76</sup>

### Framing the Prayer Halls

Although closer to the centre of the temple than the museum at the Shwedagon Pagoda, the Inner Museum likewise occupied a liminal space that remained for the most part in the peripheral vision of devotees as they journeyed towards the centre of the temple. When seated in front of the eastern shrine, devotees turned their backs on the displays in the Inner Museum to focus their attention on the image of the Buddha (fig.2.8, right). Seated for lengthy periods of time with eyes closed, meditators were framed by the temple museum and its gifts, implicit within an iconographic programme that reaffirmed the Buddha's presence.

Their rituals recall the manner in which rituals of visiting in the Western art museum observed by Duncan, reveal the effects of the architectural programme which are usually overlooked in the belief that art should be viewed unhindered in 'empty' space.<sup>77</sup> Yet other kinds of behaviour reveal aspects of the Inner Museum and its place within the iconographic programme of the temple. For example, the apparent ambivalence of visitors is also attributable to the social life of the temple, in which spatial qualities of the Inner Museum contributed in subtle ways. The window-like appearance of the cabinets and their architectural 'seamlessness',<sup>78</sup> camouflages the museum to a greater degree than was observed of the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum.

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<sup>74</sup> Sao Sanda, *The Moon Princess*, 66.

<sup>75</sup> Sao Sanda, 66.

<sup>76</sup> The festival took place in Nyaung Shwe from 28-30 September 2017.

<sup>77</sup> Duncan and Wallach, 'The Universal Survey Museum', 451.

<sup>78</sup> Candlin, *Micromuseology*, 153.

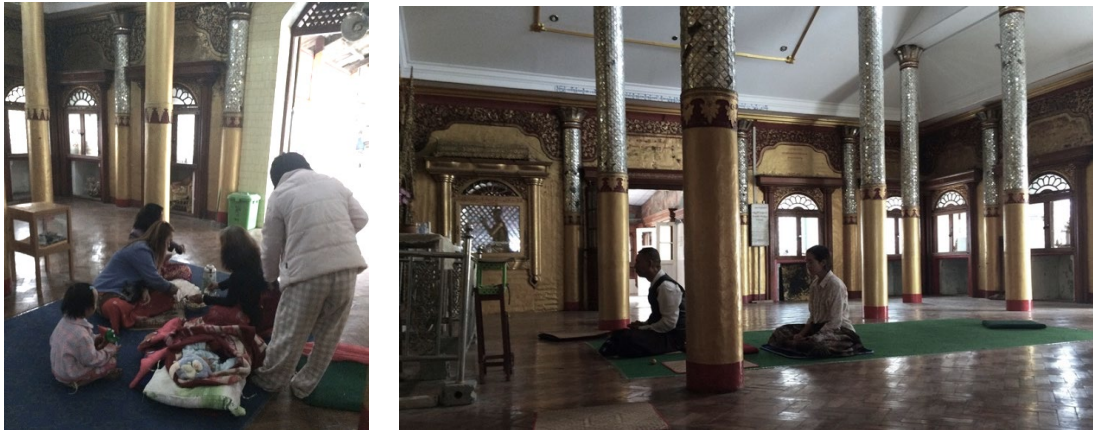


Figure 2.8. Mothers and children take lunch in a prayer hall, 26 February 2016 (left). Meditators sit facing towards the southern shrine surrounded by the cabinets of the Inner Museum. 16 August 2016. Photographs: Heidi Tan.

The museum is subsumed in the ritual and social life of the temple such that it could not and did not need to impose any protocols on behaviour. Seen from the position of those seated on the floor the cabinets remained a liminal place and a welcome source of natural light in an otherwise relatively dark interior (fig.2.8). Pagodas provide much needed spaces for resting especially at midday during hot season when it is common to see large numbers of devotees stretched out asleep. The challenge of keeping pagoda museums clean and secure in these circumstances was evident in urban areas where renowned sites such as the Sule Pagoda in Yangon enjoy high levels of visitorship and therefore keep the museum locked unless there is a request to visit.<sup>79</sup>

However, women who worked at the temple regularly sat within the prayer halls with their children to take their lunch and rest. During the Thadingyut festival in 2017 the halls were so crowded that vendors entered to sell mangoes and other snacks, sacks of provisions were stored in the spaces beneath the cabinets, and various groups including Intha rowers, stretched out to rest after conveying the *Phaung Daw Oo Buddhas* across the lake during the first day of their visit (see *Phaung Daw Oo Buddhas*). Intha, meaning 'son of the lake', refers to the community who still make a living on the lake from fishing and floating gardens. They are said to have come north from Dawei (Tavoy) to work for the first Sawbwa Si Seng Hpa.<sup>80</sup>

Yet the prevalence of the displays situated at regular intervals around the halls and vestibules offered multiple opportunities for a momentary encounter. As observed in the previous chapter, the rituals of visiting vary according to the individual's

<sup>79</sup> Anonymous trustee, interview with the author, Sule Pagoda, 29 August 2015.

<sup>80</sup> Sao Saimong, 'The Phaungtaw-Ū Festival', 79.

predispositions and embodied knowledge of visiting within the temple. The pathways taken by visitors demonstrated that the Inner Museum is experienced at different moments along two main trajectories; the first widens within the main halls where a devotee would need to diverge from their ritual activities centred on the shrine, in order to walk around the perimeter to view the displays. The second joins the circumambulatory pathway around the temple to pass through vestibules that link the prayer halls (fig.2.2, b2, b4, b6, b8).

However, those that lingered to engage more readily with the Inner Museum or deviated from these paths to retrace their steps rather than continue with their circumambulation included children and tourists. Yin May Thawe recalled that children typically enjoy looking at the displays while their parents are occupied with religious activities. Their informal encounters in the museum demonstrated exploratory and unexpected ways of learning about their own and other cultures. She also observed that usually only very interested tourists visit the temple, as most prefer to spend time on the lake or hiking in the surrounding hills.<sup>81</sup>



Figure 2.9. Young boys view the Buddha's tooth relic display (left); relic display (right), 25 – 26 February 2016. Photographs: Heidi Tan.

Foreign tourists usually accompanied by a guide engaged more consistently while groups of children, particularly boys, were drawn randomly to the cabinets that caught

<sup>81</sup> Her work as a seasonal tour guide and private tutor informs her understanding of the varying and changing expectations of different visitors especially those familiar with museum-visiting. Yin May Thawe, interview with the author, 15 August 2016.

their attention, such as the Buddha's tooth-relic shrine along the southern wall of the eastern prayer hall (fig.2.9, left).<sup>82</sup>

The dramatic presentation centred on a tiny tooth relic enshrined within a glass stupa topped with additional relics in a gilded finial and was lit up by pulsating electric lights. Bottles and reliquaries of various forms containing hundreds of smaller relics were placed symmetrically on each side, while bundles of gold leaf and piles of Myanmar kyat notes and foreign currency were laid out below (fig.2.9, right). As the only cabinet of the 48 that was entirely enclosed, the spectacle of flashing coloured lights drew the boys in to scrutinise its contents. An aperture enabled visitors to post donations, although the carefully heaped notes demonstrated an intentional use of the donations to frame a narrative of accumulation. Unlike the unlabelled relic display at the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum, a lengthy text encouraged donations towards gold leaf for gilding the Buddha images. It also informed visitors that the 'relic shrine' displayed the living Buddha's relic and that if respected this would replace bad karma with good. Other relics included those from arhats and monks. It then outlined the four types of relics – commemorative (*ouddeittha*) relics such as Buddha images; the Buddha's corporeal relics (*dat-daw*); his teachings (dharma) and utensils of use (*paribawga*).<sup>83</sup> The miniature shrine demonstrated how the numinous power of relics was endorsed with the addition of lights, a label and heaped cash. The power that enables negative karma to be overridden is one of the protective qualities that results from the Buddha's practice of austerities and the precepts, identified by Nicola Tannenbaum as a key attribute of Shan Buddhist practice.<sup>84</sup> The inclusion of the relic shrine within the museum thus offered an opportunity for devotees to make merit as well as seek out the 'power-protection' offered by potent Buddha images and objects associated with them.<sup>85</sup>

Although formal rituals were not observed, the changing appearance of the display as donations increased demonstrated that even a small shrine may attract the attention of devotees if objects of sufficient potency are made visible. While the label clearly pointed to the ritual intent of the relic shrine, the formal qualities of the display offered

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<sup>82</sup> Young men and boys were observed to be attracted to the displays of foreign currency at pagoda museums from the far south to Rakhine State in the west. At the Hpayagyi Museum in Dawei women were drawn to textiles and garments (Appendix 1, A.16), while at the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum they spent time viewing gold jewellery, while Shan swords and weaponry attracted the attention of young men. Fieldwork observations, January 2016.

<sup>83</sup> Fieldwork 25 September 2017. Translation: Win Naing Htwe.

<sup>84</sup> Tannenbaum, *Who Can Compete Against the World? Power-Protection and Buddhism in Shan Worldview*, 120.

<sup>85</sup> Tannenbaum, 180.

another basis for the 'museum effect' which recontextualised in the temple, augments Alper's 'way of seeing', to include seeing manifestations of potency.<sup>86</sup> In this case the Buddha's most potent relic sat at the top of a stepped dais flanked by those of the arhats and monks just below, while offerings were placed around the base. The display recalls the small-scale exhibit at the Buddhism gallery in the World Museum Liverpool, where a 'Tibetan shrine case' includes over sixty objects arranged on a four-tiered plinth with a consecrated Buddha image placed at the top, flanked by protector deities, and a range of objects for ritual use laid out below.<sup>87</sup> The introductory text panel to the gallery in Liverpool included a 'blessing' from the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama who had been informed about the new gallery: " 'We say that for a Buddhist practitioner the function [of objects] is to support faith, because they encourage the aspiration to acquire the qualities the images represent'." <sup>88</sup> The gallery's aim to address religious beliefs rather than the aesthetic qualities of the objects included the sounds of chanting and space for contemplation and worship. Louise Tythacott attributed subsequent ritual activity to the conducive atmosphere of the resulting devotional display.<sup>89</sup>

While the 'relic shrine' in the eastern prayer hall and the shrine case in Liverpool differ in their intent – one a shrine for religious use in sacred space, the other a secular representation of a shrine to learn about Tibetan religion – they are arguably motivated by the same need to present objects in ways that make them available as Alpers says, for 'attentive looking'.<sup>90</sup> While neither aimed to present the objects as art as Alpers intends, the 'visual interest' of the objects was nonetheless key to engage devotees with their functional significance as potent relics. The interest in the case of the relic shrine was generated by the aesthetic appeal of the abundant group, its symmetrical and hierarchical arrangement with the use of lights to draw attention to the tooth relic at the centre.<sup>91</sup> At first glance the multiplicity of relics recalls Candlin's observation of the 'aesthetic effect' that packed micromuseum displays can have, where the visitor is confronted by large groups of objects arranged according to colours or forms.<sup>92</sup> The effect of an 'undifferentiated mass' she notes, can be an immersive experience<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Alpers, 'The Museum as a Way of Seeing', 26–27.

<sup>87</sup> Tythacott, 'Curating the Sacred: Exhibiting Buddhism at the World Museum Liverpool', 127–28.

<sup>88</sup> Tythacott, *The Lives of Chinese Objects*, 214.

<sup>89</sup> Tythacott notes in 2017 that shrine displays in Western museums had become increasingly popular over the past decade. Tythacott, 'Curating the Sacred: Exhibiting Buddhism at the World Museum Liverpool', 124, fn.25.

<sup>90</sup> Alpers, 'The Museum as a Way of Seeing', 26–27.

<sup>91</sup> A photograph illustrates how the Tibetan shrine display shone brightly in the gallery with subdued ambient lighting. Tythacott, *The Lives of Chinese Objects*, Fig.7.5.

<sup>92</sup> The Bakelite Museum in Somerset and the Shell Museum in Norfolk are cited here. Candlin, *Micromuseology*, 170.

<sup>93</sup> The Cornice Museum of Plasterwork in Peebles, Scotland is cited here. Candlin, 171–72.

similar to Bastion's observation of the 'aesthetic of accretion' that prevailed at the northern shrine at the Shwedagon Pagoda (see Chapter One: *Liminal Moments on Ritual Paths*). However, Candlin's notion of 'mass' was based on displays that were not selective, while Bastion's notion of accumulation was associated with religious fervour. In both examples of the shrines their visual appeal was the result of careful arrangements in order to demonstrate relationships between the groups of Tibetan deities or relics.

Furthermore, the differing responses from devotees, and children and tourists, demonstrate different motivations for 'attentive looking'. That these may not necessarily be attributed to fixed notions of a 'secular' or 'sacred' context was observed by Imogen Clark of the shrine displays in Liverpool and in the more immersive displays in American museums cited earlier.<sup>94</sup> While seeking to elicit notions of the sacred that would counter the Orientalising effects of Western museum displays, she discovered a paradox at the heart of the issue for Western museums. In their preoccupation with distinguishing between secular and sacred space, representations of the 'sacred', especially the highly aestheticized shrine displays, are easily undermined by visitors' preconceptions. Visitors choose to see what they want, regardless of the intentions of the display. Furthermore, visitor responses reveal that different modes of engagement can co-exist in the same museum. For example, the museum at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala designed in the 1970s, houses gifts made by Tibetan refugees to the Dalai Lama for safekeeping. Foreigners view what are formally arranged displays of icons and thangkas, while Tibetan visitors remove their shoes, make offerings, pay homage and circumambulate the museum. The former may be oblivious to the religious meaning of the objects, while the latter respond with rituals to what might otherwise be seen as a 'secular' display.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, Clark concludes that understandings of the 'sacred' remain elusive and cannot be tested against a definitive Tibetan perspective as this varies with the individual and their spiritual development.<sup>96</sup> Different understandings of the sacred prevailed in the pagoda museum as noted in the previous chapter, where Daw Baby Ohn's experience was meditational rather than devotional. Similarly, at the shrine to the wish fulfilling Buddha U Taw Aung Myat clarified that the practice of moral conduct or *sila* (P) was more important than believing in the inherent powers of a Buddha image.<sup>97</sup> Even within the sanctuary of the shrine to

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<sup>94</sup> Clark, 'Exhibiting the Exotic, Simulating the Sacred: Tibetan Shrines at British and American Museums', 4, 12.

<sup>95</sup> Clark, 12.

<sup>96</sup> Clark, 14.

<sup>97</sup> U Mya Thaug, U Taw Aung Myat, interview with the author, 25 February 2016.

this particular Buddha, behaviour can vary as demonstrated below (see *The Wish Fulfilling Buddha*).

### Materialising Light in the Eastern Prayer Hall

As noted earlier the visitors were attracted into the eastern hall by its devotional ambience and the presence of the Yadana Man Aung Buddha invoked by the use of radiant light. Intense light projected from within the shrine, recalled the relic display at the Shwedagon Pagoda. However, the focus on the large seated image obfuscated the details of the polished face with multiple reflections that drew devotees in to scrutinise its auspicious qualities (fig.2.10).<sup>98</sup> During the festival in September 2017, the gold leaf seller Ma Thi Thi Kye pointed out that the image had been famous during the Second World War when it produced water from the little finger of the right hand. People still collect the holy water to drink while others use it on their eyes to improve their sight (fig.2.10 below).<sup>99</sup> This account of holy water for improving eye-sight brings to mind the potent 'Golden Spectacles Buddha' at the Shwe Myat Hman Temple in Shwedaung south of Pyay, who is believed to have cured many cases of blindness and bad eye-sight. Large quantities of spectacles from donors remain on display in a showcase to one side of the be-spectacled Buddha image.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Three directional Buddhas in the temple installed by Sao Maung after the temple was built sit within comparatively shallow niches that remain unlit most of the time. Daw Myint Myint Thein, interview with the author, 15 August 2016.

<sup>99</sup> Ma Thi Thi Kye, interview with the author, 25 September 2017. Donor Daw Myint Myint Thein recounted a similar story, interview with the author, 15 August 2016. Thanks to Win Naing Htwe for taking photos within the eastern shrine where women are not allowed to enter.

<sup>100</sup> The temple's founder King Duttabaung, lost his sight after gazing at supernatural rays of light but was cured by the Buddha after donating a pair of spectacles. Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 206–7. See Appendix 1, B.41.



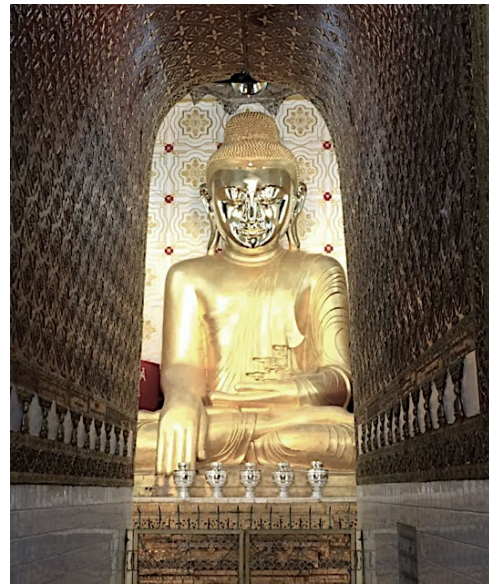
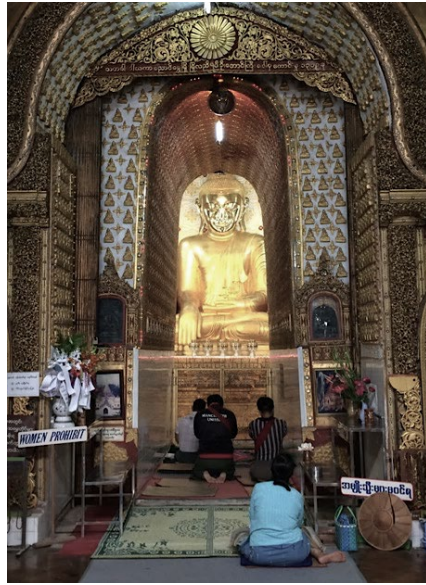


Figure 2.10. Yadana Man Aung Buddha within eastern shrine (above) 16 August 2016, detail of water stains emerging from the Buddha's little finger (below), 27 September 2017. Photographs: Heidi Tan, Win Naing Htwe.

Other accounts attested to the power of the seated image which sits at the centre of the temple as the repository for the royal relics.<sup>101</sup> This attribution of power to the relics is also made in reports of supranormal sightings that have long been part of the Buddha's biography. One report claims that jewels were seen within when a hole once opened up in the neck of the image.<sup>102</sup> This alludes to the improvements that were made to the image after it was installed. According to trustee U San Ya, the image emerged through a prophetic dream and took nine years to sculpt in *lin-lun* wood before its installation in 1876. The relics that had been enshrined within the Buddha included 36 Buddha relics from India and gold, silver and ruby jewellery relics donated by King Mindon enshrined within 15 caskets that were wrapped with gold

<sup>101</sup> U Soe Hla, trustee for the Thadingyut festival, personal communication, 29 September 2017.

<sup>102</sup> U Mya Thaug, interview with the author, 25 February 2016.

plates inscribed with doctrinal texts.<sup>103</sup> Strong notes the limitations that Buddha images as a class of commemorative or uddesika (P) / ouddeittha (M) relics can have wherein re-presentations of the Buddha simply allow him to be ‘seen’. However, unlike other classes of relics, images did not originally have contact with the Buddha, hence textual or bodily relics were inserted within images to reiterate the presence of the Buddha.<sup>104</sup>

Materials with auspicious qualities are significant in the biography of the Yadana Man Aung Buddha. For example, the wood is auspicious for its associations with the tree, known as the lin-lun or Rajayatana tree, which the Buddha sat under during his seventh week of enlightenment and his meeting with the two merchant brothers.<sup>105</sup> Some years after the image was installed, a further encasement was deemed necessary as the wood was considered insufficiently durable. Mandalay metalsmiths cast an outer form in the five-metal alloy known as *pyinsa-lawha* and the image was consecrated in 1899.<sup>106</sup>

While the revered five-metal alloy of gold, silver, copper, iron and lead is widely associated with potent Buddha images, a visceral connection was established in this way with the powerful Mahamuni Buddha in Mandalay, which Yadana Man Aung is said to replicate.<sup>107</sup> It too was cast with the five-metal alloy. As Alexandra de Mersan noted of bronze casting in Rakhine State during the 1990s the composition of raw materials remain integral to the potency of the cast image and valuable materials are reserved for the head, the highest and most noble part of the body.<sup>108</sup> For example, additional gold is also said to have been added to the eyes, lips and hair of the image.<sup>109</sup> This enhancement of the facial features gave them added lustre and inspired Sao Sanda’s observations of the sculptor’s intent to create an enigmatic smile.<sup>110</sup> Like those who collected the sacred water, these rituals and personal interactions with the

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<sup>103</sup> The texts include the First Sermon, the Doctrine of Cause and Effect, the 24 Causal Relations and the Doctrine of Impermanence. San Ya, ‘Nyaung Shwe Yadana Man Aung Temple. A Brief History [in Myanmar]’, 2. See Appendix 2.1.

<sup>104</sup> Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 20.

<sup>105</sup> The places where the Buddha stayed during the seven weeks after enlightenment are depicted at the Mahabodhi Temple in Bagan. The seventh station in the south-eastern corner is identified on a map at the site as ‘lin-lun tree’. Atsuko Naono, ‘The Buddhist Kings of Chiengmai and Pegu, The Purification of the Sangha, and the Mahabodhi Replicas in the Late Fifteenth Century’ (Michigan, University of Michigan, 1996), 58–63, Appendix VII, <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs09/Naono1996-ocr-mr.pdf>. See Glossary and Appendix 1, B15).

<sup>106</sup> San Ya, ‘Nyaung Shwe Yadana Man Aung Temple. A Brief History [in Myanmar]’, 1.

<sup>107</sup> San Ya, 1–2.

<sup>108</sup> Alexandra de Mersan, ‘“The Land of the Great Image” and the Test of Time: The Making of Buddha Images in Arakan (Burma/Myanmar).’, in *The Spirit of Things. Materiality and Religious Diversity in Southeast Asia*, Studies on Southeast Asia 58 (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2012), 100.

<sup>109</sup> Tun Yee, ‘What We Can Learn about Yadana Man Aung Pagoda [in Myanmar]’, 1.

<sup>110</sup> Sao Sanda, *The Moon Princess*, 66.

Buddha recall Alfred Gell's observations of *darshan* (S: *darśana*) the 'gift of appearance' or form of 'divine blessing' by a deity to a worshipper.<sup>111</sup> Gell refers to the practice in the context of Hindu tradition of placing oneself in the gaze of the deity as a devotional act in which the worshipper reciprocates by reaching out to touch the deity, thus establishing a 'god/devotee' relationship.<sup>112</sup> One of the means to establishing the relationship is the consecration of images by painting the eyes, wherein the image is animated. He cites Richard Gombrich's accounts of the Sri Lankan Buddhist 'eye ceremony' or *netra pinkama* in which monks place relics in the Buddha image, while lay craftsmen paint the eyes. The former eschew idolatory and give the image legitimacy, while the latter animate the image in order that 'superstitious' devotees may make contact.<sup>113</sup> The ritual is first mentioned during the fifth century CE by Buddhaghosa but the earliest reference to a king performing the ceremony is an edict of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>114</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, vestiges of the royal ritual are still commemorated in Mandalay (see *A Crowned Buddha from the Northern Shrine*), but otherwise the practice is not widely recognised in Myanmar. Yet devotees' interactions with Buddha images demonstrate significant periods of time in front of individual images in prayer and meditation, making offerings and seeking blessings, while a famous image such as the Mahamuni Buddha, receives the face-washing ceremony early each morning. Devotees often observe the human-like qualities of Buddha images such as the smile that becomes more pronounced as one moves closer to a monumental image. In this respect, Sao Sanda's observations are not unusual and are a response to the act of seeing and being seen. As the image smiles, so it also sees. As Gell says, 'the image-as-mirror is doing what the devotee is doing, therefore, the image also looks and sees'. This play of 'intersubjectivity' enables the devotee to see the image as well as see themselves as the image sees them.<sup>115</sup>

Another form of seeing the Buddha took place in February 2016 when U Mya Thaug spoke of 'white' light that had become a frequent phenomenon at the temple. This had been recorded on CCTV after the temple's main lights were turned off around 7pm. Taken from above the eastern doorway, the footage showed the caretaker walking across the hall tidying prayer mats and turning off the lights. As he closed the hall gates the screen went into a monochromatic night view and a cloud of white particles

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<sup>111</sup> Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency. An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 116.

<sup>112</sup> Gell, 117.

<sup>113</sup> Gell, 149.

<sup>114</sup> Richard Gombrich, 'The Consecration of a Buddhist Image', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 26, no. 1 (1966): 26, fn. 10, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2051829>.

<sup>115</sup> Gell, *Art and Agency*, 120.

emerged, hovered moth-like, then scattered across the front of the camera. According to the caretaker, none of this could be seen with his own eyes.<sup>116</sup>



Figure 2.11. CCTV documentation of white light displayed in February 2016 (left) and in a shrine in the eastern hall in August 2016 (right). Photographs: Heidi Tan.

Together with photographic images of the footage, these records demonstrated the importance of materialising the numinous quality of the Buddha, of recording his presence. A display of photographs during 2016 encouraged devotees to make donations and other offerings (fig.2.11).

At the devotional level light was taken to be another form of blessing. For the devout such as Daw Myint Myint Thein, the light was evidence of the Buddha's power. She recalled how her grandfather advised her to make daily visits to the temple because of this power and how the light had been consistently seen in the early evenings over the past five years. She clarified the term '*yaungyi-daw*' to refer to the 'light from the Buddha'.<sup>117</sup> This kind of light is understood to be a scattered spectrum of brown and sombre tones with other more colourful ones.<sup>118</sup> Reports of collective sightings of colourful rays of light are frequently cited in association with events such as the

<sup>116</sup> U Mya Thaug, 25 February 2016. This was reiterated to Conan Cheong, curator at the ACM who visited the temple in April 2017. Conan Cheong, personal communication, 10 April 2017.

<sup>117</sup> Daw Myint Myint Thein, interview with the author, 15 August 2016.

<sup>118</sup> This includes an 'aureole of brown, gold, red, white, sombre and coruscating hues emanating from the person of the Lord Buddha' (see Glossary). Myanmar Language Commission, 'Myanmar-English Dictionary'.

consecration of a temple.<sup>119</sup> A sacred spectrum was encoded in the Buddhist flag that was designed in 1886 and formalised by the World Confederation of Buddhists in Sri Lanka in 1950. The six colours – blue, yellow, red, white and orange – include an additional ‘radiant’ colour or *pabhassara* (P) that cannot be depicted but is represented by a combination of the previous five.<sup>120</sup>

The material and biographical association with the Mahamuni Buddha further augments the Buddha’s presence and a potent field of merit at the centre of the temple. The biography is underpinned by the Sawbwa Sao Maung’s ancestral and tributary ties with the Burmese court, his ability to secure the royal relics and consecrate a new Buddha image in the likeness of the Mahamuni Buddha, a palladium of the Arakan and then Burmese court after it was taken from Arakan (now Rakhine State) by King Bodawpaya (r. 1782–1819) to Amarapura in 1784.<sup>121</sup> The Mahamuni Buddha’s potency derived from the belief that it was made in the Buddha’s likeness and that the Buddha himself visited Arakan and breathed life into the image.<sup>122</sup> This connection with the Buddha makes the image and its copies particularly potent as being with the image is like being with the Buddha.<sup>123</sup> Yadana Man Aung Buddha was not the only example to draw on the likeness of the Mahamuni. A copy of the image was cast in Mandalay in 1921 for the Sawbwa of Kyaing Tong, Sao Kawn Kiao Intaleng, which as Karlsson notes reflects a form of ‘cultural Burmanisation’ and a sign of good relations with the Burmese at that time.<sup>124</sup>

This manifestation of presence has been described by Schober as a ‘Buddhist hierophany’, in which a ‘sacred reality’ constructs a community and its rituals of merit-making. The notion is borrowed from Mircea Eliade and can be thought of as a ‘culturally specific manifestation of the sacred in the profane world’.<sup>125</sup> Eliade explains hierophany simply as when ‘*something sacred shows itself to us*’ hence an object that

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<sup>119</sup> A similar spectrum of lights was reported at the consecration of the Alodawpyi Pagoda. See Appendix 3.1.

<sup>120</sup> National Identity Board, Office of the Prime Minister’s Secretariat, ‘What Is the Meaning of the Buddhist Flag?’ (Bangkok: SEAMEO Secretariat, 1996), <http://www.seameo.org/vl/buddhistll/frame.htm>.

<sup>121</sup> Karlsson, ‘Material Religion and Ethnic Identity’, 6.

<sup>122</sup> Pamela Gutman, ‘Ancient Arakan: With Special Reference to Its Cultural History between the 5th and 11th Centuries.’ (Ph.D, Australian National University, 1976), 7, <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/47122>. de Mersan, “The Land of the Great Image” and the Test of Time: The Making of Buddha Images in Arakan (Burma/Myanmar).’, 98.

<sup>123</sup> Karlsson, ‘Material Religion and Ethnic Identity’, 8.

<sup>124</sup> Karlsson, 8.

<sup>125</sup> Schober, ‘Venerating the Buddha’s Remains in Burma: From Solitary Practice to the Cultural Hegemony of Communities’, 113–14.

is part of the profane world can also be sacred.<sup>126</sup> In the case of Yadana Man Aung Buddha, ancestral patrons actualised its relics, controlled its field of merit and sphere of influence.<sup>127</sup> The connection with the Mahamuni Buddha demonstrated that multiple hierophanies can overlap and reflect the hierarchical relations between their patrons. One way to conceive of the casting of Yadana Man Aung Buddha is in terms of the relations that can be strengthened locally between patrons and communities. As de Mersan observed of the continued production of Buddha images in Rakhine State, the image represents a collective act of merit-making that enables communities to put themselves in the way of the Buddha's protection. Casting a new image enables local specificities to be expressed without fear of reprisal from central authorities.<sup>128</sup>

In the context of the temple and the Inner Museum these relations are alluded to in the displays situated opposite the main shrine of the eastern hall where royal gifts are attributed to King Mindon and his queen (see *Royal Manuscripts and Lacquer*). In this way the liminally situated museum draws attention to the Buddha's field of merit by giving visibility to the royal patron and the merit associated with his gifts. The reciprocal relations between the Sawbwa and King are implied here too. As Tannenbaum noted of Shan customary relations, those with greater knowledge and power must be paid respect while those in a position of authority must reciprocate with blessings in the form of protection.<sup>129</sup> The King's donations of relics and manuscripts also represent his blessings.

### Liminal Moments in the Vestibules

The memorable patterns of Sao Sanda's childhood visits resonate with the moments of 'liminality' discussed in the previous chapter. After her entry into the temple via its most auspicious shrine, the circumambulation of the temple included discrete spaces – the 'marked off time and place' as identified by Duncan – where the momentary liminal experience within and between rituals could take place.<sup>130</sup> Although the visit took place perhaps a decade or more before the Inner Museum cabinets had been installed,<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard Trask R. (New York; London: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1959), 11–12.

<sup>127</sup> Schober, 'Venerating the Buddha's Remains in Burma: From Solitary Practice to the Cultural Hegemony of Communities', 123.

<sup>128</sup> de Mersan, "'The Land of the Great Image" and the Test of Time: The Making of Buddha Images in Arakan (Burma/Myanmar).', 109–10.

<sup>129</sup> Tannenbaum, *Who Can Compete Against the World? Power-Protection and Buddhism in Shan Worldview*, 117.

<sup>130</sup> Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 11.

<sup>131</sup> Sao Sanda, personal communication, 16 February 2018.

certain objects that Sao Sanda recalled such as the painted murals were already in situ. Among the more memorable moments of her visits were the museum's 'wide passages which connected the different altar rooms' with 'provincial-style, brightly coloured murals'. In particular she recalled the depiction of the Great Departure, the scene of Buddha as a young prince who renounces worldly things and leaves the palace (fig.2.12).<sup>132</sup> The lessons of impermanence and of non-attachment were experienced as a liminal moment within her own journey. They resurfaced many hours later as she observed the town from the remoteness of her palace bedroom and realised her own sense of attachment to the world outside the palace in Yawnghwe:

I loved my room because from high above it was possible to look down on the people below going about their daily business. In one sense I was completely remote and detached, yet in another way I became attached, as I spent many an hour wondering about their individual lives.<sup>133</sup>

The encounter with the painting thus demonstrated that a momentary space and time within a visitor's journey can have a profound effect on the viewer's 'inward transformation of spirit or personality'.<sup>134</sup> The spatial quality of the vestibules where the murals reside suggests that such encounters are more likely to happen at these points in the journey. These L-shaped rooms are brightly lit transit points between the prayer halls, where pilgrims take rest and seek a brief respite between religious rituals (see *Gilded Portraits*). The lively depictions catch the attention of those walking through the vestibules, as they wrap around the walls and the tops of the cabinets (fig.2.12).

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<sup>132</sup> Sao Sanda, *The Moon Princess*, 66.

<sup>133</sup> Sao Sanda, 67.

<sup>134</sup> Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 197.



Figure 2.12. Scene of the Great Departure wrapped around cabinets in the south-west vestibule. 16 August 2016. Photograph: Heidi Tan.

The murals are didactic in that they refer to lessons learned by the Buddha during his own lifetime. They are also the material manifestation of merit made by their donors and in this case the well-known painter Kan Lwun (1915–1985) from Shan State, who restored a number of the murals in 1965 (fig.2.13, right).<sup>135</sup> Sao Sanda viewed the original versions, as the murals were in fact the work of two generations of artists. According to notes made by trustee U Tun Yee, a deliberate effort was made to commission Kan Lwun and others, as the original faded paintings that lay beneath had been made by their teacher, the celebrated Saw Maung (1900–1969).<sup>136</sup>

This effort to work with artists who were related through a shared artistic heritage reflects the importance of the teacher-student relationship in Shan culture, in which the restoration would have been a duty and a demonstration of respect for the teacher. As observed earlier, showing respect for one's elders and those with greater knowledge and power such as teachers, is a responsibility that if neglected can have negative karmic consequences.<sup>137</sup> From a Shan Buddhist perspective, such customary obligations are taught by monks as traditions that were introduced during the time of the Buddha. Hence there is a continuity between the Buddha and the past, and the present, which those in a position of authority are expected to maintain. They have a duty to teach and protect others through a relationship of reciprocal respect.<sup>138</sup> Hence

<sup>135</sup> Kan Lwun was from Shan State. Ranard, *Burmese Painting*, 349.

<sup>136</sup> Tun Yee, 'What We Can Learn about Yadana Man Aung Pagoda [in Myanmar]'. See Appendix 2.

<sup>137</sup> Tannenbaum, *Who Can Compete Against the World? Power-Protection and Buddhism in Shan Worldview*, 117.

<sup>138</sup> Tannenbaum, 117.



Kan Lwun signed the mural with both his teacher's name and his own: 'Mandalay (Alinga Kyawzwa) U Saw Maung. Acolyte, Kan Lwun '65'.<sup>139</sup>

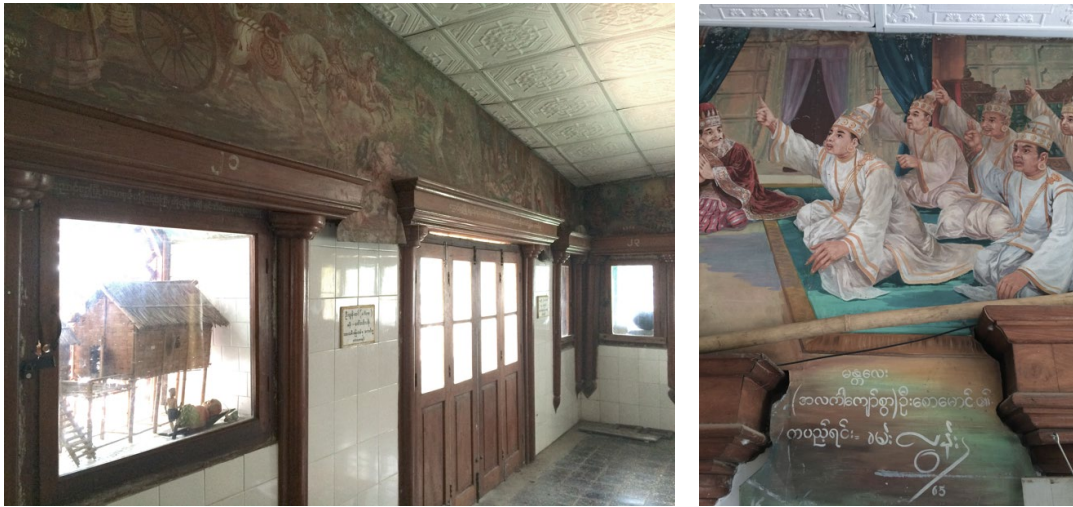


Figure 2.13. South-west vestibule with murals (left), signature by Kan Lwun dated 1965 (right), 16 August 2016. Photographs: Heidi Tan.

The murals may be didactic in intent, but they are not always received or used in this way. Yin May Thawe's recollections of learning the jātakas stories was through her grandfather's verbal instructions and from reading about them. For her, the numerous mural paintings were not necessarily meant to be accessed as didactic devices to reveal new lessons, but instead reaffirmed the stories that had already been learned at home. The murals prompted her to recollect the close relationship with her grandfather, who had taught her to read at a young age.<sup>140</sup>

The vestibules were therefore places to linger, where murals memorialised relationships of respect and the importance of sustaining these cultural and religious values that underpin the cultivation of merit. When trustee U Mya Thaug envisioned the museum as a place for preserving ancient heritage, it is these aspects of customary behaviour that inform that heritage (see *Potential for Personal Transformation*). However, the vestibules were notably also spaces for rest and relaxation as observed during Thadingyut festival in 2017, in which liminal moments in the presence of the Inner Museum were experienced in other ways and objects could be understood to have other kinds of meanings (see *Gilded Portraits*).

<sup>139</sup> The reference to Mandalay refers to Saw Maung's hometown and *Alinga Kyawzaw* refers to the highest award that a painter could receive. Ranard, *Burmese Painting*, 347.

<sup>140</sup> Yin May Thawe, interview with the author, 15 August 2016.

## Meritorious Keeping and the Trustee-Keeper

The role of the *gaw-paka* or trustee at Yadana Man Aung Temple differs notably from the volunteers at the Shwedagon Pagoda, in that it requires dedicating one's life to living within and managing the site. The challenges of fulfilling multiple roles necessitates working more independently with the museum collections and fundraising to maintain the displays. Although renovations to the Inner Museum required consultation with the committee of six advisory monks, U Mya Thaung noted that in practice this was often not possible as monastic duties often took priority. A strong sense of curatorial agency and initiative was evident as he went on to outline what he envisaged the future held for the museums. In February 2016 he had expressed concern that he could not foresee a way to undertake the much needed renovations, including cleaning of the displays which should be done four times per year, due to the lack of resources and volunteers.<sup>141</sup> The intermittent progress of this work in the past had been easily subsumed between other more pressing projects such as helping to raise funds to build more monasteries in the town.<sup>142</sup> His own efforts to raise funds included fees earned from undertaking astrological readings.<sup>143</sup>

He cited the temple's disadvantaged position compared to those situated on Inle Lake such as Phaung Daw Oo, which typically attract many more tourists and donations. He mused too about the renovation of 1957, a high point in the history of the temple's patronage when the board was twice its size with 20 trustees. In those days they received a stipend, but by the time he started work at the temple in 2000, funds had dried up and the practice was stopped. With the demise of a number of elderly trustees and a lack of interest in the museum, it had remained difficult to encourage participation or support from other trustees.<sup>144</sup>

Nonetheless by August 2016, cleaning, repainting and repair of a number of cabinets was in progress.<sup>145</sup> As records show, these works had in the past revealed subtle yet profound changes to the displays, as cleaning had brought about the reconfiguration of

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<sup>141</sup> U Mya Thaung, interview with the author, 25 February 2016.

<sup>142</sup> The town is the centre for annual monastic examinations undertaken by around 5,000 novices who come from across Shan State to stay in the town's monasteries at this time. U Mya Thaung, interview with the author, 25 February 2016.

<sup>143</sup> Clients typically donate anywhere between 10,000 and 50,000 Myanmar kyats (ten and fifty US dollars) for astrological readings depending on the depth of detail required. This work is time-consuming with a full life reading taking close to a day to perform and so cannot be done during busy festival periods. U Mya Thaung, interview with the author, 14 August 2016.

<sup>144</sup> U Mya Thaung, 25 February 2016.

<sup>145</sup> U Mya Thaung, interview with the author, 14 August 2016.

objects (see *Displaying the Buddha's Gifts*). Resourcefulness motivated by clear-sighted objectives, combined with skills in the astrological arts and the ability to work with the uncertainties of the future, are just some of the qualities U Mya Thaung demonstrated as necessary for the roles of the trustee-keeper.

## Potential for Personal Transformation

Rather than produce a formal plan, U Mya Thaung outlined his thoughts on what he felt were the most important objectives for the museums at the temple. His intentions clearly alluded to the need to provide a transformative experience for pilgrims who should be able to see new things. He also referred to the possibilities for engaging young people emotively with legacies of the past. His thoughts on the aims of the museum conveyed multiple interests that addressed both the conventional work of safekeeping as well as the qualities of the visitor's experience. He outlined three aims for the museums:

1. Ancient heritage needs to be preserved.
2. Pilgrims should see objects they have never seen before e.g. lacquerware.
3. The younger generation should nurture a love of cultural heritage.<sup>146</sup>

He indicated that with time, he planned to produce written information about objects in the collection and that he was particularly keen to offer possibilities for visitors to see unusual things. U Mya Thaung's compilation of notes on the history of Yadana Man Aung and neighbouring Phaung Daw Oo Temple demonstrated that skills in constructing written narratives had informed his work on the reconfiguration of the displays over the years.<sup>147</sup> As crucial, although largely unacknowledged in the discussion, were the interpretive possibilities of the displays, which provided the means for engaging visitors in meaningful ways. Documentation revealed that different modes of display had been engaged at different times and that these conveyed particular ways of seeing. The ability to sort, select, and construct meaning in the museum, is an aspect that Nicholas Thomas touches on in his definition of the 'museum as method' or 'the activity of knowing in a museum setting'. Specifically this involves selection which he describes as a 'canonical curatorial act' driven essentially by curiosity or an openness to encounters, to the possibility of 'happening upon things'.<sup>148</sup> These might simply be things that are already present but have yet to be revealed and as such can

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<sup>146</sup> U Mya Thaung, interview with the author, 25 February 2016.

<sup>147</sup> U Mya Thaung, 25 February 2016.

<sup>148</sup> Nicholas Thomas, *The Return of Curiosity. What Museums Are Good For in the Twenty-First Century*. (Reaktion Books, 2016), 101–2.

still be discovered. For example, objects that had been moved around within or between cabinets over the course of the years, could reappear with greater significance through the reconfiguration of a cabinet (see *Displaying the Buddha's Gifts*). As discussed below, the modes of display were varied and quite different from the systematised linear displays at the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum.

Another skill is the ability to record the collections and changes made to the displays. Many museums including sizeable state museums are not equipped to undertake such documentation. At this temple museum where the displays are rearranged periodically, photographs taken at different intervals before and after 2006 illustrate that the museum's potential for bringing about transformation applies both to people and objects. The photos reveal losses and the intermittent reconfiguration of displays.<sup>149</sup> Although U Mya Thaung stated he would like to show visitors things they have never seen before, unfortunately many objects have been impossible to keep from deteriorating in the cabinets, which are subject to high levels of sunlight and seasonal fluctuations of heat and humidity. Photo-documentation provides an important source of knowledge especially where there have been significant losses. At some pagoda museums photographs of religious events and important renovations are put on display, although these tend to commemorate and celebrate positive images of the past, while documentation that becomes evidence of loss may be less easy to accept. Significantly, the documentation of the renovated displays of 2006 is maintained in an album while a pile of loose images of earlier displays were gladly offered to the author.<sup>150</sup> These may remain the only source of information about objects that are now absent.

## Material Abundance

A number of cabinets with displays appeared as abundant as those at the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum. They were also striking in the way that large numbers of objects of the same kind or material – glass bottles, kerosene lamps, seashells – were clustered together. The abundant effect of the displays was reminiscent of the dense

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<sup>149</sup> The disposal of objects through sale had been an issue in the past before U Mya Thaung started work as a trustee in 2000. The photos complement hand-written working lists which were reportedly computerised after which copies were kept with the temple's committee of sayadaws. Interview with the author, 25 February 2016.

<sup>150</sup> I thank U Mya Thaung for these photographs which were received on his insistence after a lengthy discussion about the future of the museum and the realisation that they would be difficult to keep.

monothematic displays envisaged by Candlin of certain micromuseums (fig.2.14).<sup>151</sup> However, whereas micromuseums are usually the result of a passion for collecting by an individual or group, these repetitive clusters pressed up against the sides of the cabinets evoked the sense of collective religious fervour experienced by Bastian at the Shwedagon Pagoda and the competitive mode of merit-making noted by Koanantakool.<sup>152</sup> Associations with fervour and prestige were also evident at the neighbouring Phaung Daw Oo Temple where displays in a corner of the main hall were crammed with donations arranged typologically – watches, jewellery, foreign currency – many of them sealed in plastic with a receipt giving details of the donors' names, country of origin, and date of donation.<sup>153</sup> Within the context of the Inner Museum these homogenous groupings further emphasised the effect of abundance but with greater intensity than the displays at the Shwedagon Pagoda, each encapsulated within the thickness of the temple walls. However, the sense of heterotopic quality was intermittent as not all the cabinets had abundant displays. Some had only a couple of objects or were sparsely arranged or had assortments of objects that appeared to be unrelated. The abundance of the Inner Museum gave rise as well to observations among local informants of the comparative sparseness of state museum displays, notably the Cultural Museum within the Yawnghwe Haw or palace, in the same way that students had expressed a preference for the variety and abundance of the museum at the Shwedagon Pagoda over the National Museum in Yangon.<sup>154</sup>

Utilitarian objects such as the glassware and kerosene lamps were as much a part of the cultural heritage that U Mya Thaug hoped to interest younger visitors in, as other objects. They demonstrated the commodities of choice that were used by previous generations and a history of cultural exchange between local markets and extensive regional trading networks. Late 19<sup>th</sup> century accounts suggest that imported goods were as much in demand and often replaced locally-made products by this time. Brass lamps from China for example were among the imported wares available in Shan markets by then.<sup>155</sup> The lamps are also reminder of the meritorious gifts of light mentioned in Chapter One, which have been replaced by gifts of electric lights for

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<sup>151</sup> Notably the Bakelite Museum in Somerset and the Shell Museum situated in a church in Norfolk. Candlin, *Micromuseology*, 118, 154.

<sup>152</sup> Bastian, 'Exhibiting Buddhism: The Museumification of Burmese Buddha Images', 32. Paritta Chalermpong Koanantakool, 'Contextualising Objects in Monastery Museums in Thailand', 163.

<sup>153</sup> Fieldwork, Phaung Daw Oo Temple, 12 January, 25 February and 14 August 2016.

<sup>154</sup> See Chapter One, fn. 116. Anonymous informants, 26 February 2016. Similar perceptions were conveyed by informants at the temple, which indicate that accountability and other issues were at stake between both the temple and the state museum and their source communities. See Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown, 'Introduction', in *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader*. (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 10.

<sup>155</sup> Conway, *The Shan. Culture, Art and Crafts*, 184.

temples. For example, Sao Sanda recalled the use of kerosene lamps for the worship of the Phaung Daw Oo Buddhas at the palace that took place during the 1930s (see fig. 2.26, right).<sup>156</sup>



Figure 2.14. Displays of glassware, kerosene lamps and seashells. Photographs: Trustees' photo album, 2006, courtesy U Mya Thaug.

Natural forms made an appearance in a display of coral, seashells and sawfish beaks. These curious souvenirs from distant aquatic regions had been observed at Bandula Monastery in Mrauk-U, and the Kyantha Ya Pagoda's Auspicious Reception Museum and Tooth-relic Museum in Mandalay, although none of them were displayed in significant quantity. Another zoomorphic grouping included miniature jade and marble lions and elephants, symbols of royal power and of the Buddha which may also be understood as competitive gifts. These ubiquitous objects have enduring popular appeal as carved jade, marble, agate and other semi-precious stones are typically bought as souvenirs at the stalls around entryways to pagodas, while higher quality marble for example is the material of choice for architectural cladding and important Buddha images. Walking barefoot on the marble-paved platform at the Shwedagon Pagoda as it shimmers in the heat of the day, retains its warmth in the evening and cools off quickly in a rainstorm, provides 'sensorially perceptible characteristics'<sup>157</sup> of the material prior to viewing fine marble Buddha images for example, in the museum.

<sup>156</sup> Sao Sanda, personal communication, 24 February 2018. See Sao Sanda, *The Moon Princess*, 94.

<sup>157</sup> Dudley, *Museum Materialities*, 4.

This embodied knowledge of the material and familiarity with its market value, adds to its meritorious significance when viewed in abundance. In this respect the temple museum's displays of material abundance demonstrate that materiality can be a premise for thinking about the meaning of museum objects, as Sandra Dudley claims it should.<sup>158</sup> As Dudley points out, the conventional Western museum's approach to interpretation is to see objects as part of 'broader datasets and disciplinary paradigms' which foreclose the possibility of audiences having 'direct, embodied, emotional engagements' with objects.<sup>159</sup> Rather than see the lack of interpretives in pagoda museums as a hindrance to understanding, the culturally conditioned relationships between people and objects becomes a basis for finding and making meaning. While touching objects was not possible in the Inner Museum or at most other pagoda museums, larger objects that are difficult to showcase such as the guardian figures at the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum are occasionally touched. The Bagan Archaeological Museum is a unique example of this phenomenon as the unusually large number of Buddha images on open display regularly invite ritual touching (see Chapter Three: *Buddha Images Showroom, Merit-making on Display*). Touch and other senses may be called into play however when the cabinets are accessed by U Mya Thaung (see *Royal Manuscripts and Lacquer*) or when objects are taken out for ritual use and devotees engage bodily with them (see *The Silver Vehicle*).

### Displaying the Buddha's Gifts

Among the photo documentation of the Inner Museum cabinets made by U Mya Thaung before 2006, were several that demonstrated the prevalence of displays arranged as shrines. However, unlike the shrines discussed earlier where groups of hierarchically arranged relics or deities were the main focus, here the juxtaposition of objects centred on a single Buddha image. The arrangement of these objects in relation to the image demonstrated their meritorious value as gifts. These shrine displays evoked Shwe Yoe's account of the European souvenirs arranged around Buddha images at the Lingayama Monastery.<sup>160</sup> They also replicated in microcosm the spatial quality of the Inner Museum which, as discussed earlier, is laid out in view of Buddha in each prayer hall, its gifts a reification of the Buddha's field of merit. The eventual removal of small Buddha images for display at the core of the temple, reinforced this relationship between the centre and the gifts within the periphery.

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<sup>158</sup> Dudley, 4.

<sup>159</sup> Dudley, 5.

<sup>160</sup> Shway Yoe, *The Burman*, 132–33.

The photographs illustrate that the collection at one time included garments. A pile of folded clothing in shiny brown, indigo blue and purple hues hints at garments made of luxury materials, such as imported Chinese silks and velvets that had flooded the market since the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (fig.2.15, left).<sup>161</sup> Other groups living in and around Southern Shan State also incorporated such materials or wore tailored garments of silk and velvet.<sup>162</sup> The faded state of the clothes gives little indication of their age or the time of their donation. However, the importance of traditional dress as a marker of ethnic identity emerged in the early years after Independence. Staged public events, such as Union Day introduced in 1952, may have inspired the gifting of costumes particularly after the creation of the Inner Museum cabinets in 1957.<sup>163</sup> Related to these sumptuous court traditions are the velvet accoutrements used in religious ceremonies such as the velvet embroidered monks' fans and headdresses worn by children for the ear-boring and novitiation ceremonies (fig.2.15, right).<sup>164</sup>



Figure 2.15. Buddha image with missing usnīṣa, clothes and swivel gun in cabinet number 21 (left). Buddha image flanked by pair of fans, shoes and headdresses in cabinet number 44 (right). Photographs courtesy of U Mya Thaung, taken before 2006.

The motivation for gifting may be understood in two ways in the Shan tradition. The first is the relationship between the giver and recipient as discussed earlier. Shan Buddhist ritual known as *khan tau* (Sh), in which one pays respect and asks forgiveness, signals important relationships with the elders, monks, teachers and those more knowledgeable or powerful, who reciprocate with blessings as a form of protection.<sup>165</sup>

<sup>161</sup> These examples do not appear to have the gold-thread embroidery and other elaborate forms of decoration associated with court costume. Conway, *The Shan. Culture, Art and Crafts*, 135.

<sup>162</sup> Dudley, Sandra, 'Whose Textiles and Whose Meanings?', in *Textiles from Burma* (Brighton: Buppha Press in association with the James Green Centre for World Art, Brighton, 2003), 44–45.

<sup>163</sup> The Kachin utilised the occasion of Union Day to enhance their dress in ways that undermined negative stereotypes of their community. Mandy Sadan, 'Textile Contexts in Kachin State,' in *Textiles from Burma* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers in association with the James Green Centre for World Art, Brighton, 2003), 174.

<sup>164</sup> Conway, *The Shan. Culture, Art and Crafts*, 27.

<sup>165</sup> Tannenbaum, *Who Can Compete Against the World? Power-Protection and Buddhism in Shan Worldview*, 75.



The shrine display points to the power-protection that is sought through the ritual of paying respect with offerings to the Buddha. The other motivation is the cultivation of merit. Merit-making takes on a particular significance in Shan daily life as it is understood to operate 'like our shadow'. Merit follows a person through their life and beyond. It is therefore the one thing that remains stable, while everything else remains uncontrollable.<sup>166</sup>

The significance of power-protection and merit-making alluded to in the shrine is poignant in view of the material losses that are evident in the photographs and the connotations of wider threats to Shan heritage. Several Buddha images for example, had lost the cranial protuberance or *uṣṇīṣa* (S) from the top of their heads (figs.2.15, left; fig.2.16, top left). At least one of the damaged architectural wood carvings depicted at the far left of the display (fig.2.15, left) was part of a group of eight carvings documented before 2006, that recalled the deterioration of nearby Shwe Yan Pyay Monastery built in 1889.<sup>167</sup> With the surrendering of their authority in 1959, the possessions of the sawbwa's families often left with them when they joined diasporic communities overseas, or were lost, sold, or appropriated by others with the demise of the sawbwas' palaces.<sup>168</sup> These historic ruptures continued to be felt in more recent times with for example the demolition of the palace at Kyaing Tong (Keng Tung) to make way for a hotel in 1991.<sup>169</sup> The conversion of the palace in Nyaung Shwe to a state museum in 1964 also subsequently suffered losses.<sup>170</sup> According to the museum's leaflet, it was initially named the Nyaung Shwe Haw Nang Museum and successively renamed the Museum of the Shan Chiefs (2000), Nyaung Shwe Cultural Museum (2005); Buddha Museum (2007) and most recently Cultural Museum (2013).

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<sup>166</sup> Tannenbaum, 108.

<sup>167</sup> In 1993 decorative architectural carvings on the teakwood monastery building were deemed unrestorable. Than Tun, *Restoration of Shwe Yan Pyay Pagoda (1888) and Monastery (1890)*, Kunthaya History Series 10 (Yangon, Myanmar: Plastic Rainbow Book Publication, 2008), 24–25.

<sup>168</sup> Other notable losses include manuscripts that had been donated to the pagoda by villagers. Daw Myint Myint Thein regrets that issues with storage meant that many were not displayed and were damaged, whilst others may have gone missing in the years before U Mya Thaug's time. Interview 15 August 2016.

<sup>169</sup> The palace was seen as a bastion of Shan independence and its destruction part of a wider policy of Burmanisation. Karlsson, 'Material Religion and Ethnic Identity', 6.

<sup>170</sup> Local informants say that objects were removed from the palace in Nyaung Shwe perhaps as recently as 2014 and could have been sent to the Shwedagon Pagoda or to Mandalay. Anonymous informant, 25 September 2017. Bastian, 'Exhibiting Buddhism: The Museumification of Burmese Buddha Images', 71.



Figure 2.16. Buddha images surrounded by offerings in cabinets numbered: 46, 4, 16 (top left to right). Photographs courtesy of U Mya Thaug, taken before 2006.

The shrine displays demonstrated the careful selection of gifts that constituted the ‘ancient heritage’ deemed worthy of protection in the first of U Mya Thaug’s aims mentioned earlier. Another group he identified were unusual or rare objects, which included imported Chinese and European-style ceramics, lacquer vessels and clay pipes (fig.2.16, below).

The importance of the pipes was highlighted in a presentation made in 1969 by trustee U Tun Yee, by which time the displays had been in place for just over a decade.<sup>171</sup> According to Yin May Thawe grand-daughter of the trustee, a local saying still used today: ‘Nyaung Shwe she-ou, Moe-neh she-dan’, refers to the u-shaped pipe of Nyaung Shwe and the long pipe from Moe-neh (or Mong Nai). The saying draws on the differences in the shapes of the pipes to recognise the cultural distinctiveness of these two communities. That the trustee chose to mention the pipes signals their significance to him and the importance of having such markers of cultural identity in the collection.

<sup>171</sup> Tun Yee, ‘What We Can Learn about Yadana Man Aung Pagoda [in Myanmar]’, 2. See Appendix 2.

Their significance must also have interested colonial collectors given the numerous examples collected from around Nyaung Shwe during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>172</sup> The continued significance of the pipes for the younger generation such as Yin May Thawe is an example of one of U Mya Thaug's intended outcomes for the museum.<sup>173</sup>

As another earlier photo illustrates, the display of pipes together with currency and coinage had remained popular in the years before and after 2006 (fig.2.17, left). However, in 2016 the pipes were displayed as a group together with silver limeboxes and smoking equipment foregrounded with multiple copies of the One-Kyat note featuring General Aung San's portrait (fig.2.17, right). The inclusion of the notes offers an enduring reminder of the General and his significance to the Shan and other ethnic minorities in particular for his support for the Pang Long Conference of February 1947 and their claims to the right to autonomy and secession from Burma.<sup>174</sup> Furthermore, the reverence for the national hero following his assassination in July of that year is still widely felt, with continued demands for his image to be reinstated on Kyat notes that were phased out due to inflation or became collectables.<sup>175</sup>



Figure 2.17. Clay pipes displayed with currency donated in 2002 (left), Trustees' photo album, 2006, courtesy U Mya Thaug. The display in August 2016 (right). Photograph: Heidi Tan.

The historical importance given to clay pipes is found in at least one other pagoda museum where the wider changes related to international engagements were felt. The

<sup>172</sup> See for example 117 clay pipes acquired by the British Museum from Bertram S. Carey in 1921 and 1935. [https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/search.aspx?searchText=yawngshwe&page=2](https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx?searchText=yawngshwe&page=2)

<sup>173</sup> There are significant holdings of the clay pipe bowls from Nyaung Shwe in overseas museums. An example in the British Museum was part of the field collection made by Sir Bertram S. Carey of 112 clay pipes which had been gifted to him by the Sawbwa of Nyaung Shwe in 1921. 'Smoking-Pipe', British Museum, accessed 11 April 2017, [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=561934&partId=1&people=41023&peopleA=41023-3-31&page=2](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=561934&partId=1&people=41023&peopleA=41023-3-31&page=2).

<sup>174</sup> Smith, *Religion and Politics in Burma.*, 251.

<sup>175</sup> Zon Pann Pwint, 'Aung San Returns to Kyat Notes', *The Myanmar Times*, 24 November 2013, <https://www.mmtimes.com/lifestyle/8868-aung-san-returns-to-kyat-notes.html>.

Shwebonpwint Pagoda Library and Museum in Pyay not only renovated its displays in October 2013, but was also formally re-constituted as the Sri Ksetra Heritage Trust in 2014, the same year that the nearby Pyu Ancient Cities (Halin, Beikthano and Sri Ksetra), were granted UNESCO World Heritage status.<sup>176</sup>



Figure 2.18. 'Ancient clay pipes' at Shwebonpwint Pagoda Library and Museum, Pyay, 14 August 2015. Photograph: Heidi Tan, courtesy Shwebonpwint Pagoda Library and Museum.

According to museum Secretary U Tin Sein, the collection included archaeological materials that had been deposited by Gordon Luce when the museum was established in 1948. Furthermore, cross-institutional collaboration had included working closely with staff and students from the nearby Fieldschool of Archaeology to display Pyu objects from the local area. A group of pipes was organised according to materials – clay, metal and bamboo – with attention given to labelling and the authenticity of the objects. These were placed upright on a plinth and captioned: 'Ancient Clay Pipes'. The director of the school U Win Kyaing had devised a coded method of placing the earlier pipes upright on their bases, while a number of the metal pipes deemed later copies were laid flat (fig.2.18).<sup>177</sup>

While the Yadana Man Aung Temple lacks the support and resources that other pagoda museums have to renovate the displays as observed at the Shwedagon Pagoda and Shwebonpwint Pagoda, nonetheless intermittent cleaning and incremental changes have been made. Photographic documentation undertaken by U Mya Thaug demonstrates that even small shifts in the selection and placement of objects can impact their visibility and significance. This was evident in the first of the 48 cabinets in the eastern prayer hall, with the re-centring of a 'ruby' stupa that had previously resided

<sup>176</sup> The Pyu brick walled and moated sites dating from 200 BC to 900 AD were the first in Myanmar to be inscribed by UNESCO. See <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1158/>

<sup>177</sup> U Tin Sein, Secretary, interview with the author, 16 August 2015. See Appendix 1, A.12.

at the margins of the cabinet prior to August 2016 (fig.2.19 below).<sup>178</sup> Earlier that year, a pair of winged deities had been added to the group and eventually these and the ‘ruby’ stupa were raised onto the plinth at the centre surrounded by boxes of tiny gemstones. The two larger gilded stupas were now more visible in the spacious periphery of the cabinet. The model stupa with multiple standing Buddha images in niches (left of the display) recalls the prototypes for the stepped octagonal tower of Yadana Man Aung Temple, an architectural style that remains unique to Shan State.<sup>179</sup>



Figure 2.19. Showcase number 1, trustees’ photo album, ca.2006 courtesy U Mya Thaug (top left). Re-arranged display in January 2016. (top right) and in August 2016 (below). Photographs: Heidi Tan.

U Mya Thaug’s decision to re-position the ‘ruby’ stupa in time for Thadingyut festival around September was another instance of engaging the ‘museum effect’ in a way that brought attention to the ‘ancient heritage’ of the temple namely its patrons and the relics that included King Mindon’s heirloom ruby and the ruby-inlaid sword hilt

<sup>178</sup> The stupa is constructed of wire strung with red stones. At least one other was observed at Sakya Man Aung Pagoda in Mrauk-U. Fieldwork, 9 January 2016.

<sup>179</sup> Mon prototypes in regions that were once part of the same Tai geo-political sphere known as Lan Na (13<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries) include Wat Kukut (circa 11<sup>th</sup> century) and Wat Harinpunchai in Lamphun, northern Thailand. Carol Stratton, *Buddhist Sculpture of Northern Thailand* (Serindia Publications, Inc., 2004), 115–16.

enshrined at the temple.<sup>180</sup> A subtle reminder of these relics starts with the eastern entryway or Ruby Stairway, said to have been painted with a colourant known as hinthabada which is derived from mercuric oxide.<sup>181</sup> This ingredient produces the distinctively rich red colour of Inle region lacquerware.<sup>182</sup>

The 'ruby stupa' also invokes legends of the Buddha's relics where King Okkalapa offered a crown of rubies to the Buddha after the hair relics were enshrined at the Shwedagon Pagoda.<sup>183</sup> Rubies are also associated with powerful Buddha images, notably the ruby-eyed or Padamyashin wish fulfilling Buddha who resides on the eastern upper terrace of the Shwedagon Pagoda. This is said to be one of the most potent places at the pagoda, where prayers are said at the start of a pagoda hti-renovation ceremony.<sup>184</sup> Although most devotees will not have had the chance to worship in this shrine, a direct association with rubies and related stones such as spinels is for many still made on a regular basis through the consumption of gems, which remain a popular form of adornment especially as they have astrological significance for those born on a Sunday. A more acute notion of embodied knowledge of the potency of rubies is seen in the practice in previous times of skin implants using auspicious metals and other materials notably rubies for their protective properties. An early 19<sup>th</sup> century account includes observations of the insertion of polished rubies under the skin.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> U Mya Thaug, interview with the author, 25 February 2016. San Ya, 'Nyaung Shwe Yadana Man Aung Temple. A Brief History [in Myanmar]', 1. Nang Lao Hom, 'History of Yadana Man Aung Pagoda (in Myanmar)'. According to the Shan *Hsipaw Chronicle* at least three of the many items of regalia that were gifted to the sawbwas by the Burmese king were decorated with rubies, including a dagger and sheath, a betel set with various ruby-encrusted containers and a necklace with rubies at the centre. Sai Aung Tun, *History of the Shan State. From Its Origins to 1962.*, 121.

<sup>181</sup> Mya Thaug, 'History and Knowledge of Yadana Man Aung Temple (in Myanmar)'.

<sup>182</sup> This was still in production around 2000. Sylvia Fraser-Lu, *Burmese Lacquerware*, Revised and Enlarged (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2000), 165.

<sup>183</sup> Moore, 'Ritual Continuity and Stylistic Change in Pagoda Consecration and Renovation', 26, n.37. A ruby hair pin was one of the attributes of a righteous king at Pagan according to the *Glass Palace Chronicle*. Sylvia Fraser-Lu, 'A Lacquered History of the Kings of Pagan from an Illustrated Glass Palace Chronicle', *The Journal of Burma Studies* 20, no. 2 (December 2016): 264, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jbs.2016.0009>.

<sup>184</sup> Its image is screened live by internal video to all four devotional halls where women and other devotees who are excluded from the upper level shrine may offer prayers. Moore, Mayer, and Win Pe, *Shwedagon*, 111, 125, 171. Also see Moore, 'Ritual Continuity and Stylistic Change in Pagoda Consecration and Renovation', 10, 26. The nine gems are said to have decorated the upper level of King Thibaw's throne presumably to convey his symbolic attributes, including glory (ruby), honour (diamond), grace (pearl), greatness (coral), strength (zircon), adoration (sapphire), power (cat's eye), health (topaz) and peace (emerald). Ma Thanegi, "The Thrones Of Myanmar Kings," n.d., <http://www.myanmar-image.com/mandalay/palace/thrones/>.

<sup>185</sup> Ralph Isaacs, 'Captain Marryat's Burmese Collection and the Rath, or Burmese Imperial State Carriage', *Journal of the History of Collections* 17, no. 1 (1 January 2005): 60, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhc/fhi004>.

The re-centred 'ruby stupa' therefore drew attention to the auspiciousness of Yadana Man Aung Buddha and King Mindon's ruby-laid relics and to the merit of the temple patron Sawbwa Sao Maung. The merit associated with the wealth and status of these patrons may be attributed to the region's rich natural resources, gem-stones in particular. The ruby trade had historically brought wealth and colonial trading interests into the region. According to the *Glass Palace Chronicle* (c.1829), King Alaungsithu's collection of rubies from Mount Mali for enshrinement at two pagodas reiterates the importance of the stone in the upper regions of the country and Shan State.<sup>186</sup> Rubies from these regions were also highly prized by foreigners who sought to trade with mines around Mogok near the border of present-day Sagyin region north of Mandalay and Shan State. In 1637 ruby mining and trading came under royal monopoly when King Thalun imposed restrictions in order to control their value, together with the trade in other commodities such as gold and imported Indian textiles, not long after the arrival of the Dutch East India Trading Company.<sup>187</sup> Large returns for Kings Mindon and Thibaw inspired the British Government to continue to survey and speculate for rubies by leasing mines in 1889 in the same area.<sup>188</sup>

### Objects as Auspicious 'Contact Points'

Within the Inner Museum three cabinets with the greatest prominence are in the eastern prayer hall and all three have printed labels. One of these is the display of royal manuscripts and associated lacquerware where a moment of sensory engagement revealed that there are other ways of realising the significance of these materials that are not ordinarily possible without the intervention of the trustee. The moment of contact with these objects was significant as it demonstrated how embodied knowledge comes from a sensory understanding of the most highly valued objects in the museum.

The notion of the object as 'contact point' as employed by Jeffrey Feldman is helpful in this respect. Premised on James Clifford's experience of the museum as a 'contact

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<sup>186</sup> The Chronicle was named after the hall decorated with mosaic glass at the court of King Bagyidaw (r.1819-1837), where it was compiled. Pe Maung Tin and Gordon H. Luce (trs.), *The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Myanmar*, Third (Yangon, Myanmar: Unity Publishing House, 2008), 125.

<sup>187</sup> Present in Burma from 1634 to 1680, the VOC traded prolifically in goods particularly across the Bay of Bengal between India and Burma, which included the transshipment of ruby traders and other Indian merchants to Burma as well as the provision of loans to them. Ruby-mining was undertaken as *covée* labour and the trade was conducted through official brokers. Wil O. Dijk, *Seventeenth-Century Burma and the Dutch East India Company, 1634-1680* (Copenhagen: NIAS, 2006), 85, 47, 48, 64, 83, 85-88.

<sup>188</sup> George Scott C., *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States.*, vol. II., Part I. (Rangoon: Superintendent, Government Printing, Burma, 1900), 221-23.

zone', Feldman proposes sensory engagements as another way to understand objects and their associations with colonial relations of power. He considers the relationship of the human body to the object as alluded to by other scholars:

Expanding the idea of contact to reclaim the senses is possible if the museum is conceived as a social world shaped by the experience of the body. This reclamation occurs when the frame of museum contact is recalibrated from museum space to museum object. It begins by tracking 'what the body means and does' for museum objects (Bergson 1991:17), or by imagining 'one's own body' and museum objects (Merleau-Ponty 1958:112), or by seeing the 'socially informed body' (Bourdieu 1977:124) in museum objects.<sup>189</sup>

A visceral example of a 'contact point' is the smell he experienced of a display of leather shoes at the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. Since the first pair of child's shoes were displayed in 1960 at a Holocaust trial, shoes collected from the Nazi concentration camps have become what Feldman describes as the ultimate kind of 'metonymic contact point' in museums.<sup>190</sup> A pair of child's shoes displayed in Israel's Yad Vashem museum now stands for all the children killed in the Holocaust.

Despite the many personal possessions that have come to typify Holocaust displays, the 'sensory record' is still largely lacking in museums, in particular the sense of smell. As others have discussed of the Western museum experience, the olfactory dimension is the most visceral and yet is relegated with touch and taste to the realm of the 'irrational', whilst sight and hearing are privileged as the means to rational knowledge.<sup>191</sup>

## Royal Manuscripts and Lacquer

The sense of smell is called into play in the temple museum, through the association of events within the prayer halls, such as the aromas of fresh flower offerings and perfumed water, or food being consumed nearby. Sometimes however smell might accompany touch in an unexpected way, as for example when a cabinet is opened for inspection or an object is brought out for scrutiny. While historical evidence suggests trustees regularly made presentations to visitors to the temple, U Mya Thaug went

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<sup>189</sup> Feldman, 'Contact Points: Museums and the Lost Body Problem', 255.

<sup>190</sup> Feldman, 255–56.

<sup>191</sup> Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden, and Ruth B. Phillips, eds., *Sensible Objects. Colonialism, Museums, and Material Culture*, Wenner-Gren International Symposium Series (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2006), 7.



further by taking royal manuscripts out of the cabinet in the eastern hall. Two that were accompanied by a printed caption record the 'meritorious deed' undertaken by King Mindon and his Queen; a donation of five lacquered-copper manuscripts and nine lacquered palm-leaf manuscripts or kammawa (M) and a palm-leaf manuscript or pe-za (M) with a translation of the *Atthasālinī*, a fifth-century commentary on the first section of the *Abhidhamma* by the Indian scholar Buddhagosa (fig.2.20).<sup>192</sup> These typically comprise one of the nine sections or *khandaka* (P) of the Pali Vinaya Pitaka which relate to different aspects of the Theravāda monk's life.<sup>193</sup> Kammawa are also used in recitations for rituals such as the construction of a new building, cleansing a monk of his sins and for protection, and manuscripts are now typically printed on card.<sup>194</sup>

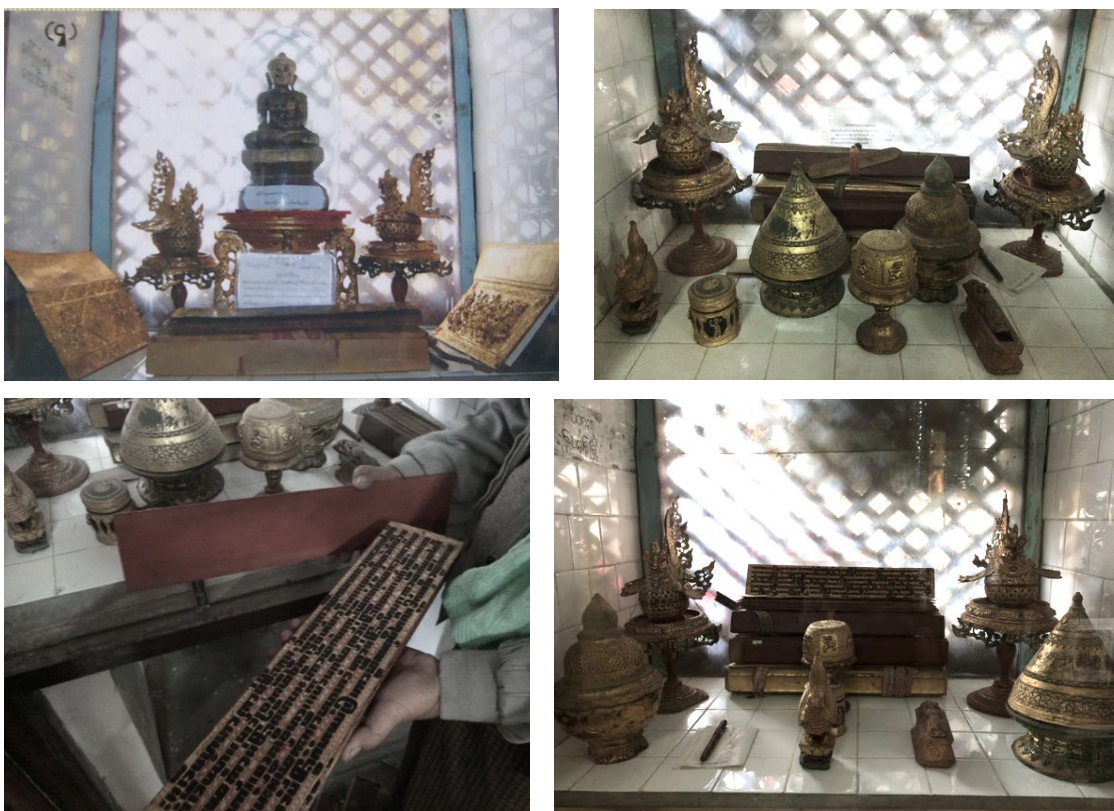


Figure 2.20. King Mindon's manuscripts, showcase number 4 ca.2006, trustee's photo album (top left), in February 2016 (top right). U Mya Thaug examines the kammawa (below left) 26 February 2016. The display re-arranged (below right), 16 August 2016. Photographs: Heidi Tan.

<sup>192</sup>Ross Carter, 'Buddhaghosa', in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005), 1073–74. The *Abhidhamma* or 'higher teachings' was the third collection of texts in the Pali Canon (see Glossary). I am grateful to Ashin Dhammasami for his clarifications of these contents.

<sup>193</sup> Venerables Candiman and Kumala, Shan State Buddhist University, interview with the author, 13 August 2016.

<sup>194</sup> Kammawa were made in Mandalay during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century although by the mid-1980s there were only four families still making them. Fraser-Lu, *Burmese Lacquerware*, 137, 159.

The significance of the manuscripts is underscored by the inclusion of a fountain-pen displayed with a hand-written caption that alludes to the date of 1949, the 'donation receiver' U Myin Yon and his pen (fig.2.20, lower right). The caption may refer to U Myin Yon's responsibility for recording donations at the temple,<sup>195</sup> while the juxtaposition of the pen with the gifts lends them authenticity by association with the act of recording their receipt. While the information provided by the labels memorialises and authenticates the King's merit-making, trustees' notes demonstrate that from time to time further explanation of the significance of the manuscripts has been warranted. In 1969, a presentation made by trustee U Tun Yee to a visiting group of 'model workers' included the information that the king had donated a kammawa to the town's chief monk during his coronation ceremony in 1854.<sup>196</sup> His colleague U San Ya continued the presentation in the eastern hall, with a detailed account of the relics and the means by which they were enshrined. He also emphasised historical relations with the court, with mention of King Mindon's conferral of the town to Sawbwa Sao Maung and his provision of military assistance to resolve the conflict with the Intha in 1862.<sup>197</sup> The inclusion of this information was highly poignant given the political persecutions of the sawbwas and their families a few years earlier in 1962.

Yet another kind of intervention demonstrated the trustee's understanding of the manuscripts and gave them authenticity. To 'track', 'imagine' or 'see' these objects in the ways discussed above by Feldman emerged in U Mya Thaug's handling of them. This momentary event entailed several well-practiced sequences of unwrapping a woven binding ribbon or *sazigyo* (M) and careful turning of the fragile palm leaves before re-wrapping them and returning the manuscripts to the display. The material quality of the lacquered kammawa with its worn gilded surfaces was still sufficiently unctuous to retain the traces of fingerprints. Yet although lacquer exudes a pungent aroma for quite some time after manufacture any aromas had long since evaporated. In contrast, the worn palm-leaf manuscript was brittle, dusty and almost illegible. As U Mya Thaug blew off the dust and carefully wiped the leaf to improve its legibility, only the vague mustiness of the cabinet accompanied these actions of inspection and authentication.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Alternatively, it may refer to the year of the donation of the pen. I am grateful to Jotika Kur-Yearn for raising these possibilities. Personal communication, 24 June 2018.

<sup>196</sup> Tun Yee, 'What We Can Learn about Yadana Man Aung Pagoda [in Myanmar]', 2.

<sup>197</sup> San Ya, 'Nyaung Shwe Yadana Man Aung Temple. A Brief History [in Myanmar]'.

<sup>198</sup> The inspection of the cabinet was undertaken when U Mya Thaug had an unexpected break in his busy schedule. Fieldwork observations, 26 February 2016.

The close scrutiny of their material qualities viewed through the hands of their custodian differed from previous experiences of viewing manuscripts behind glass. Without the privilege of opening the showcase the true state of change – the loss of smell – could not be realised. Forms of display that privileged the ‘datasets’ alluded to earlier by Dudley were viewed at the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum.<sup>199</sup> For example, several manuscripts were displayed with the leaves opened out and mounted vertically, a format encountered in the National Museum and at museums overseas. Labels described the different types of doctrinal content, and the scripts and materials that were used in their production. However, there was little sense of how a sensory encounter could illuminate other attributes such as how these materials performed when they were handled or were recited from and used in rituals.

In addition to the lacquered manuscript, Feldman’s notion of a ‘metonymic contact point’ relates to other lacquer objects in the museum’s collection. The loss of the lacquermaking tradition adds to the rarity of surviving examples. In the context of the temple, lacquer stands for Shan culture, as it originates within the region. Shan State was for centuries the source of *thitsi* or lacquer sap that was extracted from the forest highlands and sent to Mandalay, Bagan and other regions where wares were produced. Shan lacquerwares have often been cited as superior over other regional forms.<sup>200</sup> The pedestal offering trays with unusual conical and domed covers for example, are forms that were amongst the sumptuary items that are observable in photographic portraits of the sawbwas taken during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>201</sup> The pair of lacquered *hintha* birds, trays of various kinds and boxes were made at old production centres such as Keng Tung and Laikha.

It is these forms of lacquer ware that U Mya Thaug had in mind as an example of the second of his three ideals of a museum, that pilgrims should be able to see things they have not seen before.<sup>202</sup> The rarity of these wares may be attributed to the interest from colonial collectors, driven by the interest generated by exhibitions such as the annual Provincial Art Exhibition mentioned in Chapter One. Lucian Scherman, director of the Royal Ethnographical Museum in Munich, included many objects that were

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<sup>199</sup> Dudley, *Museum Materialities*, 5.

<sup>200</sup> In 1832 Major Burney cited attributes such as ‘lightness and elegance...superior brilliancy of the varnish and colours’ to distinguish Shan lacquer workmanship. Fraser-Lu, *Burmese Lacquerware*, 161.

<sup>201</sup> Conway, *The Shan. Culture, Art and Crafts*, 65–66, 95, 105.

<sup>202</sup> The agency of objects has also been recognised as another form of ‘contact zone’ where objects can act both as ‘sources of knowledge and as catalyst for new relationships – both within and between these communities’. Here Peers and Brown refer to the knowledge gap that often exists between the generations within the context of source communities that many museums now work with. Peers and Brown, ‘Introduction’, 5.

decorated with lacquer among his acquisition of thousands of objects during his fifteen-month expedition through Ceylon, India and Burma (1910–1911).<sup>203</sup> His travel diary of 24 May 1911 notes that he selected ceremonial objects at the palace of the Sawbwa of Yawngnwe which had been laid out in a hall for him to view.<sup>204</sup> A photo illustrates that among the ceremonial clothes, weapons and silverware, there were also gilded vessels, offering trays and other accessories decorated with lacquer.<sup>205</sup>

Old examples of lacquer wares that were scattered throughout the Inner Museum's cabinets included a surprisingly wide range of cylindrical betel boxes, tiered offering vessels, covered offering trays, lacquered fans, headdresses and a model pavilion, gilded Keng Tung-style baskets and bowls. The ubiquitous use of lacquer was also observed within the temple, for example to gild Buddha images, and embellish the inner walls, shrines and the royal carriage that was parked in the Western entryway. Lacquerwares were also present at other pagoda museums; for example, fine gilded examples were displayed at the Shwedagon and Mahamuni Pagoda while in Dawei and Myeik offering vessels taken to festivals in large numbers were prominently marked with their owners' names.<sup>206</sup> However, unlike the Inner Museum's cabinets, these collections were viewed in spaces separated from the stupa and shrines. The integrated nature of the Inner Museum and the sensory experience this offered became apparent during the Thadingyut festival, when the temple was transformed into a vibrant social space. The museum became part of Feldman's notion of a 'social world shaped by the experience of the body' alluded to above.<sup>207</sup> Devotees engaged in sensorial ways within the ambience of the temple surrounded by the presence of lacquerwork in various forms. They collected holy water from the hand of the Buddha in the eastern hall and meditated in front of shrines. They socialised and chewed betel or slept after pulling the chariot with Phaung Daw Oo Buddhas around Nyaung Shwe. All this took place in the prayer halls that were embellished with glittering mirror mosaic-work underpinned by a substrate of lacquer and lime-plaster,<sup>208</sup> as well as gilded

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<sup>203</sup> Uta Weigelt, "...And Saved the State Thousands," in *Golden Land. Burma/Myanmar - 100 Years. Photographs by Christine Scherman and Birgit Neiser* (Munich: State Museum for Ethnology, 2013), 14.

<sup>204</sup> Wolfgang Stein, 'Hunting for Treasure in the Country of Gold', in *Golden Land. Burma/Myanmar - 100 Years. Photographs by Christine Scherman and Birgit Neiser*. (Munich: State Museum for Ethnology, 2013), 24.

<sup>205</sup> Stein, Figure 13.

<sup>206</sup> The names enabled the vessels to be retrieved after the festival. T. Richard Blurton and Ralph Isaacs, *Visions from the Golden Land. Burma and the Art of Lacquer* (London: Published for the Trustees of the British Museum by the British Museum Press, 2000), 52.

<sup>207</sup> Feldman, 'Contact Points: Museums and the Lost Body Problem', 255.

<sup>208</sup> Cement is now increasingly replacing traditional limeplaster according to fourth-generation glass artisan, Soe Win Naing. Interview with the author, 6 August 2016. Fieldwork observations, Yadana Man Aung Temple, 29 September 2017. Mirror mosaic work is thought to have been introduced after the

lacquer decoration in the form of reliefs and filigree made of lacquer putty or *tha-yo*. U Tun Yee noted in 1969 that the fine lacquer floral decoration that framed the arched niches was an ancient inheritance dating back to the Bagan period.<sup>209</sup> The same techniques of embellishment and framing were seen on the gilded portraits and royal carriage that were brought out for display during the festival.

## Gilded Portraits

Unlike the collections that remained firmly in their showcases at the Shwedagon Pagoda objects in the temple were often temporarily re-installed in new spaces during festivals. For example, portraits were gathered together in the south-eastern vestibule to honour the temple's patrons. The regular circulation of objects for special occasions distinguishes the keeping practices of this temple museum and demonstrates an active intention to renew their meanings.

The framed photographic portrait of the Sawbwa Sao Maung and the Mahadevi probably taken around 1900 by Philippe Adolphe Klier (1845–1911),<sup>210</sup> was normally displayed in one of the trustees' rooms within the eastern cloisters. Although it had not come from the palace and had remained at the temple for a long time, its age and provenance remained unknown to the trustee (fig.2.21 left).<sup>211</sup> In October 2017 it was installed within the south-eastern vestibule alongside a painted portrait of the Sawbwa. The elaborately gilded floral trellis that framed the portrait was another example of the unique lacquerwork found within the temple.

Susan Conway's vivid description of the Sawbwa's costume conveys a sense of how Shan rulers engaged with photographic portraiture in this case by travelling to Rangoon to have their photograph taken. Their right to sumptuary goods is reflected in the Burmese court apparel worn here – the prince's coat was embellished with gold-thread embroidery, silver and mother-of-pearl sequins and beetle wings, while the skirt was

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invasion of Siam in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century Harry L. Tilly, *Glass Mosaics of Burma. With Photographs* (Rangoon, Burma : Superintendent, Government Printing Office, 1901), 3.

<sup>209</sup> Tun Yee, 'What We Can Learn about Yadana Man Aung Pagoda [in Myanmar]', 1.

<sup>210</sup> Sao Sanda muses about the weight of the costumes. Sao Sanda, *The Moon Princess*, 19. For an intact published example of the image, dated to circa 1900, see: Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 308. Klier started work in Burma in 1871 and became well known for his interest in documenting the arts and crafts as well as portraits. For other works dated to the 1890s see: British Library, 'Burmese Image Maker', Online Gallery, 26 March 2009, <http://gallery.bl.uk/viewall/default.aspx?e=Asia,%20Pacific%20And%20Africa%20Collections&n=207>.

<sup>211</sup> U Mya Thaug, Win Naing Htwe, personal communication, 26 April 2018.

constructed of velvet panels with metallic thread, sequins and cut glass.<sup>212</sup> Subsequent embellishment of the portrait with gold-painted outlines, signals an attempt to highlight the costumes, jewellery and regalia including a sword and yak's tail flywhisk, in a way that replicates the application of gold to ritual objects, for example the embellishment of *parabaik* or illustrated folding books. The goldwork like gilding on Buddha images encapsulates the couple and keeps the material presence of their forms visible even as the printed images beneath fade.

The photo-portrait is a vivid reminder of the unstable nature of materials and the ways objects acquire different meanings through bodily and sensory 'enactments'.<sup>213</sup> In the same way that U Mya Thaug's handling of the manuscripts revealed a sensory understanding of their material qualities, the gilded outlines on the photographic image reveal the knowledge of one whose scrutiny of the royal attire was a haptic encounter.



Figure 2.21. Detail of gilded photo-portrait of the Mahadevi with Sao Maung (left), 29 September 2017. Painted portrait of Sao Maung by U Sein Pe dated 1964, south-eastern vestibule (right), 25 February 2016. Photographs: Heidi Tan.

<sup>212</sup> Velvet articles were amongst sumptuary goods from Mandalay Palace displayed at the National Museum in Yangon. They include a cushion, saddle with blanket, court costumes and a coffin cover. Ministry of Culture, Department of Archaeology, National Museum and Library, *Myanma Cultural Property. Royal Regalia* (Yangon: Ministry of Culture, 2011). A velvet bag was also recorded for depositing the ashes of King Bodawpaya (1781—1819) before they were cast into the Irrawaddy River. Archaeological Department (Burma), *List of Ancient Monuments in Burma* (Rangoon: Office of the Superintendent, Govt. Printing, Burma, 1916), 8. Conway, *The Shan. Culture, Art and Crafts*, 64.

<sup>213</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 113.

Hooper-Greenhill's notion of meaning derived from 'enactments' refers to the body's 'performative relationship' with the object.<sup>214</sup> She cites the example of Maori ancestral carvings which typically remain dormant in European museums, but are treated as animate in museums in New Zealand, where they are talked to and cared for through rituals. This periodic movement or 'enactment' of objects into the museum was seen during the Thadingyut festival when the portrait was transferred from the relative darkness of the cloisters to the vestibule. Made visible by the flood of natural light it became an object for study in juxtaposition with the painted portrait. It also assumed the quality of an icon enshrined within its filigree frame like the shrines within the prayer halls.

The implications for merit-making were alluded to by Yin May Thawe who mentioned that local families stop to pay respects at the Sawbwa's painted portrait.<sup>215</sup> The reverence held by photographic images is frequently seen when homage is paid for example, by bus drivers who keep photographs above the dashboard for this purpose. The reverence for photographs emerged particularly during the late 1950s and early 60s as discussed by Mandy Sadan.<sup>216</sup> She notes too that pagodas typically exhibit historical photographs, one example being the Shwesandaw Pagoda Museum in Pyay.<sup>217</sup> The documentation of natural disasters and subsequent pagoda renovations as well as unexplained sightings as discussed earlier, are recurrent themes in such pagoda museum displays.<sup>218</sup>

The painting signed by the artist U Sein Da and dated 1964, presented the Sawbwa with the new sumptuary regalia introduced by the British after the demise of the Burmese court in 1885. He wears an embroidered ceremonial Shan coat and medals conferred by the British (fig.2.21, right).<sup>219</sup> Sir Sao Maung, as he was also known, received two titles; a 'Gold Chain of Honour' or *Kyet Thaye zaung shwe Salwe ya Min* (KSM) in 1901 and Knight Commander (KCIE) of the Most Eminent Order of the Indian

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<sup>214</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, 113.

<sup>215</sup> Yin May Thawe, interview with the author, 29 September 2017.

<sup>216</sup> Mandy Sadan, 'The Historical Visual Economy of Photography in Burma', *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde* 170, no. 2/3 (2014): 305, 307.

<sup>217</sup> Sadan, 301.

<sup>218</sup> At the Shwesandaw Pagoda Museum a number of photographs were dedicated to the flood of 1974, while at Phaung Daw Oo Temple, photographs include the karaweik barge that capsized in 1965. Fieldwork, 15 August 2015, 12 January 2016.

<sup>219</sup> The medals signified the ranking of the sawbwas under the Imperial system of honours that replaced the old system of allegiances following the exile of King Thibaw. Susan Conway lists the order of sawbwas within the new system who were entitled to a nine-gun salute: Keng Tung, Hsipaw, Muong Nai, Yawnghwe and Tawng Peng. Conway, *The Shan. Culture, Art and Crafts*, 64–65.

Empire in 1908.<sup>220</sup> The inclusion of Shan regalia here – a betel box and spittoon – recalls their abundant presence in photographs of Shan delegations at diplomatic events such as the Delhi Durbar of 1903.<sup>221</sup>



Figure 2.22 Pilgrims rest in the vestibules, 28-29 September 2017. Photographs: Heidi Tan.

During the festival the influx of visitors from further afield meant that the vestibule became a resting point with accumulations of mats, eating utensils and resting bodies occupying much of the floor-space in front of the portraits (fig.2.22). The experience of seeing these formal portraits surrounded by daily activities evokes another way of conceiving ‘contact points’. As Hooper-Greenhill has observed objects can take on meaning in everyday life in ‘encoded’ ways, drawn not necessarily directly from the object itself but through related events and experiences and the associated memories of these that the objects come to represent.<sup>222</sup> Hence Sao Sanda’s understanding of the mural was grounded in her memories of the day’s rituals and the sensory experience of these, as much as with her later reflections on the significance of the mural itself. The devotees socialising in the vestibule however, did not engage directly with the portraits but rather with each other seated on mats on the cool tiled floors. This experience of the portraits was ‘tacit and sensory rather than...articulated’.<sup>223</sup> Being

<sup>220</sup> Simms, *Great Lords of the Sky: Burma’s Shan Aristocracy*, 296–97. Roper Lethbridge, *The Golden Book of India, a Genealogical and Biographical Dictionary of the Ruling Princes, Chiefs, Nobles, and Other Personages, Titled or Decorated, of the Indian Empire* (London, New York: Macmillan, 1893), xiv, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b4512521;view=1up;seq=20>.

<sup>221</sup> Conway, *The Shan. Culture, Art and Crafts*, Pl.86.

<sup>222</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 109.

<sup>223</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, 112.



comfortable in the presence of the portraits did not however contravene protocols of respect such as stopping to pay homage to the sawbwa. In fact, devotees also used other sacred spaces around the temple to stay overnight during the festival, including the abode of the wish fulfilling Buddha.

### The Wish Fulfilling Buddha

A crowned seated Buddha image resides in a shrine within the cloisters along the north-east perimeter wall close to the trustee's office and living quarters (fig.2.2, f). A sign identifies it as 'Ancient wish fulfilling, Yadana Yan Aung Buddha'. As the image is thought to be one of the earliest donations, dating to the time of the building of the temple in 1866, there is concern for its security. Little else is known of the image except that it was originally housed within the main temple and was repaired at one time by a donor (fig.2.23).<sup>224</sup>

The gilded image inlaid with coloured glass glints in the semi-darkness of the shrine festooned with electric lights and infused with fragrant flower offerings and cups of water. The altar is flanked by portraits of the monks Shin Thiwali and Uppagut by the artist Kan Lwun. The powerful monk Shin Uppagut is depicted eating from his alms bowl while looking up to the sky. He does so to control the sun in order to be able to eat after noon and thereby circumvent the monastic rule against doing so (fig.2.23, right).<sup>225</sup> The rear wall of the shrine houses a modern retinue of the Twenty-Eight Buddhas, the lineage of 27 Buddhas that existed before Gotama Buddha who is the 28th.<sup>226</sup> U Mya Thaung reminisced on the loss of an old set of images that used to reside high up along the walls of the eastern hall in the temple.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> U Mya Thaung, interview with the author, 25 February 2016. Repairs are visible to the wing-like projections from the crown.

<sup>225</sup> Crosby, *Theravada Buddhism*, 131.

<sup>226</sup> Each follows the biographical pattern of Gotama, that is he overcomes Mara and obtains enlightenment, and each of these events takes place under a different type of tree. The lineage has existed since at least the Pagan period. Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 15.

<sup>227</sup> U Mya Thaung, interview with the author, 25 February 2016.



Figure 2.23. Wish fulfilling Crowned Buddha with painting of Uppagut by artist Kan Lwun (right). 25 February 2016. Photograph: Heidi Tan.

This sense of loss and concern to safe-guard ancient images is palpable at the smaller temples such as Yadana Man Aung and explains the close proximity of the shrine to the trustee's office. Catherine Raymond observed that Shan Buddha images have not been systematically studied and are difficult to identify, which makes them particularly vulnerable to illicit trafficking.<sup>228</sup> Iconographic attributes of the 'adorned Buddha' images accord with the attributes of the crowned Buddha illustrated above – the ovoid face with tall arched eyebrows and a 'shy smile', three rings around the neck, and the legs crossed in the 'full lotus' or *padmāsana* position – are typical of Shan images.<sup>229</sup> She cites several examples from Shan State that are dated to the 19<sup>th</sup> century with similar features, including Shan style jewellery that differs from the Burmese crossed-chain *salwe*, a two-tiered crown comprised of a lotus-bud shaped finial and pointed crown, and wing-like appendages.<sup>230</sup>

The significance of the crowned image as discussed in Chapter One, was more likely associated with the Buddha's powers as a cakkavattin (P) or Universal Ruler, a 'king of kings' whose enlightened status was signified by the earth-touching gesture as noted by Alexandra Green. She also observes that the crowned Buddha image by extension alludes to a close relationship between a ruler and the Buddha i.e. to the rulers' own

<sup>228</sup> Catherine Raymond, 'Shan Buddhist Art on the Market: What, Where and Why?', *Contemporary Buddhism* 10, no. 1 (May 2009): 142, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14639940902916219>.

<sup>229</sup> Raymond, 144–46.

<sup>230</sup> Raymond, Figs. 4, 6.

supramundane powers.<sup>231</sup> A similar association could be inferred with the temple's royal patron given its appearance when the temple was built. However, U Mya Thaung simply enthused that the crowned Buddha was *dago shi-da-baw* – 'definitely has power'. His interest in the image is strikingly different from that of U Maung Maung Gyi's when he selected the crowned image from the northern shrine of the Shwedagon Pagoda in Chapter One. While the latter was chosen for its stylistic attributes and its age and rarity, the crowned image at Yadana Man Aung Temple was recognised as 'ancient' as well as powerful and therefore deserving of a separate shrine. This difference in approach demonstrated the shifts in meaning that objects acquired as they moved between the spaces of the temple, and the role of the trustee-keeper which in this case remained unbounded by spatial or conceptual distinctions of the museum and temple.

The transferral of the crowned Buddha to its own shrine brought renewed attention to its age, potency, and association with the Sawbwa. However, as U Mya Thaung noted, visitors often spent more time in the auspicious eastern hall closer to the Yadana Man Aung Buddha. Given the strong connection with the powerful Mahamuni Buddha and the sense of presence that devotees experience it is not surprising that this should be the case. Furthermore, visitors are not encouraged to gild the crowned Buddha, while other old images are placed within the eastern hall in order to receive gold leaf. Personal preferences and long-held beliefs about certain images and auspicious areas within the temple also guide devotees. For example, Yin May Thawe explained that her family had always included in their circumambulations after visiting the prayer halls, the *aung-mye* or 'victory ground' next to the Saturday or south-western corner where another powerful crowned Buddha image resides.<sup>232</sup>

The differing behaviour around potent sacred images points to the multivalent nature of worship contingent on the experience of ritual efficacy or the devotee's particular needs and practice. For example, interpreter U Taw Aung Myat suggested that social conditioning linked to education affects a person's predisposition towards the notion of supramundane power – the more educated, he includes himself in this category, are more likely to adhere to the practice of morality. The reference here is to right speech, right action and right livelihood, three of the eight components or 'noble eightfold path' that the Buddha taught in his first sermon.<sup>233</sup> He also added another, right intention,

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<sup>231</sup> Green, *Eclectic Collecting. Art from Burma in the Denison Museum*, 204.

<sup>232</sup> Yin May Thawe, interview with the author, 29 September 2017.

<sup>233</sup> Crosby, *Theravada Buddhism*, 113.

which together with a moral disposition, is more important in prayers for granting one's hopes and wishes than the belief in the inherent power of images. He did not deny the practice of venerating images that are said to grant wishes but reasoned that without the right intentions one will not obtain their wishes even from a *sutaungpyi* Buddha.<sup>234</sup> This echoes the view of Daw Baby Ohn discussed in Chapter One, that meditation on the Buddha's special qualities rather than reliance on images was more effective.

As these opinions show, the motivations for engaging in different forms of worship are complex, whether these take the form of meditation or devotional practice. The prevalence of images points to their enduring importance as meritorious gifts. As noted by Schober, the merit associated with donating a Buddha image is considered the highest and is as important as the layperson's commitment to the core ideals of the faith; the Three Jewels – the Buddha, his teachings or dhamma and the monastic community or sangha.<sup>235</sup> As a category of the Buddha's 'remains', images are manifestations of the sacred and are believed to be inherently powerful and even those who eschew this, will typically have a home shrine in which an image resides.<sup>236</sup>

Although little was known of this image and crowned Buddha that was retrieved from the northern shrine at the Shwedagon Pagoda, these sacred objects demonstrated how movement at different times in their lives brought new meanings to bear. As the former was moved from the temple to its own abode in the cloisters, the latter was moved from the recesses of a shrine into the museum where it was re-gilded and identified as a rare 'Buddha Statue' (see Chapter One: *A Crowned Buddha from the Northern Shrine*). As Tythacott observes in her seminal work on the biographies of a group of Chinese deities:

The meanings of objects are always in flux and are contextual; if context changes, so too, inevitably, will meaning. Meanings may lie dormant or be activated as objects move through different interpretive spheres. Not only do objects travel through different 'regimes of value' during their lives, they may also be endowed with multiple meanings at any particular moment (Kopytoff 1986). As different individuals come into contact with things, different meanings are imposed.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> U Mya Thaug, U Taw Aung Myat, interview with the author, 25 February 2016.

<sup>235</sup> Schober, 'Venerating the Buddha's Remains in Burma: From Solitary Practice to the Cultural Hegemony of Communities', 112.

<sup>236</sup> Schober, 126.

<sup>237</sup> Tythacott, *The Lives of Chinese Objects*, 7. She cites Hooper-Greenhill on the unstable nature of objects. Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 114.

In this case both images had remained dormant for significant periods of time before being transferred to places where they would come into closer contact with visitors. While the new display behind glass emphasised the formal qualities of the crowned Buddha, the shrine in the cloisters created a space further away from the potency of the Yadana Man Aung Buddha, where devotees could seek additional blessings from the crowned wish fulfilling Buddha. However, the shrine room also became a social space for pilgrims to rest and store their belongings during the Thadingyut festival. The shrine may have been an auspicious yet liminal space most of the time, but during the festival it became a hive of activity with pilgrims rolling out their sleeping mats across the length of the room for several days and nights.<sup>238</sup> Like the vestibules within the temple where ancient objects were tacitly experienced as part of the social life of the temple, the auspicious abode also accommodated those in need of rest.

These moments of re-contextualisation are encapsulated in the notion of 'biographies of things' in which objects like people have lives. Introduced by Igor Kopytoff in 1986 biographies were a means to elicit how different cultures define, classify and use objects.<sup>239</sup> While the shrine represents a short moment of transition in the life of the crowned Buddha, in the next Chapter further analysis is made of another potent Buddha image and its multiple lives as it moved from the temple to the museum and back again in replicated form (see Chapter Three: *A Life in the Museum*).

### Mobile Shrines

Two processional vehicles, objects of 'ancient heritage', were kept in spaces outside the museums due mainly to their size and continued use in the festival of Thadingyut. These objects were part of the ritual paraphernalia used for hosting the Phaung Daw Oo Buddhas. Like the gilded portraits they evoked historical patrons and the origin myth of the Buddhas whose potency conferred legitimacy to the lineage of sawbwas starting with the first ancestor the Sawbwa Si Seng Hpa to whom it is believed the Buddhas appeared in 1359 CE.

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<sup>238</sup> Fieldnotes, 29 September 2017.

<sup>239</sup> Kopytoff, Igor, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process", in *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 66–67.

### *The Gilded Carriage*

Parked in the shuttered west entrance portico, the gilded carriage is said to have come from Sawbwa Sao Maung (r.1897–1926) and was made during his life-time.<sup>240</sup> It was used for the ceremonial procession of the Phaung Daw Oo Buddhas around the town during the festival until it was replaced in the late 1950s (fig.2.24, right). The gilded carriage is still crowned with a removable shrine and tiered tower or *pya-that* embellished with inlaid lacquer decoration. The shrine was used to convey the images from the royal barge shaped as the mythical bird or *karaweik* (M), on their arrival at the town's jetty. The four Buddha images were conveyed on silver 'thrones' or *palin* (M) on the carriage which was pulled by crowds around the town to the palace. Following a ritual lunch, they were then taken to the staging hall known as *Yadana San Kyaung* or *Kyaung-daw* situated next to the temple, where they stayed for three nights.<sup>241</sup> This remains the longest stop on their tour of towns around the lake which currently takes 18 days.<sup>242</sup>

Following Sao Shwe Thaike's demise in 1962 and the decline of the sawbwas, the festival was no longer patronised in the same way. The palace visit was excluded from the itinerary and a government representative officiated at the jetty to welcome the Buddhas to the town.<sup>243</sup> During the festival in September 2017, the carriage which was normally parked in the western entryway was placed to one side and the tiered tower taken off to house a miniature group of Phaung Daw Oo Buddhas. Normally displayed within the Inner Museum, the group represents all five of the Buddha images set within their octagonal bases that represent their silver thrones (fig.2.24, left).

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<sup>240</sup> U Mya Thaug, interview with the author 26 February and 14 August 2016. Note that Ralph Isaacs uses 'rath' to describe a similar royal carriage that was taken from Tavoy (Dawei) back to England in 1826. Isaacs, 'Captain Marryat's Burmese Collection and the Rath, or Burmese Imperial State Carriage', 66. The term 'rath' derives from the Sanskrit *rath-yatra* or chariot procession with sacred image particularly the deity Jagannatha, hence the etymology for 'juggernaut'. [https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/rath\\_yatra](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/rath_yatra)

<sup>241</sup> This was rebuilt in the mid-1990s. U M Mya Thaug, 14 August 2016. Literally 'holy monastery' the staging hall is identified as unique to the region as it is dedicated to housing the Phaung Daw Oo Buddhas during their annual travels around the lake. Robinne, 'The Monastic Unity. A Contemporary Burmese Artefact?', 84.

<sup>242</sup> This took place 21 September to 8 October in 2017, with the longest stop being made at Nyaung Shwe from 28-30 September.

<sup>243</sup> In September 2017 the festival was attended by the President of the Hluttaw (Legislature), U Win Myint.



Figure 2.24. Miniature Phaung Daw Oo Buddha images at the Inner Museum (left), 16 August 2016. Pya-that shrine for the Phaung Daw Oo Buddhas (right), 26 September 2017. Photographs: Heidi Tan.

The spontaneous configuration of the shrine for the Phaung Daw Oo Buddhas and U Mya Thaug's expertise in directing the spectacle of procession demonstrates the essential role the trustee-keeper plays in maintaining the use of ritual objects.

#### *The Silver Vehicle*

Like the gilded portrait the silver vehicle is another ritual object that is kept out of sight for most of the year, parked within a special shed opposite the north entrance. The medallion at the front of the vehicle is inscribed with the mythical human-bird figure or *kinnari*, the symbol of Kayah State and the donors' names: Sein Wunna the Kayah State Minister and his wife Daw Mya Mya Sein and family with the date 1959 (fig. 2.25, left). The vehicle underwent renovation in 1968 after initially being stored underground and today appears to be even more robust than described in the trustee's information sheet.<sup>244</sup> According to Myo Myint Htun, a festival volunteer and member of the fire brigade, the current chassis was re-cycled from a heavy-terrain vehicle in 1977 while the delicate sheet-silver pya-that was originally made in 1957.<sup>245</sup>

<sup>244</sup> Mya Thaug, 'Information about the Baw Vehicle [in Myanmar]', trans. Su Latt Win (Yadana Man Aung Temple, Undated).

<sup>245</sup> Fieldnotes, 29 September 2017.



Figure 2.25. Silver vehicle (left), 26 September 2017. Returning to the jetty after the third night (right), 30 September 2017. Photographs: Heidi Tan.

The donation reflects the links that continued between Shan and other communities in the year that the sawbwas had to abdicate. Daw Myint Myint Thein recalled in 2017 that remote communities have long been participants in the festival, while her brother U Soe Hla noted that the Kayah donor of the silver vehicle had been married to a woman from Nyaung Shwe.<sup>246</sup> Devotees including Pa-O women in indigo outfits and colourful headcloths, took turns to pull the silver vehicle by ropes on its clockwise circumambulation of the town as U Mya Thaug followed behind in a van watching over the proceedings. Crowds thronged the route that was strewn with lotus flowers and popcorn as festival attendants collected cash in silver bowls and showered them with more auspicious popcorn (fig.2.25).

#### *Phaung Daw Oo Buddhas*

Local origin myths speak of the Phaung Daw Oo Hpaya or Temple of the Prow of the Royal Barge, a name Stadtner suggests is a later appropriation of the Burmese chronicle of King Alaungsithu (r.1113–1160) and his travels in a magical barge.<sup>247</sup> It reflects close relations with the Burmese in which the Shan claimed a shared lineage that they traced to the royal Sakya clan. Following the Buddha's passing and their

<sup>246</sup> U Soe Hla, personal communication, 29 September 2017. Daw Myint Myint Thein, interview with the author, 15 August 2016.

<sup>247</sup> Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 312.



division into different groups, one of these, the Nineteen Shan Clans, eventually came to rule the region that included the Shan States.<sup>248</sup> According to the Phaung Daw Oo Chronicle the king was given five Buddha images carved from the southern branch of the bodhi tree from Bodhgaya and a piece of powerful sandalwood by Thagyāmin (also known as Indra), which he kept on the prow of his boat as he journeyed to various places. One of these was Inle Lake where he stopped to enshrine the images in a cave at Than Htaung. They remained there for centuries until 1359 CE when the first Shan Sawbwa Si Seng Hpa saw light rays emitted from the cave and retrieved them. They were kept at the capital Yawnghwe which he founded. Several centuries afterwards in 1615 the female Sawbwa Nang Nung Pe re-housed them at Indein for safekeeping. They were moved again in 1771 due to a fire and again in 1881 to a monastery in the village of Namhu. The annual sojourn of the images for communities around the lake to pay homage to is said to have continued since the founder's time.<sup>249</sup>

Sao Sai Mong attributes the grand procession of the Buddha images by karaweik barge as a demonstration of how 'deeply ingrained' Buddhism is in the history of the Shan. The implication is that the festival is like a re-enactment of the royal barge journey that brings merit to all who participate.<sup>250</sup> This included the families who went out onto the lake to welcome the barge on its approach to Nyaung Shwe in 2017 and the flotilla of long boats powered by hundreds of Intha leg-rowers who towed it behind them, rowing 'as if inspired by religious fervour' to the beat of drums and music.<sup>251</sup>

The festival is also a reminder of Sao Shwe Thaike's role as patron of the Phaung Daw Oo Temple and its rebuilding in the period 1951–1957. A stone inscription installed at the temple's new museum records the safekeeping of the images, the dismantling of the previous temple and the preparation of the new site with the installation of the images in 1956 and new umbrella finial in 1957. While monastic committee members are credited for overseeing the project, no mention is made of the Sawbwa's patronage.<sup>252</sup> According to Donald Stadtner the temple was built after Sao Shwe Thaike was no longer President, while a local account credits him and in particular his

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<sup>248</sup> Sao Saimong, 'The Phaungdaw-Ū Festival', 74.

<sup>249</sup> Sao Saimong, 78.

<sup>250</sup> Sao Saimong, 79.

<sup>251</sup> Sao Saimong, 79.

<sup>252</sup> Known as the 'Treasure Stay Monastery, Inscription Stone Building'. Fieldwork undertaken with interpreter U Taw Aung Myat, 14 August 2016.

son Sao Saing Pha who made a model of the temple, and both credit local architect U Phu for building it.<sup>253</sup>

The potency of the images underscored the historical narrative in which they intermittently made public appearances through the interventions of royal patrons. In a briefing to journalists in September 1954, Sao Shwe Thaik outlined the biography of the images and described them as *sao hpaya loun main kon* or 'Buddhas that came to the mundane world'. He mentioned how their powerful qualities carried great importance for local people through the festival of Thadingyut.<sup>254</sup> He ended by encouraging the journalists to attend the festival, saying that in accordance with the government's aims to promote Buddhism, train tickets would be specially discounted for travel to the region.<sup>255</sup> This reminder of the importance for the local community of seeking blessings and protection was also an acknowledgement of the Sawbwa's role as patron of the festival and inheritance as meritorious ruler. Stories of unexplained events further illustrate the potency of the images – in 1965 when the barge capsized in a storm one of the Buddha images that was not retrieved from the lake was miraculously found to have made its way back to the shrine at Namhu. The fifth image has since then remained at the temple while the others have continued to travel for the festival.<sup>256</sup>

The fervour around gaining access to the images was observed during their arrival at the staging hall next to the temple. Known formally as Yadana San Kyaung, the title denotes a 'monastery' or kyaung (M) for the Buddhas to stay in once a year.<sup>257</sup> The octagonal building with tiered roof is an auspicious space where local people believe that circumambulations beneath verses of the Pali *Tipitaka* stencilled in gold on the ceiling can fulfill wishes.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 312. 'The History of Phaung Daw Oo Pagoda (Trans."y").' (Speed Printing, Taunggyi & National Offset, Nampan, Inle, n.d), 8.

<sup>254</sup> Thawpita, *History of Inlay Hpaung Daw Oo Pagoda [in Myanmar]* (Rangoon: Maung Hpyu, Heya Ywama, 1955), 4. I am grateful to Yamin Htay for translation of this section.

<sup>255</sup> Thawpita, 5–6.

<sup>256</sup> Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 314.

<sup>257</sup> Robinne, 'The Monastic Unity. A Contemporary Burmese Artefact?', 86.

<sup>258</sup> Ma Thi Thi Kye, interview with the author, 25 September 2017.



Figure 2.26. Shrine at the centre of Yadana San Kyaung (left). 28 September 2017. Gilding the Phaung Daw Oo Buddhas, 1930s (right). Source: Sao Sanda, 2008. Photo courtesy of Yawnghwe Family Private Collection.

As they were lifted off the silver vehicle and onto palanquins, the spectacle of the amorphous gilded forms on their silver thrones flashed past, as women reached out in the few brief moments of their passing to apply gold leaf. Once installed at the centre of the hall the images were continuously gilded by waves of male pilgrims who were stopped every 15 minutes for monks and trustees to smoothen the gold leaf (fig.2.26, left).<sup>1</sup> The intensity of the festival and the continued ritual of gilding throughout the year, suggests that additional measures must have to be taken to manage the accumulation of gold leaf. In some areas such as In Paw Kone, a wealthy weaving village, donors are even said to give gold plates which are affixed with small nails.<sup>2</sup> Sao Sanda recalled that her father's favourite image, a single spherical form and the smallest of the four, was one he was photographed carrying during the festival in the mid-1950s when it must have already been of considerable weight (fig.2.26, right).<sup>3</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter identified and analysed a number of unique attributes of the museums at Yadana Man Aung Temple. Contextualised within the royal temple sanctuary, these spaces of safekeeping and display reflect the meritorious undertakings of the last Sawbwa of Nyaungshwe, Sao Shwe Thaike, during the decade or so straddling Independence (1947–1958). The museums demonstrated a variant set of spatial

<sup>1</sup> Small amounts of thitsi with a mix of oil, banana and lime were applied to the surface of the images. Yin May Thawe, 29 September 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Yin May Thawe, 29 September 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Sao Sanda, *The Moon Princess*, 94. For a photo of Sao Shwe Thaike personally conveying the image see: Thawpita, *History of Inlay Hpaung Daw Oo Pagoda [in Myanmar]*, 34. Sao Sanda, interview with the author, 23 January 2018.

relations that distinguished them as uniquely adapted to a late 19<sup>th</sup> century architectural form. As part of the renovation of the temple, the museums like other pagoda museums commemorated their donors while their historical contents were attributed to the temple's patrons, the Sawbwa Sao Maung and his tributary overlord King Mindon.

While the Outer Museum has more in common with small-scale spaces of safekeeping and storage such as the Pagan Museum or the Treasure Staging Hall at Phaung Daw Oo Temple, the Inner Museum represents a unique adaptation of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century temple to display a growing collection of gifts. While both are modest in scale and therefore similar to pagoda museums of the early Independence period, they are unusual in their occupation of liminal spaces within the temple's walls. An integral part of the protective sanctuary-like temple and oriented spatially towards the sacred centre, they differ significantly from the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum, a civic monument that sits remotely on the periphery of the pagoda platform.

The Inner Museum framed the prayer halls with light and displays of abundance and diversity in contrast with more austere modes of display at temples under government patronage. As part of the iconographic programme of the temple, the museum is oriented towards establishing the Buddha's field of merit by holding gifts in view of the main shrine. This relationship with the centre demonstrates how the temple museum more effectively touches on the 'transcendent core' that Arthur observed as missing from exhibitions of the sacred in the Western art museum.<sup>4</sup> This visual connection and proximity to the sacred centre underscores the difference between the temple museum and its pagoda counterpart. This spatial relation also raised the question of whether the safekeeping and display of gifts can be constituted as anything other than meritorious. It demonstrated that the notion of the museum as a 'desecularised' entity, or a 'holding house' for keeping objects until required for ritual use is not easily conceived in the Inner Museum as its contents are continually activated through their significance as meritorious gifts to the Yadana Man Aung Buddha.<sup>5</sup>

The museum does not easily support the notion of a secular/sacred spatial division as the museum and temple are inextricably conflated. This was confirmed by the ambivalent behaviour of devotees who must turn away from the museum in order to face the sacred centre and the 'seamlessness' of the window-like cabinets within the

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<sup>4</sup> Arthur, 'Exhibiting the Sacred', 25.

<sup>5</sup> Mathur and Singh, 'Reincarnations of the Museum. The Museum in an Age of Religious Revivalism', 205–7.

walls of the temple.<sup>6</sup> Yet pathways around the Inner Museum diverged and overlapped intermittently with the circumambulatory route around the temple. And like the museum at the Shwedagon Pagoda, visitors were observed to engage in different ways. Thus, a tooth relic shrine within one of the museum cabinets was both a point of curiosity and a source of protective power according to Shan Buddhist beliefs.<sup>7</sup> The shrine demonstrated similarities with modes of display at the Buddhism Gallery in Liverpool and drew attention to the protective power of the relic through the aesthetic appeal of the group, thus augmenting the notion of the 'museum effect' with another means to raise 'visual interest'.<sup>8</sup> However, audiences demonstrated varying responses to the relic shrine as observed in the shrine room at the Shwedagon Pagoda. Thus, different modes of seeing and levels of understanding co-existed in the Inner Museum as Clark's analysis of the Tibetan shrine displays in other museums confirmed.<sup>9</sup>

The Inner Museum differs most markedly from the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum in that its gifts frame the eastern prayer hall as part of the Yadana Man Aung Buddha's field of merit. This proximity to the Buddha implicates the museum in rituals that see devotees seeking to engage with the presence of the Buddha, whether by collecting sacred water from the image or acknowledging its sacred light, or simply sitting in prayer receiving 'divine blessings' under the gaze of the smiling image.<sup>10</sup> The Buddha's hierophany drew on its likeness to the Mahamuni Buddha in Mandalay and was further empowered by auspicious materials from which it was made and the enshrined relics donated by temple patron Sawbwa Sao Maung and King Mindon. The museum reified these royal relations through the display of the most valued historical objects, King Mindon's royal manuscripts, within view of the Buddha.

The spatial qualities of the Inner Museum were further experienced in moments of transition through the corner vestibules where other objects such as wall murals, portraits and Buddha images augmented those displayed in the cabinets. These spaces of contemplation, circulation and rest, elicited varying behaviour from devotees. While murals became enduring objects for personal reflection, they also embodied the ethical values that underpinned Shan Buddhist customs. Like the Shwedagon Pagoda

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<sup>6</sup> Candlin, *Micromuseology*, 153.

<sup>7</sup> Tannenbaum, *Who Can Compete Against the World? Power-Protection and Buddhism in Shan Worldview*, 180.

<sup>8</sup> Alpers, 'The Museum as a Way of Seeing', 26–27.

<sup>9</sup> Clark, 'Exhibiting the Exotic, Simulating the Sacred: Tibetan Shrines at British and American Museums', 14.

<sup>10</sup> Gell, *Art and Agency*, 116.

Buddha Museum, the Inner Museum demonstrated it was a place of informal learning where embodied knowledge was required.

Unlike the well-resourced Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum, the situation at the temple was more challenging for the trustee-keeper U Mya Thaung. However, clear objectives to balance the need for safekeeping with the provision of unusual displays that would enable visitors to see rare objects and ultimately engage their long-term interests in heritage, were conveyed as a personal vision for the museum. These concerns for the relationship between objects and visitors were also demonstrated in the previous chapter as attributes of a meritorious keeping practice. While a large-scale renovation would have been unsustainable, intermittent cleaning and the repainting of cabinets that took place throughout the year had resulted in the incremental rearrangement of cabinets over time. The densely clustered displays differed considerably from those at the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum. In both cases the repetition of certain types of objects also signalled the competitive mode of gifting.<sup>11</sup> The installation of shrine displays was another mode in which objects considered 'ancient heritage' – lacquerwares, items of dress, clay smoking pipes – were gathered around Buddha images in several of the cabinets. The shrine displays demonstrated ritual acts of respect or *khan tau* (Sh) expressed as offerings to the Buddha. No longer in place, these displays of circa 2006 demonstrated the enduring threat of material losses to the temple museum and Shan heritage more generally.

Finally, the trustee-keeper's engagements with several objects demonstrated how other forms of interpretation were brought about in the Inner Museum and more widely as part of the annual Thadingyut festival. These engagements were notably undertaken outside of the museum's cabinets in ways that involved the senses and the embodied knowledge that is acquired through the use of these objects. On one hand these objects – royal manuscripts, gilded portraits, the wish fulfilling Buddha and the gilded carriage – were conceived by U Mya Thaung as 'ancient heritage', as historically significant and should therefore be preserved. Furthermore, they were part of the declining Shan lacquer-making tradition in that they were embellished using lacquer and were therefore among the rare objects that U Mya Thaung wanted visitors to see. On the other hand, the handling and re-installation of these objects as they were taken out for inspection or given renewed visibility during the festival, reiterated their metonymic value as markers of identity and offered opportunities for devotees to pay

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<sup>11</sup> Paritta Chalernpow Koanantakool, 'Contextualising Objects in Monastery Museums in Thailand', 163.

respect and make merit. This paradox between preserving and sustaining living traditions was also seen in the re-gilding and cleaning practices at the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum where objects otherwise remained in their cases. The mobilisation of these different objects during the festival, demonstrated a fluid understanding of objects as 'contact points' that could be understood through the senses.<sup>12</sup> Taken out of their cabinet and the darkness of the cloisters, the manuscripts and gilded portrait renewed collective memories of the patrons and enabled devotees to pay homage to the Sawbwa and Mahadevi.

The movement of objects between different spaces of safekeeping demonstrated the shifts in meanings that objects acquire when re-contextualised.<sup>13</sup> More salient in this instance is the underlying curatorial intention to reiterate and enhance the historical significance and potency of the crowned Buddha with the reinstallation of the image in its own shrine. Notably the shrine room became an auspicious space for seeking blessings and wish fulfilment, as well as a place for socialising and overnight accommodation during the festival.

Furthermore, the same intentions were expressed in the support given by U Mya Thaug and volunteers to the ritual procession of the Phaung Daw Oo Buddhas. The creative re-use of the gilded carriage as a shrine for the Inner Museum's replica images in miniature and the organisation and marshalling of volunteers for the procession of the silver vehicle, demonstrated the relevance of the trustee-keeper's aims for the temple museum, to preserve 'ancient heritage, display rare objects, and nurture a love of cultural heritage among the younger generation. The continued activation of ritual objects such as the mobile shrines and Buddha images were unique demonstrations of meritorious curating, in which ritual objects that supported and sustained merit-making and the bestowal of blessings were necessarily taken out of the confines of the museum and temple. Rather than undermine the Inner Museum and its objectives to preserve and safekeep, these actions provided the additional rituals of circumambulation for devotees seeking the presence of the Buddha, before they returned to the prayer halls and vestibules to socialise, rest, and perhaps engage with the contents of the Inner Museum.

While this chapter focussed on the variant temple museum, the next chapter will analyse a further variant form of the museum in sacred space; the state museum that

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<sup>12</sup> Feldman, 'Contact Points: Museums and the Lost Body Problem', 255–56.

<sup>13</sup> Tythacott, *The Lives of Chinese Objects*, 7.

was established among a plain of temples at the cross-section of pilgrimage networks in Bagan.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Bagan Archaeological Museum, Bagan**

## Introduction

The previous two chapters focussed on the distinctive attributes of the pagoda museum and its temple variant, their unique spatial qualities, keeping practices and means of engaging objects in ways that sustained the ritual of merit-making. This chapter will analyse the attributes of the Bagan Archaeological Museum established in 1998 as successor to the Pagan Museum of 1904.<sup>1</sup> This prototype for small ‘field’ or ‘site’ museums was replicated in Mrauk-U, Pyay, and Mandalay around the same time.<sup>2</sup> Situated on the northern perimeter of the Ananda Temple and surrounded by temples and monasteries, the museum drew on pre-existing local collections while providing a space of safekeeping under the auspices of the Archaeological Survey of Burma.

The chapter will demonstrate how a state museum that developed from within a landscape of temples became a site of merit-making similar to its pagoda museum counterparts. It will analyse the spatial qualities as revealed by visitors’ responses to the Buddha Images Showroom at the Bagan Archaeological Museum. Like the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum it was established during the ‘museum period’ of the 1990s to support nation-building.<sup>3</sup> Under the Ministry of Culture the state museums were subject to policies that addressed the broader mission to ‘Honor the State with Culture’.<sup>4</sup> Just as the pagoda museum supported a national site of merit-making and the safeguarding of objects collected through pagoda renovations, the archaeological museum in Bagan supported the safeguarding of ‘cultural heritage’, a concept that was utilised as part of the government’s policy of Four Social Objectives i.e. the ‘Uplift of national prestige and integrity and preservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage and national character’.<sup>5</sup> Cultural heritage in this case included both the objects that were collected from the temples as well as their replacement with replicas as a means

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<sup>1</sup> Fieldwork in Bagan was conducted by the author over 23 days from 19–21 August and 6–7 September 2015, 1–4, 19–20, 23 January, 16–23 February and 7–11 August 2016 with assistance from interpreters Moe Aung Lwin and Sithu Htun Soe. Fieldwork was also conducted at the Asia Society in New York, 8–14 February 2015. Photographs and observations are included from previous visits to Bagan in 2013 when the author was involved in research trips for the ACM in Singapore.

<sup>2</sup> These included the Pagan Museum (1903), Mrauk-U Archaeological Museum (1904), the Mandalay Palace Museum (1905) and Thayet Thaw Museum (c.1907) in Sri Ksetra. Nu Mra Zan, ‘Museums in Myanmar’, 22–23. These dates of establishment pre-empt the opening of the museums, hence the signboard at the Pagan Museum is dated 1904. Daw Nu Mra Zan, personal communication, 16 December 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Houtman, *Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics*, 93–94.

<sup>4</sup> These objectives had been set out since 1952 with the establishment of the Ministry of Culture. Nu Mra Zan, ‘Museums in Myanmar: Brief History and Actual Perspectives’, 19.

<sup>5</sup> Since 1989 the government’s political, economic and social objectives in support of national unity (or ‘Three Main National Causes’) have been printed on all published materials and in prominent public places. The Four Social Objectives support the third of the Three Main National Causes. The effect of this is discussed by Gustaaf Houtman. Houtman, *Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics*, 67, 95.

to sustain the ritual life of the temples. The museum's work during the early 1990s in the run-up to its establishment in 1998 intersected with pagoda renovations, which were also recognised as part of nation-building.<sup>6</sup> The renovations reified the sacralised landscape in support of a national history that positioned Bagan as the foundation of Burmese Theravāda Buddhist rule. This intersection of temple renovation, museum collecting and exhibiting the narrative of sacred landscape contributed to the government's re-imagining of a Burmese Buddhist identity that continued to be alluded to by informants, colleagues and friends. When asked for their reasons for visiting the region they frequently replied that it was a necessity as anyone who is really from Myanmar has to visit Bagan in their lifetime. The meritorious implications for such visits among Buddhists was repeatedly acknowledged in Bagan's nomination as a UNESCO World Heritage site, in which the legacy of royal merit-making and the living traditions that continue to be practiced are recognised as key to its authenticity and 'outstanding universal value'.<sup>7</sup>

The chapter like the previous two is structured in terms of the inter-related dimensions of space, curatorial practices and objects. The first section, *The Museum in a Field of Temples* identifies and compares the spatial qualities of the Pagan Museum, the 'Octagonal Museum' and the Bagan Archaeological Museum with pagoda museums discussed earlier, and in relation to the landscape of Bagan.

The second section *Exhibiting a Sacred Landscape* will analyse the Bagan Archaeological Museum's spatial qualities as manifested in the displays of sacralised landscape and how this is 'produced' through the medium of exhibition.<sup>8</sup> It will examine the Art Gallery of Bagan Period Monuments and its construction of the meta-narrative of merit-making in ways that are comparable with the abundant forms of display at pagoda museums.

The third section *Buddha Images Showroom* will analyse the iconographic programme of the showroom relative to its pagoda museum counterparts. The showroom is comparable in size to the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum and attracts large numbers of pilgrims who incorporate the museum into their ritual pathways around

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<sup>6</sup> For example, donations towards renovations were viewed as a contributions to nation-building or 'national consolidation'. Houtman, 96.

<sup>7</sup> Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, 'Nomination Dossier for Inscription on the World Heritage List. Bagan. Volume I: Nomination Dossier', 69, 101, 131–32, 139–40.

<sup>8</sup> Souhami, 'Exhibition Production as Processes of Translation'.

Bagan. The section will draw on new data from a survey of visitors to analyse responses to the spatial arrangements of the showroom relative to other museological attempts to represent the sacred.<sup>9</sup>

The fourth section *Meritorious Curating in the Life of the Wish Fulfilling Buddha* discusses the strategy of replication as part of the process of safeguarding, documentation and display of Buddha images. It analyses how this contributed to the transformative effect of the exhibitions and was a means to reiterate the spiritual authenticity of the images (see *Replicating Buddha Images*).<sup>10</sup> This section analyses the biography of the seated Buddha at the museum and its plaster replica at the 11<sup>th</sup> century Alodawpyi Pagoda in Bagan. The replica is known across Myanmar as 'Alodawpyi Buddha' after the site of the Alodawpyi or Wish Fulfilling Pagoda. Although both images are venerated as wish fulfilling, for clarity the original image will be referred to here as the 'seated Buddha', to distinguish it from the replica or 'Alodawpyi Buddha'.<sup>11</sup> It draws on the scant published records and recollections from curators about the seated Buddha and discusses key moments after the image transitioned from an unidentified site to the storeroom, and then to the Buddha Images Showroom at the museum. Using the notion of object biographies, the section examines the lives of the two images as they moved through different 'regimes of value' and how the contrasting protocols of the museum and temple revealed different means to attribute meaning (see *A Life in the Museum* and *A Life in the Temple*).<sup>12</sup>

The final section, *Many Lives On Display*, concludes with analysis of the seated Buddha's significance as it travelled to international exhibitions in 2015 and 2016. It questions the extent to which a meritorious form of curating comparative to those of the pagoda museum may be discerned in this endeavour and the implications for the future museumisation of Bagan and wider museological attempts to represent the sacred.

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<sup>9</sup> Bastian, 'Exhibiting Buddhism: The Museumification of Burmese Buddha Images'. Wingfield, 'Touching the Buddha. Encounters with a Charismatic Object'. Souhami, 'Exhibition Production as Processes of Translation'. Gaskell, 'Sacred to Profane and Back Again'.

<sup>10</sup> It remains to be seen whether the pilgrims' appropriations have a place in the museum's future and Bagan's claims to recognition as a World Heritage site. The sixth of the ten criteria for selection to World Heritage status is "To be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance". UNESCO, 'World Heritage Convention. The Criteria for Selection', UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2017, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria/>.

<sup>11</sup> The display caption titles the object as 'Dharmachakra Mudra'. For this reason, it is simply described here as the 'seated Buddha'.

<sup>12</sup> Kopytoff, Igor, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process", 66–67.

## The Museum in a Field of Temples

The significance of the country's first site museum at Bagan in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was that it provided a more sustainable model compared to its predecessor the Phayre Museum, which had struggled to receive funding and never reached provincial museum status as its counterpart the Lahore Museum had done.<sup>13</sup> The site museum provided immediate housing for objects retrieved locally and from excavations conducted by the Department of Archaeology in the late 1950s, which at that time focussed on the Pyu sites of Sri Ksetra, Hanlin and Beikthano.<sup>14</sup> Security remained a problem however and thefts took place not only at sites but also at these museums, which remained under-resourced and unsupported by weak legislation in the post-Independence years.<sup>15</sup>

### 'Pagan Museum, 1904'<sup>16</sup>

The predecessor to the present Bagan Archaeological Museum was the Pagan Museum which was established in 1904 adjacent to the northern entrance of the Ananda Temple among monasteries within Old Bagan.<sup>17</sup> In 1948 Luce described it as the best museum in Burma compared to the small museum at the palace in Mandalay and the field museum at Pyay. Later accounts recognised its small scale and local remit – Lu Pe Win referred to it as a 'field museum' and more recently Nu Mra Zan identified it as the first of the country's pre-Independence 'site' museums to be initiated in 1903.<sup>18</sup> Described as having displays that were 'not systematic', the site still functions today as a repository situated enigmatically within a quiet dusty compound

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<sup>13</sup> Taylor, 'A Burma Provincial Museum', 4–6. Established in 1865, the Lahore Museum exhibited a Burmese Buddha image within an altar-like display in the Hindu/Jaina/Buddhist Gallery. Shaila Bhatti, *Translating Museums. A Counterhistory of South Asian Museology*, Publications of the Institute of Archaeology, University College London. Critical Perspectives on Cultural Heritage. (Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, 2012), 38.

<sup>14</sup> Aung Thwin, 'Editorial Wilhelm G. Solheim II Iii Burma Before Pagan', 2–3. These sites were inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1996 and received approval in 2014.

<sup>15</sup> The history of looting and weak legislation emerged particularly during the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century, despite attempts by first Chief Commissioner Sir Arthur Phayre (1862-1867) to protect religious sites. Penny Edwards, "Relocating the Interlocutor. Taw Sein Ko (1864-1930) and the Itinerancy of Knowledge in British Burma." *South East Asia Research* 12, no. 3 (November 1, 2004): 289, <https://doi.org/10.5367/0000000042690144>.

<sup>16</sup> The date reflects the date of opening, although the museum was initiated earlier in 1903. Personal communication, Daw Nu Mra Zan, 16 December 2019.

<sup>17</sup> The old Burmese name 'Pukan' was transcribed as 'Pagan' during the colonial period. In 1989 the term was changed to 'Bagan' as part of the government's policy of changing many old place names. The latter is used here except where reference is made to the old museum.

<sup>18</sup> Thiripyanchi U Lu Pe Win, *Pagodas of Pagan* (Rangoon: Buddha Sāsana Council Press, 1966), 2. Site museums were also initiated in Shwebo and Mrauk-U in 1904. Nu Mra Zan, 'Museums in Myanmar', 22–23.

that is easily overlooked.<sup>19</sup> It is larger than the Outer Museum discussed in Chapter Two with many more objects similarly casually placed on the floor behind wire fencing.

The museum comprises three open-sided sheds where stone objects remain on view under corrugated tin roofs and a building with veranda enclosed by a low brick wall and wire-mesh fence. In 1986 the total number of objects was reported at 1,109 and 57 stone inscriptions.<sup>20</sup> The main building is kept locked with objects stored on the floor but viewable through the fence, much like the Outer Museum in the previous chapter and other small pagoda museums. A sign over the front gate to the building reads: 'Museum. Pagan. 1904' and is a reminder of the protection that was sorely needed by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century following an intense period of looting during the 1890s when hundreds of objects were shipped to museums in Germany (fig.3).<sup>21</sup>

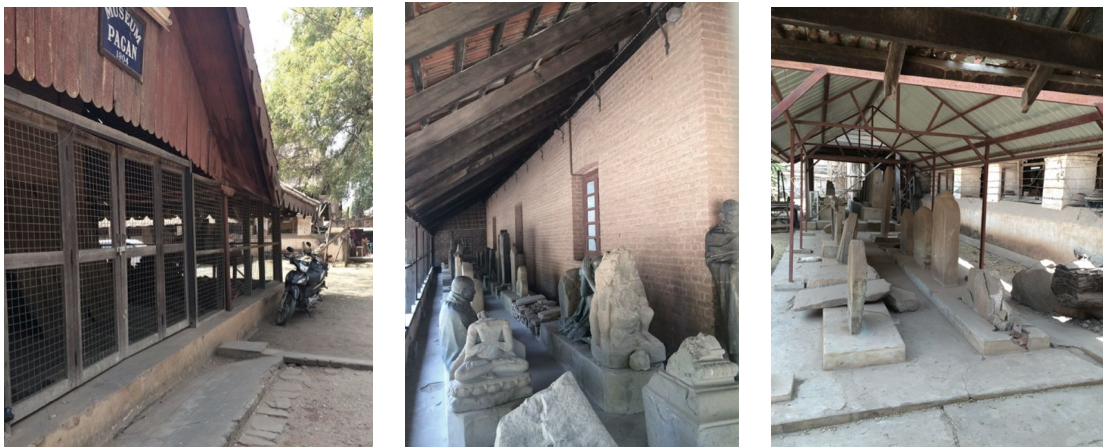


Figure 3. Entrance to the Pagan Museum (above) and veranda (lower left). Adjacent open shed with Ananda Temple north entryway behind (right), 17 February 2016. Photograph: Heidi Tan, courtesy of Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture.

The building of the museum is attributed to Lord Curzon, British Viceroy of India who visited Bagan in 1901 and called for greater efforts towards preservation of the monuments and protection of their contents.<sup>22</sup> Curzon's visit also led to the establishment of the Archaeological Survey of Burma in 1902, the forerunner of the

<sup>19</sup> Asia Europe Museum Network (ASEMUS), 'Bagan Archaeological Museum, Myanmar', Asia-Europe Museum Network, 2017, <http://asemus.museum/museum/bagan-archaeological-museum-myanmar/>.

<sup>20</sup> Department of History, University of Rangoon, *Glimpses of Glorious Pagan* (Rangoon, Burma: The Universities Press, 1986), 59.

<sup>21</sup> Gordon H. Luce, 'A Century of Progress in Burmese History and Archaeology', *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 32, no. 1 (1948): 85, <http://viewer.igroupnet.com/viewer/service/iglibrary/portal/JBRSB0003201/default/default/desktop/vertical/200/1/viewer.html?88d2a9ac491b19da37504faf8bf27686>.

<sup>22</sup> Nyunt Han, 'A Retrospective and Prospective Review of the Conservation of Ancient Monuments in Pagan', in *Study on Pagan. Research Report* (Tokyo: Institute of Asian Cultures, Sophia University, 1989), 93. A small museum was also ordered at the Palace in Mandalay and a storage shed and field museum (now Srikshestra Archaeological Museum) for Old Prome (Pyay). Luce, 'A Century of Progress in Burmese History and Archaeology', 87.

Department of Archaeology (DOA) set up over half a century later in 1957, and to the first Ancient Monument Preservation Act in 1904.<sup>23</sup>

It is also a reminder of the work of Taw Sein Ko (1864–1930), the country's first Superintendent Archaeologist who had assisted Emil Forchhammer in his pioneering work as Research Officer for the Epigraphic Office established in 1881.<sup>24</sup> Retired Deputy Director-General of the DOA, U Aung Kyaing, recounted that Taw Sein Ko collected antiquities from neighbouring monasteries in particular from a monk named U Sein Da who resided just next to the Ananda Temple.<sup>25</sup> King Bodawpaya (r.1782–1819) had ordered hundreds of stones to be taken to Mandalay for copying, for the purpose of establishing lands designated for temples that would be free of taxation.<sup>26</sup> Taw Sein Ko stored them within a shed near the Pahtodawgyi Pagoda in Amarapura in 1906.<sup>27</sup> He also retrieved many inscriptions from the riverside in Bagan and stored them at the Mahabodhi Temple from where they were subsequently taken to the museum. Luce and Bo-Hmu Ba Shin proposed in 1969 that these had belonged to temples that had disappeared due to the erosion of the river-banks. They observed 30 of these inscriptions arranged in double rows around the sides of the veranda at the museum at that time.<sup>28</sup>

These accounts suggest that the site museum, perhaps more so than the Phayre Museum, set a precedent for the developing awareness of what a museum could and should do. The sheds remained a place of safekeeping particularly for stone inscriptions many of which were still kept at the sheds in 2016. Notable examples that were transcribed and translated early on included sections of Kyanzitha's palace inscription and the Myazedi inscription from Gubykaugyi temple in Myinkaba village found by Forchhammer in 1886. Displayed at the Bagan Archaeological Museum it is framed by lengthy interpretives and an acknowledgement of its UNESCO Memory of

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<sup>23</sup> Michael Aung Thwin, "Burma Before Pagan: The Status of Archaeology Today," *Asian Perspectives* 25, no. 2 (1983-1982), 1. Ministry of Culture, 'Brief History. Department of Archaeology, National Museum and Library'. The Ancient Monuments Preservation Act 1904.

<sup>24</sup> Edwards, "Relocating the Interlocutor. Taw Sein Ko (1864-1930) and the Itinerancy of Knowledge in British Burma". Moore, 'Pagoda Desecration and Myanmar Archaeology, 1853–86', 249.

<sup>25</sup> U Aung Kyaing, interview with the author, 4 January 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Gordon H. Luce, "A Century of Progress in Burmese History and Archaeology," *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 32, no. 1 (1948): 81.

<sup>27</sup> Charles Duroiselle, 'Preface', in *Original Inscriptions Collected by King Bodawpaya in Upper Burma and Now Placed near the Patodawgyi Pagoda, Amarapura* (Rangoon: Office of the Superintendent, Government Printing, 1913), 1, <https://digital.soas.ac.uk/content/AA/00/00/03/93/00001/PDF.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> U Aung Kyaing, 20 February 2016. Gordon H. Luce and Bo-Hmu Ba Shin, *Old Burma: Early Pagan. Volume 1. Text.*, vol. 25, Artibus Asiae. Supplementum (Zurich: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 1969), 7, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1522657>.

the World registration.<sup>29</sup> Inscriptions have since provided the basis for historicising Pagan as an ‘age of the temple builders’ founded on Theravāda Buddhism that had been appropriated from the Mons by King Anawratha.<sup>30</sup>

Subsequent expansion of the museum took place in 1937–38 although it was closed during the Second World War as the collections were put into underground storage for safety during the 1940s.<sup>31</sup> In 1954 the museum was re-opened after the collections were taken out of storage.<sup>32</sup> However its role as a secure repository is maintained by a caretaker whose family continue to live at the rear of the main shed.<sup>33</sup>

### The ‘Octagonal Museum’

On 1 October 1979 a new museum was opened which comprised an enlarged group of storage sheds and an octagonal display building situated to the south-west of the Ananda Temple, just south of Gadawpalin Temple (fig.3.1).<sup>34</sup> The octagonal building is still used for storing a large number of stone inscriptions and Buddha images. The euphemism ‘Octagonal Museum’ as used by U Aung Kyaing, is used from here onwards to refer to this building.<sup>35</sup> The success of this model has been attributed to its ‘unobtrusive’ design and appropriate scale in relation to its purpose.<sup>36</sup> The octagonal-shaped museum model was also employed in other parts of the country, for example at the archaeological museum in Bago where displays are integrated around a central atrium. The new museum at Phaung Daw Oo Temple follows a similar model where the historical narrative of temple renovation is given centre-stage.<sup>37</sup>

The 1970s saw a period of collecting particularly after the earthquake of 1975 when reliquaries exposed by damage to the temples brought small valuable objects into the

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<sup>29</sup> Taw Sein Ko and Chas. Duroiselle, eds., *Epigraphia Birmanica. Being Lithic and Other Inscriptions of Burma*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (Rangoon, Burma: Superintendent, Government Printing, Burma, 1919), 1. UNESCO, ‘Myazedi Quadrilingual Stone Inscription | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’, accessed 10 March 2018, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/memory-of-the-world/register/full-list-of-registered-heritage/registered-heritage-page-5/myazedi-quadrilingual-stone-inscription/>.

<sup>30</sup> Thiripyanchi U Lu Pe Win, *Pagodas of Pagan*, 1.

<sup>31</sup> The burying of smaller works at this time was attributed to the Mon and Pali scholar Lu Pe Win. Luce and Bo-Hmu Ba Shin, *Old Burma: Early Pagán. Volume 1. Text.*, 25:viii.

<sup>32</sup> This was after the Ministry of Culture had been established in 1952. Nu Mra Zan, ‘Museums in Myanmar: Brief History and Actual Perspectives’, 22.

<sup>33</sup> Daw Baby, personal communication, 16 February 2016.

<sup>34</sup> Asia Europe Museum Network (ASEMUS), ‘Bagan Archaeological Museum, Myanmar’.

<sup>35</sup> U Aung Kyaing, interview with the author, 4 January 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Pierre Pichard, ‘Today’s Pagan: Conservation Under the Generals’, in *‘Archaeologizing’ Heritage? Transcultural Entanglements between Local Social Practices and Global Virtual Realities* (New York, Dordrecht, London: Springer, 2013), 245.

<sup>37</sup> See Appendix 1.



museum's collections.<sup>38</sup> These retrievals of sacred objects, including small metal Buddha images or htarpana such as those displayed at the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum, augmented the collections of the Octagonal Museum as well as the National Museum in Yangon.<sup>39</sup> The concealment of metal objects is thought to have been motivated by a belief that they increased the potency of the temple. Looting of sites for the valuable metal probably started well before the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>40</sup> As noted earlier the 1970s had also been a time for ensuring improved security measures at the Shwedagon Pagoda as gifts kept within the Hall of Ancient Buddha Images were moved out to a separate pavilion (see Chapter One: A 'Curio Gallery' and the 'Hall of Ancient Buddha Images').



Figure 3.1. Octagonal Museum. Source: Department of History, University of Rangoon, *Glimpses of Glorious Pagan*. 1986, 59. Courtesy of Department of History.

During the 1980s security issues remained a concern as thefts increased at this time. U Aung Kyaing recalls that in fact security had always been a pressing issue throughout his career of some forty years with the DOA. Thefts from temples and from the museum's sheds in 1984 motivated further collecting from the temples and the introduction of a new strategy of replacing original Buddha images with replicas (see *Replicating Buddha Images*).<sup>41</sup> The museum thus became the site for a plaster-casting workshop in which hundreds of replicas were produced for reinstallation in the temples.

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<sup>38</sup> A group of five gilded metal plaques uncovered at the Myinpyagu Temple after the earthquake in 1975 were displayed at the Asia Society in 2015. Fraser-Lu and Stadtner, *Buddhist Art of Myanmar*, 112.

<sup>39</sup> A standing bronze Buddha image found in the walls of a temple in 1937 is one such example. Fraser-Lu and Stadtner, 126.

<sup>40</sup> Fraser-Lu and Stadtner, 126.

<sup>41</sup> U Aung Kyaing, interview with the author, 4, 20 January 2016. U Myo Nyunt Aung, personal communication, 5 February 2017, 1 March 2018. According to Daw Baby, head of the Bagan Archaeological Museum, the old Pagan Museum was not used to store anything of high value for this reason. Interview with the author, 1 January 2016.

As discussed below, this engagement with the sites implicated the museum in the ritual life of the temples and brought new meaning to the original images in the museum (see *Ritual Authenticity Revealed*).

## Bagan Archaeological Museum

Like the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum that preceded it, the new Bagan Archaeological Museum development was also part of the military government-sponsored 'museum period'.<sup>42</sup> The project was overseen by the Myanmar Central Heritage Preservation, Restoration and Conservation Central Committee, established in 1993 and chaired by General Khin Nyunt.<sup>43</sup> Unlike the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum development which did not exhibit individual patron credits, within the museum grounds at Bagan a stele dated 2005 acknowledged Senior General Than Shwe, Head of State (1992–2011), as patron. In 1995 the group of sheds, except for the octagonal building which was retained as a storage facility, were demolished to make way for the new museum which was opened in April 1998 under the auspices of the then Department of Cultural Institutes.<sup>44</sup>

The new museum building constructed by the Public Works Department overshadowed the existing Octagonal Museum in the heart of Old Bagan. Monumental in scale with features based on a 19<sup>th</sup> century style of royal architecture, the building's three-tiered roofs with additional towers and arched doorways and windows were identified as ' "neo-classical Myanmar"-style'.<sup>45</sup> Multiple arches rendered in concrete along the upper walls re-imagined the use of the vaulted arch that grew out of Pyu traditions and proliferated in Bagan architecture.<sup>46</sup> The monumental form and internal spaces which diminish even the largest objects within its collections, was three times larger than the museum at the Shwedagon Pagoda,<sup>47</sup> although the second floor area was comparable

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<sup>42</sup> Houtman, *Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics*, 93–94.

<sup>43</sup> Houtman, 96.

<sup>44</sup> Set up to oversee museums in 1954, the department was amalgamated with the DOA in 2007, to create the Department of Archaeology, National Museum and National Library. Ministry of Culture, 'Brief History. Department of Archaeology, National Museum and Library'.

<sup>45</sup> Schober, *Modern Buddhist Conjunctures in Myanmar*, 94. Pichard, 'Today's Pagan: Conservation Under the Generals', 245.

<sup>46</sup> For example, a Mon inscription makes reference to twenty-eight arched pediments around a coronation pavilion at King Kyanzittha's palace. Kyaw Nyein, 'The Palace of King Kyanzittha Known from His Inscription', in *Study on Pagan. Research Report* (Tokyo: Institute of Asian Cultures, Sophia University, 1989), 44–50. Paul Strachan, *Pagan. Art and Architecture of Old Burma* (Arran: Kiscadale, 1989), 9. Charles Duroiselle, *Epigraphia Birmanica. Being Lithic and Other Inscriptions of Burma*, vol. III, Pt. 1 vols (Rangoon: Superintendent, Government Printing and Stationery, 1924).

<sup>47</sup> The total reported was 115,200 square feet, around 10,700 square meters. Houtman, *Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics*, 96, fn.1. The collection was also reportedly much larger at 6,461 objects in total compared to 2,590 at the Shwedagon Pagoda. Department of Archaeology and National Museum,

in size to the Buddha Images Showroom at Bagan.<sup>48</sup> The museum also sits prominently at the centre of a sacralised landscape unlike the pagoda museum that was situated at the margin of the sacred site.

The museum's disproportionate size in relation to its function has been critically described as 'unseemly'.<sup>49</sup> It has also been the focus of critical discussion among heritage practitioners in Myanmar for its detracting from key viewpoints within the area designated as a Monuments Zone. San Nan Shwe and Maung Hlaing note that the museum overshadows neighbouring Gadawpalin Temple and disrupts the 'harmony' of the site's relationship to other old monuments. The implication is that the authenticity of the landscape is at stake, that one may no longer 'feel the essence of Bagan' as the museum obstructs views between significant sites such as the Gadawpalin and Lawkananda Temple, the southernmost of the four relic stupas that demarcate the sacred landscape (fig.3.2).<sup>50</sup> The significance of the relic stupas is noted by Nyein Lwin who states that they 'made people feel that they were within the Bagan cultural heritage region' but that new structures such as a viewing tower and hotels and restaurants within the archaeological zones impinged on the 'integrity and aesthetic of Bagan's cultural heritage'.<sup>51</sup> Finally, the DOA's draft Nomination Dossier has also recognised that the museum building together with the Golden Palace reconstruction of 2008 and the viewing tower are all 'out of character with the landscape'.<sup>52</sup>

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Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, 'Nomination Dossier for Inscription on the World Heritage List. Bagan. Volume I: Nomination Dossier', 120.

<sup>48</sup> Floorplans indicate that the the second floor of the museum at the Shwedagon Pagoda is 1,200 square meters, while the Buddha Images Showroom occupies an estimated floor space of 1,263 square meters.

<sup>49</sup> Pichard, 'Today's Pagan: Conservation Under the Generals', 245.

<sup>50</sup> San Nan Shwe and Maung Hlaing, 'Conservation of Cultural Heritage Buildings in Bagan Area', in *Transforming Societies: Contestations and Convergences in Asia and the Pacific* (Asia Pacific Sociological Association (APSA) Conference, Chiang Mai, Thailand: Unpublished, 2014), 12–13. Elizabeth Moore also referred to the 'spirit and feeling' of the landscape to be taken into consideration in the search for balance between archaeology, ecology and the living heritage of Bagan. Elizabeth Howard Moore, "The Future Authenticity of Bagan," vol. II (Promotion, Protection and Preservation of Buddhist Culture and Heritage., Lumbini, Nepal: Theravāda Buddhist Academy, Sitagu International Buddhist Academy, 2014), 75.

<sup>51</sup> Nyein Lwin, 'Buddhist Heritage Conservation and Management in Myanmar (with Special Reference to the Buddhist Centre of Bagan)', in *Asian Buddhist Heritage. Conserving the Sacred*, ICROM-CHA Conservation Forum Series 1 (Rome: International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property, 2017), 123, [http://www.icrom.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/asianbuddhist\\_web.pdf](http://www.icrom.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/asianbuddhist_web.pdf).

<sup>52</sup> Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, 'Nomination Dossier for Inscription on the World Heritage List. Bagan. Volume I: Nomination Dossier', 138.

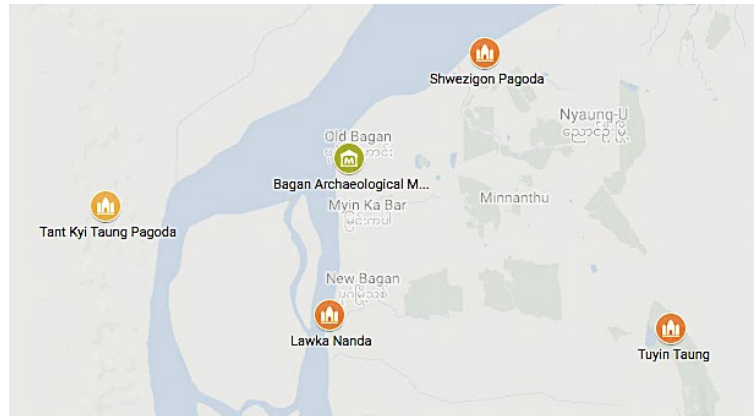


Figure 3.2. Map of Bagan Archaeological Museum in Old Bagan surrounded by the four relic stupas. Source: Google Maps.

The museum's situation at the centre of this 'original space' and how it was incorporated as a meta-narrative for the museum's exhibitions is discussed in the section below, *Exhibiting a Sacred Landscape*. Busloads of pilgrims traverse this area as they complete itineraries that typically include the museum (fig.3.2).

### Exhibiting a Sacred Landscape

Unlike the pagoda museums discussed in earlier chapters which have undergone refreshments and renovations, the spatial arrangements and other elements of the iconographic programme at the Bagan Archaeological Museum have remained relatively unchanged since 1998. Their dated appearance is consistent with Rachel Souhami's observations of the dual nature of exhibitions as both 'cultural product' and producer of ideas to be conveyed to audiences. Furthermore, the exhibition is a medium of communication bounded by the multiple expectations and interests of the institution, the curator and the visitor.<sup>53</sup> Her assertion that the exhibition process implies an active re-making or 'translation' where 'to translate is simply to transform', is even more evocative here in the assemblages of objects that have been retrieved from the fragmented landscape of Bagan.<sup>54</sup> The categories alluded to in the titles of the showrooms, reflect their intent to 'produce' the historical and spiritual authenticity of the surrounding landscape. This act of translation starts at the museum's grand entrance

<sup>53</sup>The term 'exhibition' is used broadly by Souhami to include both temporary and permanent exhibitions, collection displays and special loans. Souhami, "Exhibition Production as Processes of Translation," 14–15.

<sup>54</sup> Souhami, 12.

where a plan maps the categories and themes of display under the rubric of 'archaeology' and 'art'.

The hand-painted floor plan that greets visitors as they ascend the front steps illustrates the museum's alignment along an east-west axis following the convention for palaces and temples in Myanmar.<sup>55</sup> The plan maps the ten showrooms situated north and south of the vast east-facing entrance hall or 'Special Showroom' (fig.3.3). The ground floor is devoted to 'Bagan Palace City' (model palace reconstructions), 'Bagan Period Arts and Crafts', 'Architecture', 'Social Life' and 'Literature' (stone inscriptions), whilst the first floor includes showrooms for 'Ancient Monuments', 'Wall-paintings', 'Buddhist Arts' and 'Buddha Images'. The plan reiterates the museum's use of taxonomies that emerged from the historical legacy of colonial research and collecting. Yet embedded within the auspicious orientation of the plan, they framed a narrative of the sacralised landscape and tacitly accommodated rituals of visiting that were comparable with those observed in the pagoda museums.

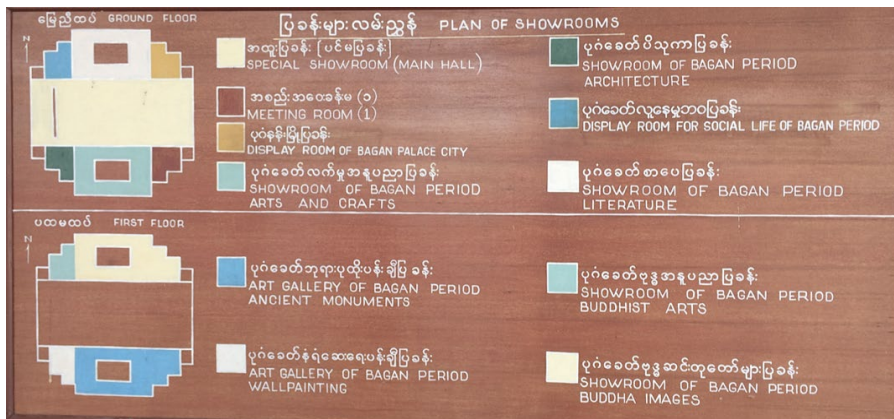


Figure 3.3. Plan of Showrooms, Bagan Archaeological Museum. 19 February 2016. Photograph: Heidi Tan, courtesy of Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture.

This was particularly evident in the displays of 'ancient monuments' and 'Buddha images' where the iconographic programme framed these objects in a way that emphasised their sacred quality. The Buddha Images Showroom in particular became a place of merit-making for pilgrims in high season. The persistent use of the term 'Buddha images' was notable as a shift took place in early 2016 when the title of the Buddha Images Showroom at the National Museum in Yangon was changed to

<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Moore, 'The Reconstruction of Mandalay Palace: An Interim Report on Aspects of Design', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 56, no. 2 (1993): 339.

'Buddhist Art Gallery'.<sup>56</sup> This renewed interest in 'art' suggests a move to re-authenticate sacred images as one of many categories of art already displayed at the National Museum in Yangon.<sup>57</sup> The 'transcendent' value of art as David Phillips notes, is an attribute that art museums engage to reify the authenticity of the art object.<sup>58</sup> Yet this taxonomic shift reflects how museums are complicit in other aspects of the complex process of authentication. For example, the loan of objects to international exhibitions in 2015 and 2016 would have required insurance values to be agreed between collaborating institutions. These are largely contingent on the international art market, a sensitive subject given the historical looting at sites and small museums in Bagan and elsewhere, ostensibly to feed that market.<sup>59</sup> Regardless of these new engagements, the re-classification of 'Buddha images' to join what Phillips calls the 'cult of art'<sup>60</sup> did not mitigate against daily rituals of veneration at the National Museum (see *Buddha Images Showroom*).

Two sections of the exhibitions – ancient monuments and Buddha images – as observed in 2016 brought objects and viewers into a nexus of art and the sacred. This conflation was both implicit in the layout of the exhibitions and in the selection of their contents. The starting point was the painting of the sacred landscape in the main hall, which provided a popular backdrop for taking group photos (fig.3.4).<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Fieldwork, 2 February 2016. This followed use of the term 'Buddhist Art' for the title of the exhibition at the Asia Society in New York in February 2015 and at the National Museum in Nay Pyi Taw which opened in August 2015 with a gallery titled 'Myanmar Buddhist Art'.

<sup>57</sup> See Appendix 1, C.8.

<sup>58</sup> David Phillips, *Exhibiting Authenticity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 5.

<sup>59</sup> Restitution cases are a catalyst for recognising market values. Two well known cases of restitution from the United States were the group of Pyu bronze figures that were returned to Sri Ksetra Archaeological Museum returned in 1983 and the standing Buddha from Kyaukgu Umin Temple in Bagan which was returned in 2006. Cherry Thein, 'The Happy Reunion of Pyu Statues, Recounted', *The Myanmar Times*, 22 November 2010, <https://www.mmtimes.com/national-news/4551-the-happy-reunion-of-pyu-statues-recounted.html>. Thomas Parisi, 'NIU Burma Studies Directors Rescue, Return 1,000-Year-Old Buddha Statue to Myanmar', *NIU Today* (blog), 1 April 2013, <https://www.niutoday.info/2013/04/01/niu-burma-studies-directors-rescue-return-1000-year-old-buddha-statue-to-myanmar/>.

<sup>60</sup> Financial values are one of the 'taboos' implicated in the authenticity of the work of art. Phillips, *Exhibiting Authenticity*, 6–12.

<sup>61</sup> By late 2016 photography with mobile phones had been permitted in state museums. Fieldwork observations, 11 August 2016.



Figure 3.4. Visitor taking photos of the mural in the main hall, 10 October 2017. Photograph: Udomluck Hoontrakul, courtesy of Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture.

Framed by the double-height main hall with teak panelling and lacquer-decorated columns, the painting was a meta-narrative of merit-making, flanked by sandstone reliefs and contemporary figures of the ancient kings. The scene dominates the view from the main entrance, while upstairs the panorama comes repeatedly into view as visitors move between the showrooms along a mezzanine balcony.



Figure 3.5. Mural painting of Bagan landscape. Photograph: Heidi Tan courtesy of Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture.

The painting maps the network of famous relic stupas that demarcate the sacred landscape of Bagan. A sandy track leads the eye towards the western-most stupa at Tangyi Taung, dimly visible along the crest of hills across the Ayeyarwady River, whilst

the two gilded stupas along Bagan's shoreline depict the Shwezigon Pagoda to the north (far right) and the Lawkananda Pagoda to the south (far left). This orientation assumes the viewer is travelling along the eastern approach to Old Bagan, after visiting the fourth of the relic stupas at Tuyin Taung, towards a succession of white-washed temples from the Htilominlo in the foreground to the Ananda and Thatbyinnyu in the distance (fig.3.5). An inscription in the lower right corner credits the work as the 'responsibility' of the Myanmar Traditional Art Association and is dated 1997. This co-authored statement of introduction to the exhibitions represents the ritual network that is popular with pilgrims who complete a visit to all four stupas before noon in order to attain a special wish.<sup>62</sup> Much popular knowledge of Bagan has come from the 19<sup>th</sup> century *Glass Palace Chronicle* in which the temple at Tangyi Taung marks the site where the Buddha foretold his prophecy of the city's impending greatness during his visit to Arimaddana (the Pali name for Bagan).<sup>63</sup> The chronicle also tells of King Anawrahta's receipt of relics from Sri Lanka, its miraculous replications and multiple enshrinements at the four stupas that were built wherever the royal white elephant roamed and chose to stop.

Souhami's further observation of exhibitions as complex processes involving many different people and interests is demonstrated in this example of a collaborative work which was coordinated by the painter U Tin.<sup>64</sup> He recalled facilitating its production by sharing photographic documentation of the temples.<sup>65</sup> In the late 1990s photography was an expensive undertaking and access to equipment and printing facilities was limited.<sup>66</sup> The use of photographs is discussed below, in relation to paintings of the ancient monuments, and the replication of potent Buddha images (see *Authenticity in the Making of Alodawpyi Buddha*).

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<sup>62</sup> Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 43.

<sup>63</sup> The chronicle describes the origins of Bagan. Founded on a group of nineteen Pyu villages around 107 C.E., Bagan's mythological origins are embodied by the first ruler Pyusawhti, who was said to be born of a sun god and a snake princess. Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 22. An unusual lacquered book produced in 1907 illustrates the prophecy. Fraser-Lu, 'A Lacquered History of the Kings of Pagan from an Illustrated Glass Palace Chronicle', 261. Pe Maung Tin and Luce (trs.), *The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Myanmar*, 29–30.

<sup>64</sup> Souhami, 'Exhibition Production as Processes of Translation', 12.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with the author, 22 February 2016.

<sup>66</sup> The costs of photographic equipment and printing remained prohibitive and was cited as one of the main limitations to the museum's ability to produce interpretives for the exhibitions in 2016. Daw Baby, interview with the author, 1 January 2016.



## ‘Art Gallery of Bagan Period Ancient Monuments’

The ‘Art Gallery of Bagan Period Ancient Monuments’ exhibits a large group of paintings that depict each of the temples. These were part of a large collection commissioned by Senior General Than Shwe during the mid-1990s, who is said to have expressed a preference for painting over photography.<sup>67</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan reflected that apart from the historical archaeological collection, this vast new body of material estimated at several thousand works, was in retrospect a prime justification for the construction of the new museum.<sup>68</sup> She recalled being re-assigned from her work at the MOC in Yangon to assist U Aung Kyaing with the arrangement of the displays in 1996. The Chair of the committee overseeing the museum development, General Khin Nyunt, was also personally interested in the archaeological collections at this time and directed various aspects of the displays such as the elaborately constructed plinths with carved aureoles for the display of Buddha images.<sup>69</sup> This interest in objects meant that over time the number of paintings on display was reduced in favour of showing more archaeological material including pottery and a fossilised tree.<sup>70</sup>

The iconographic programme of the Art Gallery in the southern wing comprised a single linear arrangement of paintings hung above eye-level at evenly spaced intervals (fig.3.6). This elevated position was also observed at the Mahamuni Pagoda’s Dhamma Hall where monumental oil paintings were hung even higher, as if to emulate the traditional mural paintings that hung along the entryways to the temple. The height elevated the significance of the painted images and assumed visitors would remain standing to view them. That visitors were required to look up at the paintings implied a respectful protocol that was accorded to temples and Buddha images alike as noted of the tall altar in the shrine room at Uppatasanti Pagoda Museum (see Chapter One: *Devotion in the Re-framed Shrine*). This coded behaviour was further encouraged by the use of heavily carved teak frames that were replicated in the form of plinths and aureoles to support the numerous stone Buddha images in the adjacent showroom. Whilst other showrooms put paintings to work as didactic contextual backdrops, these still-lives collectively reproduced a microcosm of the re-imagined sacred landscape.

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<sup>67</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan, interview with the author, 30 August 2015. Daw Baby estimated there were around four thousand paintings in the collection. Interview with the author, 1 January 2016. 216 of these paintings were published in 1999. Ministry of Information, *Magnificent Myanmar, 1988-2003* (Yangon: Ministry of Information, 2004), 357–61.

<sup>68</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan, 30 August 2015.

<sup>69</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan, personal communication 4 November 2017.

<sup>70</sup> Eventually a large group of around 300 objects including the tree were sent to the new National Museum in Nay Pyi Taw. Daw Baby, interview with the author, 19 August 2015.



Figure 3.6. Art Gallery of Bagan Period Ancient Monuments, 8 October 2017. Photograph: Udomluck Hoontrakul courtesy of Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture.

Bagan's World Heritage Nomination Dossier identifies the museum's collection together with the surrounding monuments as historical evidence of a cultural continuum of 'Buddhist merit-making on an impressive and unprecedented scale'.<sup>71</sup> Rather than articulate this significant meta-narrative of Bagan through written interpretives, the gallery was populated with a collection that aimed to reproduce each of the temples. While the title 'Art Gallery' suggested that the paintings were to be viewed as 'art', implicit within their content was the significance of the 'Monuments' as meritorious works. Engagement with the 'museum effect' was apparent to this point, while abundance that called attention to the conditions of merit-making rather than the singularisation of particular works could be observed. The paintings conveyed the same sense of ordered abundance, albeit on a larger scale, that was observed in the displays of Buddha images at the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum (see fig.1.17). Similarly, unmediated by interpretives, the paintings were open to visitors' embodied and 'encoded' ways of understanding and recalling the sites.<sup>72</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, this indirect means of understanding, through associations and memories, came about when devotees spent time socialising amidst the portraits of the Sawbwa (see fig.2.22). However, the ambience of the art gallery with its subdued lighting and overwhelming number of paintings was less conducive to lingering. As discussed below visitors drew extensively from experiences or from what others had told them of the temples, in order to make sense of objects in the museum.

<sup>71</sup> Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, 'Nomination Dossier for Inscription on the World Heritage List. Bagan. Volume I: Nomination Dossier'.

<sup>72</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 109.



Figure. 3.7. Painting of a temple, illegible artist's signature, dated 1996, Bagan Archaeological Museum, 7 August 2016. Photograph: Heidi Tan courtesy of Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture.

The paintings exuded a mix of 'realist' and 'impressionist' styles that were typical of the 1990s (fig.3.7).<sup>73</sup> Many were romantic portrayals of imminent decay rendered in a photo-realistic manner, illustrated here in the ruin of crumbling brickwork set among tall grass, cacti and thorny bushes.<sup>74</sup> The low perspectives and dramatic skies raise the viewer's gaze even further to evoke a sense of awe and respect, while the schematic elevations and plans in the upper and lower margins offer a vision of the original elevation that hinted at its future renovation.

Although inconsistently signed, dated or captioned, some of the paintings bear the name of the site and its inventory number in accordance with UNESCO's *Inventory of Monuments at Pagan* which Pierre Pichard began in 1982 and published in eight volumes throughout the 1990s.<sup>75</sup> The collection emulates the inventory yet goes well beyond the number of sites recorded in that publication. By 2001 the surrounding landscape had been intensively mapped, zoned and inventoried. A total of 2,237 ancient temples, monasteries and stupas was estimated to have been documented over an area of about 80 square kilometres, although that number has fluctuated considerably since then.<sup>76</sup> A marble stele installed in the grounds of the museum in

<sup>73</sup> Ranard, *Burmese Painting*, 270.

<sup>74</sup> I am grateful for Lisa Horikawa's observations on this work. Lisa Horikawa, National Gallery of Singapore, personal communication, 25 March 2018.

<sup>75</sup> Pierre Pichard, *Inventory of Monuments at Pagan. Volume VI* (Paris: Gartmore: UNESCO; Kiscadale (Ltd.), 1996).

<sup>76</sup> Bob Hudson, Nyein Lwin, and (Tampawaddy) Win Maung, 'The Origins of Bagan: New Dates and Old Inhabitants', *Asian Perspectives* 40, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 48, <https://doi.org/doi.org/10.1353/asi.2001.0009>. The statistics vary - Stadtner notes that 2,834

2005 states that there was a total of 4,446 ancient religious monuments of which 3,122 had been inventoried by 2005.<sup>77</sup> The total number of monuments reported in Bagan's Nomination Dossier in early 2018 was 3,595.<sup>78</sup>

Deputy Director Daw Baby reflected on the challenges of displaying the large collection of paintings and of engaging audiences whose interests were oriented towards Buddha images and ritual objects.<sup>79</sup> Her comments conveyed a sense of the challenges faced since assuming her post in 2012, which included the limited means to update the exhibitions. However, modest renovations were made in early 2016 which focussed on these areas of interest to visitors. They included the reconfiguration of the Twenty-eight Buddhas from the Nagayon Temple and the redisplay of ritual objects titled 'Buddhist Arts'. As discussed below ritual care was also part of Daw Baby's remit, which included annual merit-making rituals in the Buddha Images Showroom (see this chapter *Ritual Authenticity Revealed*).

#### *Buddha Images among the Ancient Monuments*

Daw Baby's observations about the lack of interest in the paintings may partly explain the display of a small group of metal Buddha images at one end of the gallery. The group of three Buddha images included gold and silver seated images from temple number 1515 in Old Bagan, and a standing image cast in the revered five-metals alloy. Two smaller images were placed on a red velvet-wrapped plinth within a glass showcase, while the larger one stood on an elaborately carved plinth (fig.3.8). Dramatically lit, the displays like their counterparts at the pagoda museums, were obscured by iron bars installed due to security concerns as mentioned earlier. Yet the spaciousness encouraged devotees to pray and meditate in front of the enclosures. Like pagoda museum counterparts state museums employed these safekeeping

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monuments were documented by Pierre Pichard. Donald M. Stadtner, 'Inventory of Monuments at Pagan by Pierre Pichard', *Ars Orientalis* 33 (2003): 212–14. More recently the Association of Myanmar Architects reportedly recorded 3,822 monuments, following an earthquake in August 2016. Ei Ei Thu, '3822 Religious Monuments in Bagan: Latest Study', *The Myanmar Times*, 7 September 2017, sec. National News, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/3822-religious-monuments-bagan-latest-study.html>.

<sup>77</sup> The total number cited in 1955 was 5,000, with around 100 still actively in use. U. Lu Pe Win, *Pictorial Guide to Pagan* (Rangoon: Ministry of Union Culture, Government of the Union of Burma, 1955), e-f. Bob Hudson, 'Restoration and Reconstruction of Monuments at Bagan (Pagan), Myanmar (Burma), 1995–2008', *World Archaeology* 40, no. 4 (December 2008): 558, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00438240802453195>.

<sup>78</sup> This includes several hundred unexcavated mounds and 11 free-standing sculptures. Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, 'Nomination Dossier for Inscription on the World Heritage List. Bagan. Volume I: Nomination Dossier', 27.

<sup>79</sup> The powers of exaggeration are vividly evoked in local lore that takes the figure to four million. Daw Baby, interview with the author, 1 January 2016.

measures for the most valued objects. For example, iron bars were still in use to house King Thibaw's royal regalia after its return from Britain in 1964.<sup>80</sup>



Figure 3.8. Metal Buddha image display in the Art Gallery, 11 August 2016. Photograph: Heidi Tan courtesy of Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture.

The ostentatious caption in hand-painted gold letters reveals a monastic source for the gift:

Standing Buddha image, 11<sup>th</sup> c. A.D. It was found on the east face sikara of Nagayon Temple at Sint-gu, Bagan, Nyaung Oo Township and removed from Ven: U Ye Vada, Ng. A Sutaik Monastery on 11.7.99.<sup>81</sup>

Taw Sein Ko's retrieval of objects from local collections such as monasteries must have required substantial negotiation given the fledgling heritage legislation that existed in 1904. Despite a number of legislative provisions being made after Independence, in practice the protection and restitution of movable objects has been difficult to implement, and as noted earlier a prevailing attitude persists that favours the meritorious mode of gifting to famous pagodas or monasteries rather than to the state's museums.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Ministry of Culture, Department of Archaeology, National Museum and Library, *Myanma Cultural Property. Royal Regalia*, 3.

<sup>81</sup> Fieldwork, 2 January 2016.

<sup>82</sup> Five pieces of legislation were enacted: the 1957 Antiquities Act, the 1998 Protection and Preservation of Cultural Heritage Regions Law, the 2009 amendment to that law, and two other laws introduced in 2015 which included the Protection and Preservation of Antique Objects Law and the Protection and Preservation of Ancient Monuments Law. Jennifer Morris A., 'Rebuilding a Troubled Nation, One Brick at a Time: Cultural Heritage and the Law in Myanmar' (Unpublished typescript, 2015), 11, <https://law.wm.edu/academics/intellectuallife/researchcenters/postconflictjustice/documents/morrison.paper.pdf>. For 2015 laws see: Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, 'The Protection and Preservation of Antique Objects Law', Pub. L. No. 43, 2015 (2015). Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, 'The Protection and Preservation of Ancient Monuments Law', Pub. L. No. 51, 1 (2015), [http://www.unesco.org/culture/natlaws/media/pdf/myanmar/mya\\_lawprotmon\\_15\\_entof](http://www.unesco.org/culture/natlaws/media/pdf/myanmar/mya_lawprotmon_15_entof).

## Buddha Images Showroom<sup>83</sup>

The Buddha Images Showroom is the most object-heavy of the museum's displays with 104 sandstone images dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries on open display and eight groups of smaller images in various materials displayed in showcases.<sup>84</sup> During the 1980s the collection had been augmented significantly by the large number of images collected from the temples in order to avoid thefts. They were accessioned as 'Bouda sin-du-daw' or 'Buddha images' (see *Replicating Buddha Images*).<sup>85</sup> The collection evidently motivated thinking about mounting exhibitions of this material elsewhere. For example, in 1992 UNESCO consultant Takeshi Nakagawa prepared plans for a 'Buddha Image Exhibition' in a proposal for an archaeological museum in Yangon.<sup>86</sup>

The title 'Buddha Images Showroom' differentiates the large sandstone images and a few showcases of rare metal and wood images from other categories of 'Buddhist art'. For example, in February 2016 the Showroom of Bagan Period Buddhist Arts underwent renovation. Many more categories of objects were displayed there including small Buddha images in bronze, gold, silver and even fired earthenware. There was also an assortment of clay tablets, ritual pouring vessels, beads and pipes.<sup>87</sup> Around the same time, the National Museum re-named its Buddha Images Showroom to 'Buddhist Art Gallery'. This recalls the classificatory themes proposed by Luce in 1947 for an 'Exhibition of the Arts of Burma, including masterpieces of architecture, painting, sculpture, etc. – chiefly of the past'.<sup>88</sup> Such categories of art have been adopted by state museums with the notable exception of 'sculpture'. A preference for broader terms such as 'Buddhist art' may be contingent on the conventional lexicon of terms that pairs sculptural genres with specific materials, for example sculpture would be subsumed within the categories of stone-carving, wood and ivory-carving and bronze-casting, as listed in the canon of traditional Myanmar art known as the Ten Flowers (see Glossary). As noted in Chapter One, these were implicit in the themed titles of

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<sup>83</sup> Here the space formally titled: 'Showroom of Bagan Period Buddha Images' is typically referred to by staff as 'Buddha Images Showroom'.

<sup>84</sup> The Bagan period is conventionally assigned dates 1044–1287 although the origins remain debatable and continuities with Pyu predecessors have been proposed. Charlotte Galloway, 'Bagan: The Living Legacy of Kings', in *Cities and Kings. Ancient Treasures from Myanmar*. (Singapore: Asian Civilisations Museum, 2016), 48. Fieldwork, 21 February 2016.

<sup>85</sup> See Chapter Three: *Curatorial Response* for records of the seated Buddha.

<sup>86</sup> The UNESCO consultant who formulated the proposal had witnessed the replication of Buddha images at Bagan in 1992. Takeshi Nakagawa, 'Planning of Archaeology Museum. Yangon, Myanmar', Internal report, Serial No. RACAP/PROAP/92/5 (Bangkok: UNESCO, United Nations Development Programme, 1992), Annex 5., <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0009/000939/093901eb.pdf>.

<sup>87</sup> Fieldwork, 16–23 February.

<sup>88</sup> Luce, 'Draft Scheme for a Burma Museum', 100. Taylor, 'A Burma Provincial Museum'.

showrooms at the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum. In the context of Bagan, the pluralisation of 'Buddhist Arts' more readily incorporates the diverse materials and techniques of production while reiterating their status as art. This broadening of classificatory schemes recalls Louise Tythacott's discussion of the challenges of working with a taxonomic legacy that had subsumed groups of Buddhist objects within broader epistemological categories, such as 'Antiquities' and 'Ethnography', during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The extrication of 'Buddhist' objects from these established categories created a new permanent exhibition at the redeveloped Asia Gallery at the World Museum Liverpool. Moreover, it brought cross-cultural 'encounter' into the mix of new meanings for this material as the gallery looked at the spread of the religion across the Buddhist world.<sup>89</sup> This development signalled a move away from what Eileen Hooper-Greenhill identified as the 'fixed' nature of classificatory terms and the 'character of inevitability' that they produce around objects.<sup>90</sup>

However, in the context of the Buddha Images Showroom, the persistent use of the category 'Buddha Images' reflects the extent to which the corpus of the museum's collection remains inextricably linked to the temples and identifiably sacred. The means to recognising this remain subtle as the iconographic programme within the showroom bore few signs of conducive spatial arrangements or ritual paraphernalia that were observed at pagoda museums or other state museums. For example, at the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum the configuration of sacred centre that encouraged circumambulation could not be employed in this case as the centre of the showroom was occupied by an enclosed air-well overlooking a courtyard. At the National Museum in Yangon an ancient five-metals Buddha image resides in a special shrine, on open display for all to venerate as requested by the donors. The caption states that the image had been found by U Tun Win within ancient brick walls of a village in Bago in 1925. The circumstances of its retrieval obliged the museum to accede to the donors' request and the image is venerated daily by staff.<sup>91</sup> At the Sagaing Buddha and Cultural Museum a single Buddha image sits beneath a canopy and a prayer mat and beads are retained for regular use in the main showroom of Buddha images (see fig.3.18). However, in Bagan during high season the showroom is only intermittently dormant until ritually activated by staff or a group of visitors.

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<sup>89</sup> Tythacott, 'Curating the Sacred: Exhibiting Buddhism at the World Museum Liverpool', 122.

<sup>90</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 124.

<sup>91</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan recalled that Thidagu Sayadaw, who is also from the same area of Thegone Township assisted with the retrieval of this Pyu period Buddha image. Nu Mra Zan, 31 December 2015, fieldwork observations 2 February 2016.

Bastian like others notes the ambiguity of the museum, that is 'neither sacred nor profane but a complex mixture of the two', and attributes this in the context of Myanmar to the prevalence of Buddhism in daily life. Yet she concludes that the Buddha Images Showroom in Bagan comes much closer to the model of the Western art museum and the 'museum effect' due to the use of chronological arrangements, white walls and labels.<sup>92</sup> However, as discussed below other elements of the iconographic programme drew attention to the ritual importance of the images. As Daw Nu Mra Zan recalled, she had worked on the arrangements within the showroom with General Khin Nyunt and U Aung Kyaing, which included the commissioning of carved plinths and hand-written interpretives.<sup>93</sup> These framing elements that adhered to an austere protocol of respect for sacred objects, were a significant part of the iconographic programme in that they encouraged ritual behaviour in subtle ways.

### Merit-making on Display

While merit-making was alluded to in the mural of the four relic stupas network, other images in the main hall graphically depicted the practice of the ritual. One example was the relief that was transferred to the museum in 1993 from the Kubyaukngge Temple in Myinkaba Village as part of a programme of retrieval.<sup>94</sup> It depicts acts of merit-making during the Buddha's passing or *parinibbāna* (P), with figures thought to be royal donors in the lower register and a three-tiered shrine or relic stupa that presages their importance as sites of worship after the Buddha has gone (fig.3.9).<sup>95</sup> U Aung Kyaing recalled that the image had been left in situ as it was too large to manoeuvre through narrow sections of the temple. A join through the centre marks where it had been sliced through by looters in an unsuccessful attempt to remove it.<sup>96</sup> Situated originally along a corridor, the relief was probably accessible to devotees.<sup>97</sup> The shiny patina at the centre of the projecting elbow demonstrates it was subject to regular touching in the

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<sup>92</sup> Bastian, 'Exhibiting Buddhism: The Museumification of Burmese Buddha Images', 74, 77. See also Arthur, 'Exhibiting the Sacred', 13. Gaskell, 'Sacred to Profane and Back Again', 149. Clark, 'Exhibiting the Exotic, Simulating the Sacred: Tibetan Shrines at British and American Museums', 12.

<sup>93</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan, personal communication, 4 November 2017.

<sup>94</sup> Pierre Pichard, *Inventory of Monuments at Pagan. Volume V.* (Paris: Gartmore: UNESCO, Kiscadale (Ltd.), 1995), 332.

<sup>95</sup> This is one of two reliefs from Kubyaukngge Temple dated to around 1198 in accordance with a dated inscription at the temple that was loaned to the Asia Society in 2015. Fraser-Lu and Stadtner, *Buddhist Art of Myanmar*, 122.

<sup>96</sup> Restoration was undertaken with the help of an Italian conservator. U Aung Kyaing, 20 February 2016.

<sup>97</sup> The relief was situated in a southern niche along the western corridor. Pichard, *Inventory of Monuments at Pagan. Volume V.*, 333–34.



museum, as it was accessible to large groups of pilgrims streaming through the hall during high season.



Figure 3.9. Installation view of exhibition “Buddhist Art of Myanmar” at Asia Society Museum, New York, 2015. Photograph: Heidi Tan, courtesy of Asia Society. Buddha’s Parinibbāna, Kubyaung Temple, Myinkaba village, Pagan period, ca. 1198. Asia Society, New York, 9 February 2015. Courtesy of Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture.

Unlike the pagoda museums where objects including Buddha images are mainly kept behind glass, images in the main hall and the Buddha Images Showroom were all subject to haptic forms of ritual engagement. Within the Buddha Images Showroom visitors on fast-track pilgrimage tours produced an energetic atmosphere within the showroom, in a way that was not seen at the National Museum in Yangon or at the Shwedagon Pagoda. As the museum is centrally located it is considered an important stop in order to get an overview of Bagan. Informants appreciated the museum for the sense of being ‘able to see everything’ that cannot be seen when visiting particular temples.<sup>98</sup> Their first response was to remove footwear and the rapid accumulation of shoes and slippers at the entrance to the showroom even had tourists asking whether they should also remove theirs.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Fieldwork survey, 19–21, 23 February 2016. See Tin Tin Twe, Appendix 3.2, no. 4.

<sup>99</sup> Fieldwork notes, 20 February 2016.



Figure 3.10. View of Buddha Images Showroom from the entrance. 19 February 2016. Photograph: Heidi Tan courtesy of Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture.

Their circumambulations with intermittent gestures of prayer and touching of the Buddhas' knees was encouraged by the systematic linear arrangements of images set at regular intervals along perimeter walls and around columns (fig.3.10). The effect of the austere arrangement with each image respectfully presented on an elaborately carved plinth, was a collective presence of the Buddha and multiple opportunities for merit-making.

Unlike pagoda museums which almost always display objects inside showcases, the large number of images on open display meant that touching was a frequent occurrence, the traces of which were evident on many of the images. The lacquer Buddha prominently positioned at the centre of the lengthy northern wing of the showroom sits with legs pendant and knees exposed (fig.3.11), the only example in the showroom to be seated in such a posture.



Figure 3.11. Seated lacquer Buddha, Buddha Images Showroom, 20 February 2016. Photograph: Heidi Tan courtesy of Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture.

Labels in Myanmar and English handwritten in gold capital letters identified the image by the hand mudrās using Sanskrit terms which were partly explained by a text panel at the entrance to the showroom:

ABHAYA MUDRA AND  
VA-RA-DA MUDRA <sup>100</sup>  
15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> CENT: (IN-WA PERIOD)  
LACQUER  
(FROM YA-TA-NAR-SAN-HLUT MONASTERY BAGAN)

A sign prohibiting touch had been strategically placed on the lap in 2016. This confirmed an earlier observation in 2013 when a group of visitors from Shan State were observed rubbing the knees of the image which they said they believed would help alleviate knee pains.<sup>101</sup> Their collective experience in the spaciouly configured showroom and the accessibility of the unusual image evidently impacted on the way that they engaged with it. Situated along the axis of the northern wing, the image stood out as both different in form as well as substance. The maroon lacquer with traces of gilding appeared dry and worn dull unlike the shiny patina of the stone relief discussed earlier. However, the wear of previous contact evidently encouraged further ritual

<sup>100</sup> The text panel explained abhaya mudrā as meaning the Buddha's protection from all dangers, whilst the meaning of varada mudrā (gift-giving gesture) had been omitted altogether.

<sup>101</sup> Tan, 'Art, Power and Merit. The Veneration of Buddha Images in Myanmar Museums', 84. I am grateful to Moe Aung Lwin for drawing my attention to this activity observed during a fieldtrip in August 2013.

touching. Christopher Wingfield noticed a similar tendency among visitors to the Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, where parts of the Sultanganj Buddha that were worn shiny from touching attracted further touching from visitors.<sup>102</sup>

The deliberate placement of the image at the centre of the room emphasised its distinctive qualities relative to the ubiquitous stone images which line the walls of the showroom (see *Quiet Potency on Display*). Yet this intentional engagement with the 'museum effect' was augmented by visitors' needs to seek ritual efficacy. A contributing factor to their response to the image can be attributed to the human cognitive sense of perception towards human-like forms. Wingfield attributes the charisma of the Sultanganj Buddha in Birmingham to a sensitivity on the part of visitors towards forms that manifest 'lateral symmetry'. The human-like qualities of the standing bronze figure call the viewer's attention to the form, regardless of the viewer's religious inclinations or interests. As Wingfield notes, visitors are drawn to the Buddha '...in ways that they do not notice other objects in the museum'.<sup>103</sup> In the case of the lacquer Buddha this lateral symmetry is more pronounced in the posture that depicts the Buddha with legs extending out over the plinth with feet fully formed as opposed to the stylised forms observed in most of the stone figures that are seated cross-legged. Notably, visitors did not cite the human-like nature of the images per se when questioned about them, but were drawn to details that relate to human-like attributes and the notion of charisma predicated on extraneous details such as the auspicious orientation of the image. Like the venerated sandstone seated Buddha discussed below, this lacquer image also faces east, an attribute that at least one visitor cited as significant to their visit (see *Auspicious Orientation*).

Yet the seated image was also situated within a conceptual framework that ordered the displays according to iconographic attributes. Three large information panels situated at the south-eastern entrance enumerated the different mudrā or hand gestures to be found in the showroom, while on an adjacent wall two sets of hand-drawn diagrams illustrated a stylistic chronology of images across the Bagan and successive periods. Although the panels were highly synoptic, like the floor plan they reveal that a didactic rationale had originally been intended for the exhibition. Visitors who were asked to respond to the large illustrated text panel on mudrā near to the entrance invariably

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<sup>102</sup> Christopher Wingfield noticed a similar tendency among visitors to the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, where parts of the Sultanganj Buddha that were worn shiny from touching attracted further touching from visitors. Wingfield, 'Touching the Buddha. Encounters with a Charismatic Object', 57.

<sup>103</sup> Wingfield, 57.

replied that they knew of the gestures since childhood when they learned about the events in the life of the Buddha from their elders, or from dharma school or a sayadaw, or simply from talking to each other. Most responded that dharmacakra mudrā for example, referred to the First Sermon, defined more technically in the panel as 'Buddha preaching attitude to the Five Arhats' or summarised in the captions as 'Preaching Attitude'.<sup>104</sup>

Yet disengagement with the panels was also due to perceptions of the subject as too advanced or difficult to access for the lack of information. For example, Shin Zaw Thika, a 12-year-old novice from Hsipaw in Shan State felt that he was too young to know about such matters, while Shin Thuriya a 38-year-old monk from Magwe felt that he was not senior enough to comment.<sup>105</sup> Tin Tin Twe from Sagaing felt that she lacked knowledge about mudrās as she had not read about them although as she spoke her own hand movements revealed her embodied understanding of the complex hand-gesture.<sup>106</sup> U Maung Maung Kyaw, a local engineer, felt it had been difficult to obtain information about the gestures despite having read a little about them. He noted the need for information on the historical development of Theravāda Buddhism in the context of the 'first empire' and the establishment of the Buddhist religion.<sup>107</sup> U Thein Htaik, a retired dentist from Magwe, said that Pali rather than Sanskrit should be used in the interpretives since that had been the language at the time of the Buddha.<sup>108</sup> Like visitors to the Shwedagon Pagoda, those who are devotees also want and expect the museum to provide more information.

These responses may have been calibrated by the novelty of being asked for an opinion by a foreigner in the midst of a pilgrimage tour. Yet others also took the opportunity to voice a more critical response and to make requests. They conveyed the need for more more information and better lighting to read the labels, as well as more objects to fill the expansive showroom. At least one also felt the need for skilful curators who can convey difficult aspects to foreigners which are otherwise easy for Buddhists.

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<sup>104</sup> Interviews with 19 visitors were carried out in the Buddha Images Showroom, 19–21 February 2016. They were asked particularly about dharmacakra mudrā, one of eight gestures listed on the interpretive panel. More than half of the respondents showed some familiarity with the mudrā. See Appendix 3.2.

<sup>105</sup> Appendix 3.2, nos. 3, 18.

<sup>106</sup> Appendix 3.2, no. 4.

<sup>107</sup> Appendix 3.2, no. 5.

<sup>108</sup> Appendix 3.2, no. 17.

The responses reflected how different views were shaped by the framing of the showroom and its displays in the same way that devotees responded to the shrine room at the Shwedagon Pagoda. A more detailed way of understanding the iconographic programme is Souhami's use of the filmic mode of framing or the *mise en scène*, literally 'putting on stage'.<sup>109</sup> The setting that frames and organises the contents of an exhibition comprises a group of elements – lighting, colour, décor, props, space, angle of view, composition and performance. However, unlike the discrete frames that make up celluloid film strips, the exhibition environment is less easily defined as it relies on the viewer's own 'field of vision' which changes as they move around the exhibition.<sup>110</sup> The varying, sometimes contradictory responses from visitors illustrate the personal and changing nature of this experience of seeing. For example, U Thein Htaik recognised the showroom as a sacred place because of the Buddha images but this focus on the sacred had caused him to shift his gaze to the mundane pile of slippers that cluttered the doorway. He mentioned that it would be better if shoes were removed and kept on racks as they would have been at the temple.<sup>111</sup>

The last element, performance, relates to the way objects bring out the ideas and concepts of the exhibition.<sup>112</sup> Several commented on the seated Buddha in particular and offered comparative ritual experiences of engaging with Buddha images in the museum and temple. At least two alluded to the feeling that praying to the seated Buddha in *dharmacakra mudrā* at the museum was more effective – U Kyaw Linh Te had spent the most time in front of the seated Buddha. He noted that details such as the hair and the seemingly non-existent robes worn by the image had caught his attention, thus alluding to the human-like qualities that Wingfield noted. However, he also said that he recognised it as he had seen the image before at the Alodawpyi Pagoda (fig.3.17). His 'field of vision' was clearly oriented towards the seated Buddha and was predicated on its likeness to the replica, thus confirming the conflation of replica and original in the minds of devotees, even if the original felt more efficacious.<sup>113</sup> Sai Nyi Nyi, a student from Bago on his first visit had said prayers for a good education and had learned of the wish fulfilling Buddha from his father, who added that the image at the museum was more effective than the replica at the temple.<sup>114</sup> Conversely a farmer from Wakema, U Thein Nyo, felt that the new display of

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<sup>109</sup> Oxford University Press (OUP), Lexico.com, 2019, <https://www.lexico.com/about>.

<sup>110</sup> Souhami, "Exhibition Production as Processes of Translation," 50-51.

<sup>111</sup> Appendix 3.2, no.17.

<sup>112</sup> Souhami, 'Exhibition Production as Processes of Translation', 55.

<sup>113</sup> Appendix 3.2, nos.14.

<sup>114</sup> Appendix 3.2, no. 19.

the 'Twenty-Eight Buddhas' was easy to understand but that it felt better to offer prayers at the temple (see *Quiet Potency on Display*).<sup>115</sup>

The limitations of the secular Western art museum raised by Ivan Gaskell would also seem to be undermined by these visitors' appropriations of the museum. He states:

Once a sacred object has been removed to a secular space, its sacred qualities are often compromised. Indeed, in their emphasis on the aesthetic and the art-historical, art museums have proved to be very effective means of expunging the sacred qualities of objects.<sup>116</sup>

However, visitors' experiences within the showroom demonstrated that categorical distinctions between sacred and secular cannot be made in the case of the museum at Bagan. The museum did not explicitly encourage ritual behaviour but neither did it forbid it. As noted in Chapter One, the dual experience inside and outside the shrine room resonated with Gaskell's notion of the divide between the sacred and the aesthetic, in which multivalence and a certain ambiguity in the display of the sacred or art object prevails.<sup>117</sup> The perspective of the viewer took precedence in each case; within the shrine room devotees sat while outside viewers stood up. In the showroom the difference between sitting and standing also represented a subtle but profound shift in perspective. The protective barrier around the seated Buddha simply modified the distance between the seated worshipper and the image rather than prohibited worship per se (see fig.3.19). The ambiguity of the relic shrine at the Inner Museum was likewise observed in Chapter Two where different forms of engagement co-existed and the cash donations themselves formed part of the curiosity of the display (fig.2.9).

Far from Gaskell's sense of sacredness 'expunged', visitors' responses suggest that the exhibition provided a liminal moment in their tour of Bagan, in which they felt able to acknowledge the sacred and other ways of engaging with the images that they might not have done at the temple. An elderly couple who moved more slowly than others through the showroom took time to observe the images at close quarters. Their interest was palpable as they reached out to grasp and feel the surface of the stone, as if to ascertain its material qualities or ponder at its volume and weight, attributes which are often noted on donor credits for donations such as bells or Buddha images made of

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<sup>115</sup> Appendix 3.2, no.16.

<sup>116</sup> Gaskell, 'Sacred to Profane and Back Again', 150.

<sup>117</sup> Gaskell, 152–54.

fine quality marble or other precious stones at pagodas.<sup>118</sup> Whilst in the temple the act of reaching out would normally entail ritual applications of gold leaf, here they reached out relying largely on the quality of touch to understand the underlying sandstone forms. In this case the relative absence of interpretives subverts the tendency for an object to be seen as an 'object-information package' or as part of a composite set of information that makes reference to wider spheres of knowledge, as observed by Sandra Dudley.<sup>119</sup> These brief moments of embodied understanding demonstrated Dudley's notion of the importance of the 'object-subject interaction' in which the object is 'sensorially experienced'. Although it contravened museum protocol, haptic engagement was the most truthful way for devotees to understand the Buddha images as material objects (see Chapter Two: *Material Abundance*).<sup>120</sup>

In the still moments after large groups had departed, it became clearer why earlier comments about the quiet spaces provided by pagoda museums such as the newly enclosed shrine room at the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum had been a draw for visitors (see Chapter One: *Devotion in the Re-framed Shrine*). Slower-paced visitors took time to simply sit or even lie down on the cool tiled floor to rest as they did within the vestibules at Yadana Man Aung Temple. A group of older women and mothers with children were observed to be in most need of rest. Some of the interviews were conducted seated in this way as the air conditioner struggled to cool the room. A student who subsequently recalled visiting the museum with her family some years ago was told by a museum officer that there was a prevailing belief that cool winds could be felt within the section where the seated Buddha is situated. Despite its proximity to the entrance the winds cannot be felt in the corridor immediately outside, a fact that she says she had verified for herself.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Fieldwork observations, 20 February 2016.

<sup>119</sup> Dudley, *Museum Materialities*, 3.

<sup>120</sup> Dudley, 5.

<sup>121</sup> Anonymous informant, personal communication, 13 November 2017.



## Meritorious Curating in the Life of a Wish Fulfilling Buddha

Unlike their counterparts at pagoda museums, curators at the state museums are salaried staff whose roles are largely structured according to a management hierarchy as mentioned earlier (see Chapter One: *The Volunteer-Keeper*). This structure recognises an equivalent curatorial progression whereby the head of the museum, Daw Baby, was Deputy Director or Senior Curator.<sup>1</sup> Many state museum curators and a few pagoda museum curators<sup>2</sup> have augmented their first degree with museum studies training, for example by taking the Postgraduate Diploma in Museology course which Daw Nu Mra Zan established in 2001 at the National University of Arts and Culture in Yangon.<sup>3</sup> They are therefore part of a growing museum profession which has participated increasingly with international museum associations and institutional partners for example on capacity building programmes that aim to standardise museum practice within the country and coordinate heritage initiatives across related sectors such as tourism.<sup>4</sup> However, amidst these developments curators at state museums who are religious Buddhists have continued to practice rituals and traditional ceremonies within their place of work, which includes keeping small images within shrines in offices or a communal area and venerating Buddha images in museum collections. Having a collective place of worship is not unusual – for example, the installation of a Buddha image in a publicly accessible place for worship in court buildings was mandated in the State Religion Promotion Act of 1961.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, curators have readily acknowledged that a protocol of respect is required when handling sacred objects such as Buddha images (see *Curatorial Response*). As the following discussion demonstrates, collecting for the museum during the 1980s was a response to the urgent need for safekeeping. Yet implicated in the removal of Buddha images from the temples was the need to mitigate against offending spirits of the land or incurring bad luck especially if the image had been consecrated.<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan, personal communication, 2 March 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Those who took the Postgraduate Diploma course included staff members at the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum, Myo Myint Thuzar and Yazar Ko Ko, and curator Daw Khin Khin Than at the Uppatasanti Pagoda Museum.

<sup>3</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan, personal communication, 2 March 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Lae Phyu Pya Myo Myint, 'International Museum Forum', *The Myanmar Times*, 24 May 2019, <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/international-museum-forum.html>. See also the British Council's initiative, International Museum Academy Myanmar, which has delivered museums skills training courses since 2015: <https://www.britishcouncil.org.mm/programmes/arts/international-museum-academy-myanmar>

<sup>5</sup> Smith, *Religion and Politics in Burma.*, 335.

<sup>6</sup> Schober, 'Venerating the Buddha's Remains in Burma: From Solitary Practice to the Cultural Hegemony of Communities', 127.

replication of images that could be reinstalled in the temples and therefore sustain the Buddha's presence and continuity of the life of the temples was a meritorious act, brokered by a patron and supported by curators and artists involved in the creation of a new image (see *Replicating Buddha Images*). Analysis of a particular seated Buddha image that became known through its replica at the Alodawpyi Pagoda, considers how the ongoing ritual care of the image demonstrates the meritorious role that state museum curators undertake in common with their pagoda museum counterparts.

## Replicating Buddha Images

The museum increased its collecting activities during the 1980s due to a number of thefts that occurred both at the temples and at the Octagonal Museum. The theft of the sandstone Buddha from Kyaukgu Umin Temple in Bagan is one of the more renowned cases. The standing image with hands in *dharmacakra* mudrā had been cut off around its lower legs and the upper body trafficked to the United States. It was eventually recognised at an auction in 1991 but was only returned in 2012 following a gradual relaxation of US policy on sanctions (2003–2016).<sup>7</sup> Reunited with its lower section, it has since remained at the National Museum in Yangon where it is displayed with a lengthy text panel that describes these events.<sup>8</sup>

To mitigate thefts, it was decided that Buddha images were to be retrieved from important temples and replaced with plaster replicas. U Aung Kyaing recalls feeling highly ambivalent about the plan when first implemented around 1984 on the advice of Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt, as the removal of ancient images carried with it the risk of disturbing 'local spirits'.<sup>9</sup> The removal of original images from the temples was also questioned in 1992 when Takeshi Nakagawa a UNESCO consultant witnessed the replication of the images being undertaken at the museum. He stated that the originals should be left in situ as long as security and conservation were not compromised.<sup>10</sup> A notable exception was the Ananda Temple which had remained a focal point of living

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<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of the Treasury, 'Burma (Myanmar) Sanctions', 10 July 2016, <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/pages/burma.aspx>.

<sup>8</sup>The image was identified by Richard Cooler Director of the Burma Studies Centre at Northern Illinois University at a Sotheby's auction in New York in 1991. Strained relations during the 1990s meant that it was not possible to return the image by diplomatic means. In 2006 Catherine Raymond saw the case for restitution to its conclusion. "NIU Burma Studies directors rescue, return 1,000-year-old Buddha statue to Myanmar" 1 April 2013. <http://www.niutoday.info/2013/04/01/niu-burma-studies-directors-rescue-return-1000-year-old-buddha-statue-to-myanmar/> (Accessed 11 May 2015).

<sup>9</sup> U Aung Kyaing, 4 January 2016. Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt was Director-General of the Department of Fine Arts (1976–1983) and of the DOA (1987–1989).

<sup>10</sup> Nakagawa, 'Planning of Archaeology Museum. Yangon, Myanmar', 3–4.

Buddhist traditions with a major festival each year that attracted pilgrims from around the country. The 80 relief images that illustrate the Buddha's lives, housed in niches within the outer corridor, were given added protection with the addition of wire mesh doors particularly for those most accessible at a lower level.<sup>11</sup>

A model of the Ananda on display at the museum is accompanied by a lengthy text panel that describes studying its many features as being 'like at a museum', a perception that contributes to a collective notion of the whole site of Bagan as constituting a 'treasure house'.<sup>12</sup> These lines of reasoning pre-empted more recently articulated concerns about the impact of museumisation and heritagisation of the sacred landscape. The former relates to Nakagawa's implied state of loss and the impact of replicas on the authenticity of the temples. The latter concerns the depletion of the constituents who had patronised the temples, the source communities who were repatriated to New Bagan and elsewhere during the zoning of Bagan in the 1990s, with whom the museum had subsequently failed to connect.<sup>13</sup>

However, the thefts increased and proved difficult to prevent by other means. By the early 1990s a large number of images had been removed from six temples thought to date to the early Bagan period (late 11<sup>th</sup>– early 12<sup>th</sup> centuries) and a busy programme of replication was underway. At the same time duplication of the replicas was undertaken to repopulate the long empty niches at the Alodawpyi Pagoda.<sup>14</sup> While they remained largely unattributed as replicas at the sites, their presence if anything enhanced the potency of the more active sites such as the Alodawpyi Pagoda. As visitor responses demonstrated earlier, the fame of the replica brought them to the museum in search of the seated Buddha. Replication in this sense demonstrated a meritorious mode of curating that extended the protocols of respect to implicate curators in the merit-making ritual. While safekeeping may have been the initial motivation, involvement in the processes of replication was a meritorious act that

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<sup>11</sup> Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 108–14.

<sup>12</sup> Soni, *Evolution of Stupas in Burma*, 24.

<sup>13</sup> The immediate community living within Old Bagan was transferred and zoning took place in the 1990s. Whilst this may have curtailed looting it also diminished daily activities in and around the ancient pagodas of Old Bagan. Kai Weise, 'Safeguarding Bagan: Endeavours, Challenges and Strategies', *Journal of Heritage Management* 1, no. 1 (June 2016): 68–84, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2455929616636193>. Other sites such as Bupaya in Old Bagan also lost their traditional constituents through this move. Chiao-Yen Chang, 'Cultural Resilience in Asia: A Comparative Study of Heritage Conservation in Lijiang and Bagan.' (Washington, University of Washington, 2014), 240, <https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/handle/1773/26240>.

<sup>14</sup> Six other temples had plaster replicas of their original images installed: the Nagayon, Abeyadana, Myinkaba Kubyaukgyi, Myinkaba Kubyaukngye, Pahtothamya and Kyaukgu Umin. U Aung Kyaing, 4 January 2016.

ultimately enabled the Buddha to be simultaneously present in the museum and temple.



Figure 3.12. Replica Buddha image with gold leaf offering, Nagayon Temple (left), 23 February 2016. Sandstone Buddha image with traces of plaster from Pasit-Toke Temple (right), 20 February 2016. Photograph: Heidi Tan courtesy of Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture.

A single sheet of gold leaf on the chest of a replica image at the Nagayon Temple recalls the veneration of the ‘Indian’ door guardian at the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum by pilgrims seeking remedies for ailments (fig.3.12, left). It also illustrates the efficacy of these images regardless of their age or material qualities. Even a plaster image that was labelled as a replica at the National Museum in Yangon had acquired discoloured patches on the knees, a favourite area for pilgrims to engage in ritual touching.<sup>15</sup>

The painter U Tin worked with his late brother the sculptor U Win at the Octagonal Museum for at least two years to make the plaster replicas of images, inscription stones, stucco architectural elements and small-scale models of the temples.<sup>16</sup> Their company known as ‘Win Brothers’ had started sculpting large Buddha images and portraits of famous monks for a growing local market around 1983 using modern gypsum plaster to make reproductions that distinguished their work from that of traditional artists. From 1990 onwards the brothers produced an estimated 1,000 cast

<sup>15</sup> By February 2016 the image had been removed from the newly renovated gallery. Fieldwork observations, 1 September 2015.

<sup>16</sup> A photograph of the plaster moulds in production was included in a report for UNESCO at this time. Nakagawa, ‘Planning of Archaeology Museum. Yangon, Myanmar’, Pl.7.

replicas for the DOA.<sup>17</sup> Rather than sculpt prototypes from photographs or observations of the originals, the replicas were to be cast from plaster moulds taken directly from the sandstone images, thus producing facsimiles or exact copies of the originals.<sup>18</sup>

The work required the application of plaster to the original stone images to form moulds, which although separated by a layer of *a-meh-zi* (M) a thick oily mixture, left plaster traces on the surface of the stone. The figure illustrated above has clear delineations where the mould was made in sections (fig.3.12, right). U Tin confirmed that it had not been possible to ensure that all the images were cleaned after the casts were made.<sup>19</sup> Clearly some such as the seated Buddha in dharmacakra mudrā were prioritised over others, as they bear minimal or no traces of plaster (see *Ritual Authenticity Revealed*). These inadvertent traces of replication like the marks of registration and documentation signify the last stages of the process of transitioning into a life at the museum. The powdery residues reaffirm their authenticity. As for the plaster replicas, the vast majority were installed in their temples of origin after being finished with an ‘antique’ patina, or in the case of those situated at active temples, were ritually gilded. Little has been written about the replica images although their ritual efficacy is evident even in the un-illuminated and less active temples.<sup>20</sup>

## A Life in the Museum

The original sandstone seated image has remained on permanent display at the Bagan Archaeological Museum since it opened in 1998. Its material attributes such as the unadorned but rubbed patina suggested a history of intermittent storage, cleaning, and touching. A paucity of formal information on its history recalls the other means by which objects may nonetheless come to be known, through the biographical details of their existence. One of the means to this knowledge is through recorded moments of movement, as a number of studies have shown since the mid-1980s.<sup>21</sup> Igor Kopytoff

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<sup>17</sup> U Tin, interview with the author, 22 February 2016.

<sup>18</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary defines replica as ‘*n.* 1 duplicate of a work made by the original artist. 2 a facsimile, an exact copy. 3 a copy or model, esp. on a smaller scale. [Italian, from *replicare* REPLY]’. H.W. Fowler, F.G. Fowler, and Della Thompson, eds., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English. Ninth Edition.*, Ninth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>19</sup> Born in Kyauk, south of Bagan, both brothers had been trained at the State School of Fine Art in Mandalay in the early 1970s and had then worked for the Ministry of Cooperatives in Yangon. By the early 1980s they had returned to start teaching at the Lacquerware College in Bagan. U Tin, interview with the author, 22 February 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Stadtner identifies replicas at several sites and notes that at the Nagayon Temple not all the images were correctly positioned. Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 182.

<sup>21</sup> Kopytoff, Igor, “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process”; Richard H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton University Press, 1997); Gell, *Art and Agency*. Tythacott, *The Lives of Chinese Objects*.

notes that lives comprise multiple events and just as people move through phases in life so too can an object move through ‘a successful social career’. A cultural biography as proposed by Kopytoff can reveal aspects of a culture that would remain hidden, particularly when an object is ‘culturally redefined’.<sup>22</sup> More recently Tythacott prefaced the study of the lives of a group of Chinese Buddhist images with the notion of objects ‘in motion’, a reminder that objects ‘absorb meaning as they travel’.<sup>23</sup> The distances may be very small, perhaps only between the storeroom and a gallery, but studies of these moments particularly within the context of the museum are rare.<sup>24</sup> The following are moments in the life of the seated Buddha which reveal how various custodians understood the image during the early stages of its life.

The image first came to light in 1920 in Taw Sein Ko’s annual report as a ‘stone tablet...measuring about three feet in height...an image of the Sage in alto-relievo’ that had been ‘found among the ruins of a temple at Wetkyi-in’.<sup>25</sup> In the same report he characterised the ‘Burmese tradition’ of image-making by the incorporation of physical features that reflected the ethnicity of worshippers, an attribute that was also used for dating. For example, sharp ‘almost Caucasian’ features made the image ‘decidedly Indian’ with its clinging robes that closely resembled Gupta or Northern Indian styles as influenced by the ‘Greek School of Art’ in Gandhara. The image was therefore dated to 1057, an earlier period of Indian influence before the conquest of the first Burmese ruler King Anawrahta (ca.1044–ca.1077) and the later arrival of Dravidian influences.<sup>26</sup>

In 1970 Gordon Luce and Bo-Hmu Ba Shin identified the ‘stone relief’ as a ‘Fine ‘Mon’ type’ on account of a Mon ink inscription on the side which points to a possible provenance at Kubyaukngye Temple in the Wetkyi-in area. It reads ‘Wetpyauk pagoda’, which was interpreted as ‘Wet [-kyi-in Ku-] pyauk [-ngè]’ although this has recently been disputed by Stadtner and the original inscription is no longer visible.<sup>27</sup> Its provenance remains ambiguously recorded as the museum’s current record book designates object number 131 as ‘old’, ‘sandstone’, and as ‘Buddha image’ or *Bouda sin-du-daw* (M). The provenance is ‘Wetki-in Kubyaukgyi Hpaya’ as proposed by Luce

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<sup>22</sup> Kopytoff, Igor, “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process”, 66–67.

<sup>23</sup> Tythacott, *The Lives of Chinese Objects*, 8,12.

<sup>24</sup> Tythacott, 8.

<sup>25</sup> The report makes no mention of when the image was first found or the conditions in which it was found. D.B. Spooner, *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India. 1917-1918* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1920), 28.

<sup>26</sup> Spooner, 28.

<sup>27</sup> Stadtner disagreed on the basis that the temple niches were not meant for stone images and that there are no records of images coming from that site. In his view the image has more affinities with those from the Kybaukgyi Temple at the village of Myinkaba. Fraser-Lu and Stadtner, *Buddhist Art of Myanmar*, 116.

and Bo-Hmu Ba Shin. A second record entered with a ball-point pen notes the provenance as 'Alodawpyi Hpaya' and is likely a retrospective edit following the installation of the replica in 1992.<sup>28</sup>

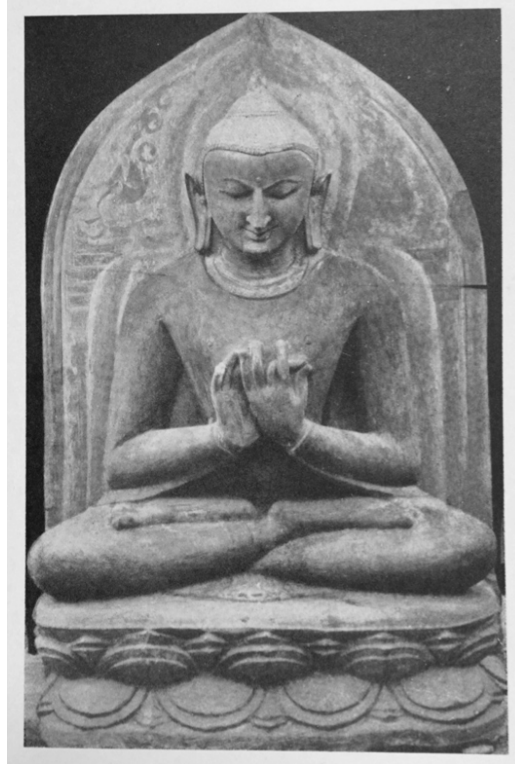


Figure 3.13. Seated Buddha. Source: Spooner, 1920, pl.XVII, fig.3.

The image was observed in 1970 together with several other 'Miscellaneous Images' at the Pagan Museum and described as having an 'architectural backslab with *ham̐sas* at the shoulders'. However, the photograph that was published appears to be a reprint of the earlier photo illustrated in Spooner's report (fig.3.13).<sup>29</sup> By then it is possible that the image had been heavily damaged and subsequently cleaned, hence Luce's use of the earlier image. The seated Buddha would then have undergone a period of underground storage during the 1940s when all the objects were 'buried very safely in the earth' throughout the Second World War. The Pagan Museum was re-opened in 1954 where the image would have sat for another twenty-five years.<sup>30</sup> These periods of damage and subsequent cleaning probably account for the curious lack of any Mon inscription today (see this chapter, *Quiet Potency on Display*).

<sup>28</sup> Fieldwork, 2 January 2016.

<sup>29</sup> The reading was attributed to Mon Bo Kay. Luce and Bo-Hmu Ba Shin, *Old Burma: Early Pagan. Volume 2. Catalogue of Plates, Indexes.*, 25:177, Pl.409.

<sup>30</sup> Nu Mra Zan, 'Museums in Myanmar: Brief History and Actual Perspectives', 22. As in the previous chapter the name 'Pagan' is retained here in reference to the old museum or historical matters.

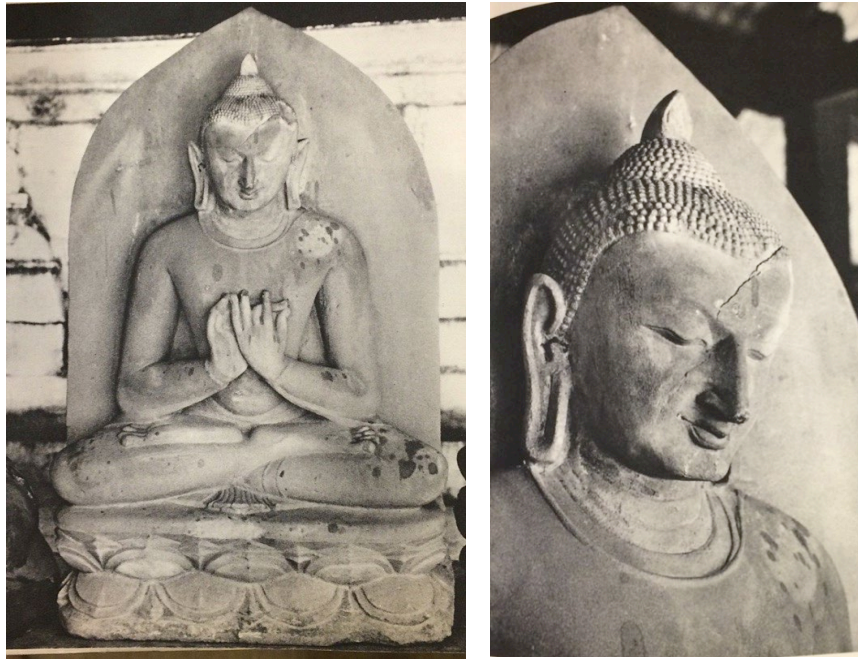


Figure 3.14. Seated Buddha (left) and detail (right). Source: Louis Frédéric, *The Art of Southeast Asia. Temples and Sculpture*. New York: H.N. Abrams, 1965, pl. 76,77.

In 1965 the image was published by Louis Frédéric who identified it as 'Preaching Buddha'. A photograph depicts the image flanked by two others in front of a reticulated wall, likely to be the outer wall that demarcates the northern entryway to the Ananda Pagoda (fig.3.14, left).<sup>31</sup> Frédéric's photograph of 1965 would appear to be the only published documentation of the condition of the piece some forty-five years after its life in museum storage started. The photograph reveals the effects of prolonged open and closed storage in less than ideal conditions.

As described in the previous chapter, objects are still housed today in the Pagan Museum's half-timbered building with adjacent open-sided sheds where they are exposed to heat and dust. Surface deposits and dust emphasise damaged areas such as the diagonal crack across the forehead which appears to be less apparent or perhaps absent when first photographed. Evidence of damage or repair still visible today such as the chip to the lower right of the double lotus base, a discoloured patch to the upper right of the backslab and a repaired crack to the forehead, are also visible in this photograph but may also have been incurred much earlier (fig.3.14, right).

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<sup>31</sup> Louis Frédéric, *The Art of Southeast Asia. Temples and Sculpture* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1965), 80, pl.76. Attempts to identify copyright ownership for the photographs in figure 3.14 have been unsuccessful. Any further information is welcome.



A little over a decade later the image was moved to the new Octagonal Museum that opened in 1979 on the existing site of the present Bagan Archaeological Museum. This would have been the first time that it was housed in an enclosed building after half a century in open storage at the Pagan Museum.

### *Curatorial Response*

At this point in 1965 a life in the mundane space of the Pagan Museum storage shed must have been a stark difference from what can only be imagined of a previous existence in the temple. One assumption is that the image had spent centuries in an 11<sup>th</sup> century temple, housed in a niche perceptibly above eye level for veneration. Early curators such as Taw Sein Ko worked with limited means. The necessity of keeping large stone objects on the floor as they are still today, must have at times outweighed traditional ritual protocols of keeping sacred images raised above floor level.

There is also no information on how curators of the past have coped with looking after the image. U Aung Kyaing's son U Myo Nyunt Aung who was Deputy Director of the museum by the time his father retired in 2010, confirmed that there were no records of the backslab being cleaned but recalls that the crack to the forehead received some treatment during his time in office.<sup>32</sup> In a study on the impact of storage conditions on Chinese Buddhist images in the Liverpool Museum's collection, Tythacott notes that the dust and contact with the floor were disrespectful, but concludes that at least they had remained safe throughout the Second World War.<sup>33</sup> When such challenging situations present a dilemma for the curator, their account usually remains unpublished. But willingness to acknowledge that the sacred life of an object can intersect with that of the curator's does occasionally happen.

For example, Daw Nu Mra Zan's experiences demonstrate how the curator's agency can be employed proactively in response to the needs of sacred images. The issue of using the floor as a work space was raised in Chapter One where her concerns about having to lay out groups of Buddha images on the floor led to discussions about the need for a consecration ritual during the opening of the renovated Shwedagon Pagoda

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<sup>32</sup> He worked for the DOA from 1987 to 2010. U Myo Nyunt Aung, personal communication, 5 February, 17 November 2017.

<sup>33</sup>Tythacott, *The Lives of Chinese Objects*, 175. Chandra Reedy also notes the importance of height for storing Tibetan images. Chandra Reedy L., 'The Opening of Consecrated Tibetan Bronzes with Interior Contents: Scholarly, Conservation, and Ethical Considerations', *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 30, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 32, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3179515>.

Buddha Museum (see Chapter One: *Respect for Buddha's Belongings*) .<sup>34</sup> This action was prompted by an earlier experience in 1996 when she was helping to collect objects for display at the forthcoming Bagan Archaeological Museum. Stucco fragments were retrieved from the temple Myebontha Hpayahla including the head of a female figure identified as Midwedaw Gotami, the sister of Maha Maya (Buddha's mother). The fragment had inadvertently lain on the floor of the pick-up vehicle prompting her advice to give it support, whereupon a colleague decided to place it on his lap. Following a severe headache and a dream about the temple that lasted through the night, these actions were later deemed inappropriate and a consequence of retrieving and handling material that belonged to a sacred site without proper ritual protocols. A ceremony was held to pay homage or *asaunt-ashauk* (M) to the guardian spirit of the site for forgiveness and permission to take the head for exhibition. The fragment was also repositioned on a higher shelf within a storage cupboard. The experience apparently became well known among staff and reached ministry officials, prompting senior figures to ask for her own account on a subsequent visit to the museum.<sup>35</sup>

No similar story has emerged in relation to the retrieval of the seated Buddha which took place almost a century ago. Yet relationships formed by curators with the image emerged through discussions about its changing condition over time. Daw Baby was hesitant about the identity of the image published by Frédéric in 1965, saying that she could not be sure about the changes it had undergone. For her the seated Buddha was the image as it appeared upstairs in the Buddha Images Showroom and as depicted in the framed photograph on her office desk. Homage was paid daily with fresh flower offerings placed on the desk and through the annual Waso rituals performed each July in the showroom.<sup>36</sup> The additional rituals that were conducted by her with staff were deemed a necessary preparation for the image to travel safely to international exhibitions in 2015 and 2016 as discussed below (see *Ritual Authenticity Revealed*).

In contrast her predecessor U Aung Kyaing immediately confirmed the similarities of the seated Buddha with the image in the photograph of 1965. His work of over 40 years with the Department of Archaeology (1963–2007) had included a key role in the retrieval of the images from temples and their replication during the 1980s.<sup>37</sup> His

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<sup>34</sup>Daw Nu Mra Zan, interview with the author, 2 February 2016.

<sup>35</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan, personal communication, 8 October 2013. It was later confirmed that the official visit was made on a pre-opening inspection of the museum by Vice General Khin Maung Aye and Secretary 1. General Khin Nyunt. Email communicated 4 November 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Daw Baby, personal communication, 3 July 2017.

<sup>37</sup> In 1963 U Aung Kyaing started work as an Assistant Conservator and worked his way up to become Assistant Director of the museum in 1998, and Deputy Director-General of the Department of

recollections included a poignant moment just before the installation of the replica at the Alodawpyi Pagoda in the early 1990s, when he felt compelled to recite his own consecration stanza prior to the formal ritual that was undertaken by monks (see *Narrative Two: Consecration of the Image*).<sup>38</sup>

Here the lives of sacred objects reflected the epistemological slippage the curators experienced either en route with the object (or its replica) to a new home, or within the daily life of the display at the museum. Complicit in shaping these lives, curators traversed between museological and spiritual 'regimes of value' acknowledging this as a condition of being both museum employees and practicing Buddhists.<sup>39</sup> Their personal involvement in rituals demonstrated how curating in the state museum was also a social practice in the sense referred to by Kreps.<sup>40</sup> Although limited by conservation protocols from practicing the same conventional duties of care as their pagoda museum counterparts, their rituals and embodied knowledge of handling sacred objects, making offerings and performing consecration stanzas for example, had been a necessary part of their curatorial duties. Further movements after the seated Buddha went on permanent display at the Bagan Archaeological Museum revealed how its multiple identities shifted between the archaeological and the sacred.

#### *Quiet Potency on Display*

The few sources mentioned above illustrate the various ways in which the seated Buddha image has been perceived over a period of some 80 years from the time it emerged around 1917 to the opening of the new museum in 1998. From an archaeological object described as a stone tablet in 'alto relieve',<sup>41</sup> it was reframed as a didactic illustration of the key moment in the Buddha's biography with the title 'Preaching Buddha'.<sup>42</sup> By the early 1990s museum records reflected the sacredness that the Bouda sin-du-daw, a venerable term for 'Buddha image', held for its keepers.

The life of the seated Buddha on display also revealed its sacred qualities. Although subsumed in a cluster of three images around a pillar and surrounded by uniform lines of images it is possible to discern how the elements of a *mise en scène* identified

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Archaeology (DOA) in Bagan in 2000 until his retirement in 2007. He remained a Member of Parliament for the Bagan-Nyaung Oo Region from 2010 onwards. U Aung Kyaing, interview with the author, 4 January 2016.

<sup>38</sup> U Aung Kyaing, interview with the author, 20 February 2016.

<sup>39</sup> Kopytoff, Igor, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process", 66–67.

<sup>40</sup> Kreps, 'Thai Monastery Museums. Contemporary Expressions of Ancient Traditions', 236–37, 245.

<sup>41</sup> Spooner, *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India. 1917-1918*, 28.

<sup>42</sup> Frédéric, *The Art of Southeast Asia*, 80.

earlier, particularly the use of décor (plinths, barriers), props (labels), angle of view (frontal orientation, height) and space, combined to frame and subtly engage the potency of the seated Buddha.<sup>43</sup> Firstly, the frontal orientation of the image which takes the form of a relief with backslab, was further encouraged with the placement of the image against a pillar. This frontal view reaffirms the function of the image for veneration or as Suzuki observes ‘venerable gazing’ (see Chapter One: *Devotion in the Re-framed Shrine*).<sup>44</sup> Tythacott observes that this orientation does not encourage scrutiny of the Buddha image as sculpture, which in the context of the temple would transgress its symbolic significance.<sup>45</sup>



Figure 3.15. Traces of ochre and pink pigment on face and hands, 17 August 2013. Photographs: Heidi Tan courtesy of Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture.

The painted decoration would also originally have contributed to the appearance of the image when viewed from the front. The photograph of 1920 indicates that both the backslab and figure were painted (fig.3.13). Traces of yellow-ochre and pink pigments are still visible on the figure (fig.3.15). The half-opened eyes were likely once painted so that they appeared to gaze on devotees kneeling below. Painted eyes are evident on several other images on display. The spacious gallery enables the viewer to easily shift their view of the image, but these attributes encourage the adoption of a frontal perspective (see fig.3.20).

<sup>43</sup> Souhami, ‘Exhibition Production as Processes of Translation’, 53–54.

<sup>44</sup> Suzuki, ‘Temple as Museum, Buddha as Art: Hōryūji’s “Kudara Kannon” and Its Great Treasure Repository’, 138.

<sup>45</sup> Tythacott, *The Lives of Chinese Objects*, 169.



Figure 3.16. Detail of inscriptions on right side (left) and reverse of back slab (right), 17 November 2016. Photographs courtesy of Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore and Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture.

Secondly, the seated Buddha's teaching gesture was one of only four examples of the 104 images in the showroom, the majority of which were depicted with the popular earth-touching gesture.<sup>46</sup> Frédéric's reference to the iconography of preaching is still visible in the modern ink inscription along the right edge of the backslab: 'Buddha Preaching (A.D. XI<sup>th</sup> Cent<sup>y</sup>) PAGAN'. On the reverse of the slab a modern ink inscription in Burmese script includes a shelf number: '5/52' and 'dama-sekya hudaw moudra' or 'Dharma wheel preaching mudrā' (fig.3.16). In 2016 the label that accompanied the image emphasised the gesture, date and material in gold upper-case lettering:

DHARMAKAKRA MUDRĀ  
 (PREACHING ATTITUDE).  
 11<sup>th</sup> CENT: (BAGAN PERIOD)  
 SANDSTONE

The Alodawpyi Pagoda was cited by visitors as one of the famous temples that they had already visited or would do so in future. Although several had already visited and perhaps even gilded the replica image, this did not necessarily enable them to recognise the original seated Buddha. As the respondents indicated earlier recognising mudrās is difficult, although they understood the significance of the First Sermon.

<sup>46</sup> Fieldwork, 21 February 2016.



Figure 3.17. Seated Buddha on display (left) and in profile (right), *Bagan Period Buddha Images Showroom*, Bagan Archaeological Museum. 20 February 2016, 17 August 2013. Photographs: Heidi Tan courtesy of Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture.

Thirdly, the image bears the marks of constant touching especially on the hands and knees, which if gilded would be rendered invisible (fig.3.17). Unlike many of the surrounding images, remarkably little residue from the plaster-casting process is visible. This absence masks a key moment in its life within the museum and suggests that the seated Buddha underwent careful cleansing after the plaster mould was cast. However, the patina of ritual touching that had accrued over the years since then was particularly visible under florescent lighting and emphasised the efficacy of the image.

Fourthly, like the other images in this gallery, the seated Buddha is placed on a velvet mat that subtly blends in with the dark maroon-lacquered pedestal with elaborate carved aureole of foliate *kanout* motifs. These props evoked conventional technologies of display that are found at shrines such as the Alodawpyi Pagoda and other Buddha image showrooms in the state museums. Historically an imported luxury material subject to sumptuary restrictions, velvet remains the material of choice for ritual purposes including donations of monks' accoutrements such as embroidered fans, slippers and altar furnishings.



Figure 3.18. Buddha images displayed with velvet mats and canopy (left), dry lacquer Buddha (right). Sagaing Buddha and Cultural Museum, 24 August 2015. Photographs: Heidi Tan courtesy of Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture.

Similar furnishings were observed at the Buddha and Cultural Museum in Sagaing.<sup>47</sup> The showroom of over one hundred large images includes a dry lacquer Buddha image dated to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, placed prominently at one end on a velvet-covered throne under a large canopy (fig.3.18). The venerated image has both palms turned upwards, in *laba mudrā*, the gesture associated with prosperity (fig.3.18, right). According to a staff member it is popular as it is also believed to bestow longevity.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Sitagu Sayadaw donated land for the construction of the museum whilst architect Tampawaddy U Win Maung gave guidance on the displays, and both had a hand in writing the labels. Tampawaddy U Win Maung, personal communication, 23 August 2015. See Appendix 1, C.3.

<sup>48</sup> Fieldwork, 24<sup>th</sup> August 2015.



Figure 3.19. Prayers in the Buddha Images Showroom. 21 February 2016. Photographs: Heidi Tan courtesy of Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture.

And finally, the Buddha's potency was revealed by the mechanisms of safekeeping as observed at the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum. In this case a chain remained in position around the seated Buddha as prayers were offered daily and when special assistance was sought for example for safe travel, fertility and good examination results (fig. 3.19).<sup>49</sup> At these moments, all the elements of the display culminate in a 'performance' with the actor-like object performing the concepts of the exhibition.<sup>50</sup> In this case the ritual *mise en scène* worked in relation to the devotee seated below and gazed upon by the Buddha, while the barrier like the bars on showcases, became a marker of the reverence for the Buddha and his field of merit.

#### *Auspicious Orientation*

Clearly not all visitors bypass the seated Buddha as observations made in February 2016 revealed.<sup>51</sup> More relaxed forms of visiting by families and small groups of friends included taking a rest seated on the cool floors of the showrooms, as they would at the pagodas. The location of the seated Buddha away from the sunlit courtyard and nearer to the entrance of the showroom seemed to attract sitters including those who were unaware of its presence. That they and others who passed the display remained unaware even though they may have visited the Alodawpyi Pagoda and venerated the replica image may be understood in different ways. Information about the replication of images from the museum was prominently displayed at the entrance to the temple by its trustees (see this chapter: *Narratives of Authenticity*). The chances of making a connection between original and replica without any prior knowledge would have relied on luck and a degree of visual acumen. Five of 19 respondents in a survey undertaken

<sup>49</sup> A staff member asks for safe passage before a long bus trip to the capital Nay Pyi Taw. Fieldwork 21 February 2016.

<sup>50</sup> Souhami, 'Exhibition Production as Processes of Translation', 54, fn.184.

<sup>51</sup> Fieldwork included a survey of visitors, 19–21, 23 February 2016. See Appendix 3.2.



at this time indicated an attraction to the seated Buddha of which three indicated an awareness of the connection with Alodawpyi Buddha. Those 'in the know' were more likely to have visited previously or received advice from others about the image, or were part of the social networks associated with civil servants, such as teachers and those working in connection with government departments.<sup>52</sup> At least two replica images were observed at the temples with credits to donors from the civil service (see *Authenticity in the Making of Alodawpyi Buddha*).

However, those who had heard that 'Alodawpyi Buddha' is also present at the museum made time to seek out the image and knelt in veneration or sat with their prayer beads. A bottle of water was surreptitiously offered at one point by a devotee who then walked around the showroom with his family members before they returned to say more prayers and collect the bottle. U Thein Htaik, a retired dentist from Magwe, felt that the showroom is a sacred space because of the presence of the images and the seated Buddha in particular. He acknowledged that it was a full moon day and that he would normally not visit due to the crowds on such days. This sensitivity to the quality of experience extended to his preference for sites which were acoustically better suited to quiet prayer such as the Nagayon Temple.<sup>53</sup> In another case the auspicious east-facing showroom was cited as a reason for pausing at the seated image. The computer studies student Kyaw Zaw Myint had arrived at the image and stopped to admire it. When asked why he had stopped there he said that the posture of teaching was 'simple' and that he found the image 'good looking'. As he pondered the question further, he said that its orientation 'facing the front of the museum' (east-facing) made him feel drawn to the image.<sup>54</sup> While the human-like qualities noted by Wingfield had been attractive, these alone were insufficient to feel the charisma of the image. Instead, the visual appeal had been augmented by the careful orientation of the image so that devotees were able to sense auspiciousness.

As noted earlier, the similarities and differences between the original and replica are concerns that notions of art historical authenticity would seek to answer. However, the attributes that enable one to recognise the identity of the seated Buddha or Alodawpyi Buddha, namely its reading as the Teaching Buddha or a representation of the First

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<sup>52</sup> At least one respondent whose spouse was also a civil service lecturer was looking for a powerful image that his wife had prayed to on a previous visit. See Appendix 3.2, no. 2.

<sup>53</sup> U Thein Htaik and family, 23 February 2016. Appendix 3.2, no.17.

<sup>54</sup> He had visited once before and had come back to visit Bagan's temples which included a visit to Alodawpyi Pagoda. He also expressed an interest in the models of temples displayed downstairs. Kyaw Zaw Myint, interview with the author, 19 February 2016. Appendix 3.2, no. 1.

Sermon and in particular its framing and orientation towards the east, hold more significance for the devotee.

### *Ritual Authenticity Revealed*

The impending loan of the seated Buddha for the exhibition *Buddhist Art of Myanmar* brought about further rituals that became part of a wider story that framed the seated Buddha as precious art. In January 2015 just before the packing for shipment to the Asia Society in New York, staff conducted a ceremony for a safe journey. The event was co-opted into the Asia Society's promotional strategy as a story of diplomatic trust.<sup>55</sup> The narrative of an emotional farewell and fearful curators gave leverage to cultural diplomacy and the trust that the authorities were placing in the American museum with the loan of precious objects, not identified at this point as potent. The emphasis on trust is pertinent given the history of strained relations after the 1990 elections in Myanmar and two famous cases of illicit trafficking to the United States which had resulted in restitutions in 1983 and 2006.<sup>56</sup>

According to Daw Baby, the ceremony took the form of the consecration ritual or *anekazar tin-bweh* (M) that was led by her for staff and members of the packing company in order that the image would travel safely.<sup>57</sup> Although held during opening hours, the only witness to the ritual was the project manager Clare McGowan from the Asia Society. A temporary shrine was set up in the showroom for prayers and offerings to be made. These included baskets of nine fruits, a signature offering at the Alodawpyi Pagoda. Their prayers, according to Daw Baby, were that the image would travel safely and come to no harm (fig.3.20).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Tom Nagorsky, "From Myanmar with Love: An Ancient Buddha's Historic Journey to New York City", 29 January 2015. <http://asiasociety.org/blog/asia/myanmar-love-ancient-buddhas-historic-journey-new-york-city> (Accessed 11 May 2015).

<sup>56</sup> Thein, 'The Happy Reunion of Pyu Statues, Recounted'. Parisi, 'NIU Burma Studies Directors Rescue, Return 1,000-Year-Old Buddha Statue to Myanmar'.

<sup>57</sup> The consecration ritual was also conducted by U Aung Kyaing for the replica image. See Narrative Two: Consecration of the Image.

<sup>58</sup> Clare McGowan, interview with the author, 16 March 2015.



Figure 3.20. Consecration ritual, Bagan Archaeological Museum, 11 January 2015. Photograph: Clare McGowan courtesy of Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture.

Other aspects that were not reported on the website included the accommodation of a small ritual within the gallery in New York, where rituals are not otherwise generally encouraged.<sup>59</sup> The annual Waso ritual that took place in July after the seated Buddha returned was a much larger event attended by nearly 100 staff and their families and led by 11 sayadaws from nearby monasteries who gave recitations and performed another consecration ceremony. Conducted at the same temporary east-facing altar in the Buddha Images Showroom, staff were able to place small images brought from their home shrines on the altar to receive blessings.<sup>60</sup>

The annual Waso ritual of 2015 assumed greater significance with the safe return of the image. The movement of the image brought about opportunities to acknowledge its potency. Whilst this aspect of the image remained absent in the international exhibition and its on-going display at Bagan, its agency in bringing about occasions for merit-making and wish fulfilment suggest that potent objects can give rise to multivalent forms of curating that engage with international museums, yet also resonate with the duties of spiritual care associated with the pagoda museum. The discussion below expands on the biographical movements of the seated Buddha and those of its replica which augmented the potency of the image as it forayed into a further episode of international exhibition-making.

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<sup>59</sup> The museum had accommodated ritual touching and offerings in the past by installing plinths with a larger surface area for the display of images. Clare McGowan, 16 March 2015.

<sup>60</sup> Special food was ordered for staff including *roti prata* and chicken curry, with fruit, ice cream, cake and pickled tea-leaf salad (*lahpet-thouk*) for dessert. Daw Baby, interview with the author, 19 August 2015.

### *A Moment as 'Buddhist Art'*

As discussed earlier the loan of objects to the Asia Society in 2015 for the exhibition *Buddhist Art of Myanmar* revealed the full extent of the seated Buddha's spiritual significance. Yet its presence in New York took on a new significance through the museum's curatorial ambition to bring 'works of art' from Myanmar to the West for the first time.<sup>61</sup> The seated Buddha's aesthetic qualities were heightened in a way that had not been seen before. The exhibition was primarily a visual experience mediated by written interpretives, powerful photographic images and in a separate section on *Ritual and Devotion*, a video projection with short sound clips of monks chanting. A prime example of the 'museum effect' associated with the occularcentric approach to the display of art, the atmosphere was one of studious looking and calm quiet, punctuated by the occasional docent tour.<sup>62</sup>

Framing devices calculated to maximise the presence of the art objects included stark grey walls, showcases and plinths in matching tones customised to the scale of the objects, while labels were displayed discretely. Like punctuation marks the pools of lighting drew attention to and made visual sense of the objects, their relationships to each other and the themes of the display. The effectiveness of the design in communicating the curators' ideas reflects a successful working relationship between curator and designer and recalls Baxandall's notion of the exhibition as 'social occasion' or the successful meeting of three agents – the maker of objects, exhibitor of objects and the viewer of objects.<sup>63</sup> The arrangement of the seated Buddha as a focal point within the introduction to the exhibition afforded a view of the image from the entrance to the gallery. This vista emulated to some degree the axial positioning of wish fulfilling images of the Buddha at Yadana Man Aung Temple and the Alodawpyi Pagoda. Its position in this case provided a gathering point for docents to convene groups for the start of a tour (fig.3.21).

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<sup>61</sup> 'Buddhist Art of Myanmar', Asia Society, accessed 11 September 2016, <http://asiasociety.org/new-york/exhibitions/buddhist-art-myanmar>.

<sup>62</sup> Svetlana Alpers, "The Museum as a Way of Seeing." In *Exhibiting Cultures. The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, edited by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 25. Travel Section, Daily Eleven, 'Buddhist Art of Myanmar Exhibition Goes to the Western World', *Daily Eleven*, 10 March 2015, sec. Travel. The author was also advised by museum staff to conduct interviews outside the galleries with the implication that such activity would detract from the ethereal atmosphere of the gallery.

<sup>63</sup> Michael Baxandall, "Exhibiting Intention: Some Preconditions of the Visual Display of Culturally Purposeful Objects." In *Exhibiting Cultures. The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display.*, edited by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991). 33-41.



Figure 3.21. Installation view of exhibition “Buddhist Art of Myanmar” at Asia Society Museum, New York, 2015. Photograph: Heidi Tan, courtesy of Asia Society and Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture.

The image was identified as a unique early example and was foregrounded by an introduction to the development of Buddha images at Bagan. Its art historical importance was strengthened by a caption that identified it as ‘Buddha seated in *dharmacakra mudrā*’, with attributes originating from precedents in the Pala tradition of India. Noted too were the additional appearances of the *mudrā* at other sites in Bagan that suggested some ambiguity prevailed in this interpretation.

Visitors responses were somewhat muted about the interpretives and more engaged with the material, in the embodied way that Dudley envisaged earlier. A retired history teacher was thankful that there “was not too much language” in the interpretives, while a Swiss engineer commented that she had been inspired by the materials in the displays and wanted to find out more about how the ‘sculptures’ were made. The need for a visual experience was also raised by a retired psychologist who stated: “I came for the aesthetics more than anything else. I didn’t come to learn anything – I came to look”.<sup>64</sup> The need to see Buddha images at the pagoda museum as observed by Ma Ohnmar Myo, also became evident in the art museum when the Burmese security guard who worked there felt compelled to respond (see Chapter One: *Liminal Moments on Ritual Paths*). In an unexpected moment he revealed that he had lived away from his country for over 20 years and felt proud to see the exhibition. As he spoke, he

<sup>64</sup> Fieldwork, New York, 13 February 2015.

opened a collection of photos on his mobile phone to dwell on images of the monumental gilded Buddhas at the Ananda Temple in Bagan.<sup>65</sup>

The dramatic lighting enabled the first-time viewer to take an impressionistic view whilst maintaining a respectful physical distance. In contrast to the lighting at the museum and temple in Bagan, the warm-white raked lights emphasised the sculptural qualities of the crisply carved sandstone and gave it a uniform appearance that masked the patchy traces of ritual touching (fig.3.22).

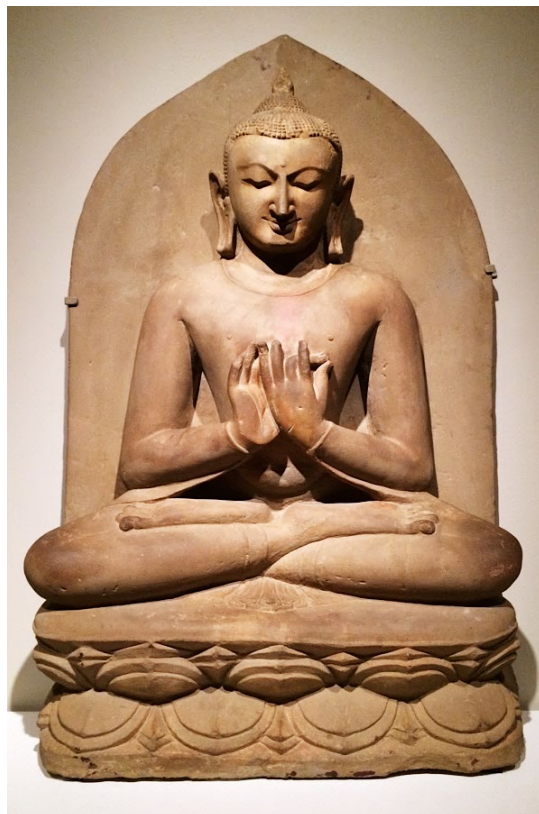


Figure 3.22. Installation view of exhibition “Buddhist Art of Myanmar” at Asia Society Museum, New York, 2015. Photograph: Heidi Tan, courtesy of Asia Society. Buddha seated in dhammacakra mudrā. Pagan period, 11<sup>th</sup> century; Bagan Archaeological Museum. Courtesy of Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture.

Framed by the elements of a *mise en scène* that reified its status as ‘art’ the seated Buddha drew visitors in to scrutinise its material attributes. Unlike in Bagan where it could be compared with many related images, the image assumed a singular importance that recalls Dudley’s observations about objects on open display, particularly where there is minimal text which can thereby offer a way to sensorial and emotive experiences. This form of enhanced visual engagement with the object’s tactile qualities can then lead the visitor’s interest back to an appreciation of the interpretive material.<sup>66</sup> Although different from the brightly lit relic display at the pagoda museum, or

<sup>65</sup> Fieldwork, New York, 14 February 2015.

<sup>66</sup> Sandra H. Dudley, ‘Encountering A Chinese Horse’, in *Museum Objects. Experiencing the Properties of Things* (London ; New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2012), 1–3.

the radiant projections and sacred light at the Yadana Man Aung Temple, the spotlights drew attention to the seated Buddha's visual and material qualities. The display demonstrated how lighting privileges sight and enables visitors to declare that they only came to "look", in other words to acknowledge that looking as opposed to reading is another way of knowing.

### A Life in the Temple

'Alopyi-gu-hpaya' takes its name from a sixteen-line ink inscription on the southern wall of the eastern doorway (fig.3.23). The Mon text refers to 'Alopyi' meaning 'fulfilled'. The inscription also states that repairs were made in 556 BE or 1194 CE after the building of the temple.<sup>67</sup> As observed in Chapter Two the enclosed ritual space around a central tower is a defining feature of the temple or *pahto*, as opposed to the solid stupa or zedi. The hollow form has its origins in the gu or cave-temple of the Bagan period (11<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> century) and earlier Pyu period temples which in turn derive from the Indian rock-cut temples or *guha*, 'secret place, cave'.<sup>68</sup>



Figure 3.23 Alodawpyi Pagoda from the south-eastern corner, 3 January 2016. Photograph: Heidi Tan

<sup>67</sup> Oral traditions say it is 11<sup>th</sup> century in association with Kyanzittha. Kyaw Lat attributes the curvilinear arches of the niches inside to the same period as other temples including the Abeyadana (late 11<sup>th</sup> century) and Nagayon temple (early 12<sup>th</sup> century). Kyaw Lat, *Art and Architecture of Bagan and Historical Background*. (Yangon: Mudon Sarpay, 2010), 107–8, 158, 162. Pichard suggests a date of 1130 CE. Pichard, *Inventary of Monuments at Pagan*, 2:172.

<sup>68</sup> Luce and Bo-Hmu Ba Shin, *Old Burma: Early Pagán. Volume 2. Catalogue of Plates.*, 25:243.

This 'cave-like house for the image' was a place for devotion as well as learning to which donors sponsored slaves, cattle, land and gardens to ensure its upkeep. Paul Strachan evokes the ancient sense of a royal home with requisites for the Buddha's enjoyment including freshly made food offerings, chanting devotees, musicians, ritual baths, perfume and fine garments.<sup>69</sup> Scholars have noted the metaphorical (and linguistic) confluences of Buddha and stupa in the term *hpaya*. The historical development of the architectural *gu* or cave temple as noted by G.H. Luce and Bo-Hmu Ba Shin, was a means to enshrine the image of the Buddha, yet it was also possible to anthropomorphise the temple as 'simply "the Holy One".'<sup>70</sup>

The early Bagan period temple is an integrated shrine and hall with thick brick walls punctuated with deep-set ventilated windows that allow bursts of light into the otherwise dark interiors. Cardinal shrines around the central core for the Four Buddhas of this era, would have assumed the future Buddha Mettaya resided at the core of the stupa.<sup>71</sup> Ambulatory passages adorned with paintings were lined with niches for images that had become empty over the years.

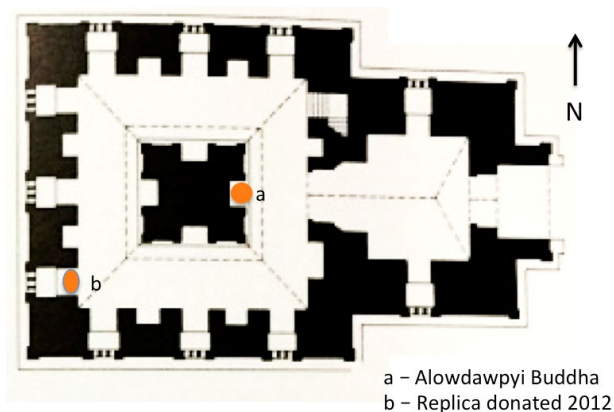


Figure 3.24. Aloyi-gu-hpaya, temple number 374. Source: Pierre Pichard, *Inventory of Monuments at Pagan*, Vol.II. Paris: Gartmore: UNESCO; Kiscadale (Ltd.), 1993, 169.

A total of 13 replica plaster images were installed – nine within the niches along the outer walls and four within the directional niches around the core. The replica image in the east-facing niche is known as the Alodawpyi Buddha (fig.3.24, a) and another smaller replica sits in a niche in the south-western corner (fig.3.24, b) as discussed below (*Authenticity in the Making of Alodawpyi Buddha*).

The renovation of the pagoda (1987–1992) was undertaken by the abbot Bhaddanta Aryavamsa also known as Alodawpyi Sayadaw according to a text panel inside the

<sup>69</sup> Strachan, *Pagan*, 17.

<sup>70</sup> Luce and Bo-Hmu Ba Shin, *Old Burma: Early Pagan. Volume 1. Text.*, 25:243.

<sup>71</sup> Luce and Bo-Hmu Ba Shin, 25:245. Snodgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stupa*, 131–32.



eastern entrance to the temple.<sup>72</sup> The renovation was also supported by his student General Khin Nyunt who officiated at the temple's various merit-sharing ceremonies. Originally from Rakhine State the sayadaw played an influential role in the selection of replica images and by advocating specific rituals for pilgrims to perform (see *Narrative Two: Consecration of the Image*).<sup>73</sup> The continued patronage of temples by senior government figures since Independence was particularly notable during the 1990s. Bagan rulers and their architectural achievements provided obvious role models for merit-making, but new levels of religious fervour were cultivated through, for example, the tradition of *vipassanā* (P) or insight meditation which brought about new partnerships among elite patrons.<sup>74</sup>

U Aung Kyaing recalled that the temple's original signboard 'Alopyi' was edited with the addition of the honorific 'daw'. This association with royalty was added by the Sayadaw.<sup>75</sup> The name 'Alodawpyi' reflects the royal associations made through local lore, but it is also more formal than the term 'sutaungpyi' and would have elevated the status of the temple and its patrons.<sup>76</sup> Associations with royal patronage and potency of the site are reflected in stories of wish fulfilment, one being a story of general Kyanzittha who in the service of King Anawrahta (ca.1044–ca.1077) would pray at the temple before going into battle.<sup>77</sup> Recent patrons cultivated large followings which were boosted by further stories of army personnel who obtained career promotions after visits to the temple.<sup>78</sup> The fervour of pilgrims at the opening ceremony in July 1992 was recalled by U Aung Kyaing who had been concerned about the strength of the roof as supporters clambered up to receive blessings in the form of popcorn and money that patrons showered on them from above.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Listed as monument number 374, the temple referred to as Alopyi-gu Hpaya by Pierre Pichard had already been repaired in 1977. Pichard, *Inventory of Monuments at Pagan*, 2:170.

<sup>73</sup> Houtman, *Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics*, 272–73. U Aung Kyaing recalls that he was part of the selection committee, interview with the author, 20 February 2016. The older of the Win brothers U Win was also part of this group, U Tin Aung, interview with the author, 22 February 2016.

<sup>74</sup> The restoration of temples at Bagan is included as a significant event in the history of Buddhism in Myanmar, which started with the Fifth Buddhist Council of 1871. See Myo Myint, *Collected Essays on Myanmar History and Culture* (Yangon: Department for the Promotion and Propagation of the Sasāna, 2010). Houtman, *Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics*, iv, 271.

<sup>75</sup> The edit is found in the current information panel on the north wall of the entrance vestibule discussed in the section: *Narratives of Authenticity*. U Aung Kyaing, 20 February 2016.

<sup>76</sup> I am grateful to Yamin Htay for bringing to my attention the distinction between *sutaungpyi* referred to in earlier chapters for wish fulfilling images and 'Alodawpyi' for the formal naming of wish fulfilling pagodas of which there are many in Myanmar.

<sup>77</sup> Kyaw Lat, *Art and Architecture of Bagan and Historical Background*, 107. Brick and plaster sculptures of King Kyanzittha (r.1084 – 1113) and his wife Abeyadana are the only remaining such portraits left at Bagan. Galloway, 'Bagan: The Living Legacy of Kings', 48; Gordon H. Luce and Bo-Hmu Ba Shin, *Old Burma: Early Pagan. Volume 3. Plates*, vol. 25, Artibus Asiae. Supplementum (Zurich: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 1970), pl.215e-f, pl.276b, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1522661>.

<sup>78</sup> Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 22.

<sup>79</sup> U Aung Kyaing, interview with the author, 20 February 2016. Bob Hudson, 'The Merits of Rebuilding Bagan', *Orientations* 31, no. 5 (2000): 86.

According to U Aung Kyaing, the main criterion for the selection of replicas was that they should be reproduced from 11<sup>th</sup> century originals so as to be in keeping with the chronology of the temple. Those for the Alodawpyi Pagoda were seated images chosen mainly from the Nagayon Temple.<sup>80</sup> Unlike the replicas for other temples which were painted to approximate the appearance of the originals, those for the highly active Alodawpyi Pagoda were eventually gilded and kept behind glass. Despite the temple's intermittent popularity over the years, the replica images have remained and even grown in number, which together with the density of their arrangement and the narrow circumambulatory path create an intense experience, particularly during full moon.<sup>81</sup>

The gilded replica image of Alodawpyi Buddha sits within the east-facing niche within a tall cusped arch. The shrine imbued with the presence of the image, is visible as one enters the eastern doorway (fig.3.25). Unlike other temples, such as the Ananda, where architectural apertures cast beams of sunlight onto the main images, here the Alodawpyi Buddha sits gleaming under electric spotlights flanked by jasmine garlands that materialise the idea of the perfumed chamber or *gandhakhuṭi* (P) to house and bathe the Buddha in fragrance as noted earlier.<sup>82</sup> The south-facing door jamb of the eastern doorway bears the Mon ink inscription that identifies the temple as 'Alopyi'. As a preface to the shrine, it pre-empted and conveys by association a provenance for the image. This insinuation became an issue for the trustees as they sought to distinguish the authenticity of the site over its images, as discussed below in *Narratives of Authenticity*. The gesture of teaching is reinforced here by the other dominant framing device, the multiple rows of painted images of the Teaching Buddha painted in natural tones of yellow-ochre and brown.<sup>83</sup> More than 650 images each with the title of a different sutra inscribed below, are wrapped around the walls as if to reinforce the popular idea of the First Sermon and the image of the Buddha as teacher.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> U Aung Kyaing, 20 February 2016. The date of the installation of replicas varies according to different sources. U Aung Kyaing recalled it was around 1990, interview with the author, 20 February 2016. A text panel at the temple says that the production and installation of the replica image took place in 1992 (see Appendix 3).

<sup>81</sup> The temple received large followings until General Khin Nyunt's incarceration in 2004 brought about a decline. Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 22. According to local informants he returned to civilian life in 2012 and by 2016 had arranged for the Dhammayazika Pagoda to be re-gilded. Fieldwork observations, 16 February 2016.

<sup>82</sup> Strachan, *Pagan*, 17.

<sup>83</sup> For variations of the mudrā at Bagan see Fraser-Lu and Stadtner, *Buddhist Art of Myanmar*, 116.

<sup>84</sup> Claudine Bautze-Picron, *The Buddhist Murals of Pagan. Timeless Vistas of the Cosmos* (Bangkok: Orchid Press, 2003), 187. Luce and Bo-Hmu Ba Shin, *Old Burma: Early Pagan. Volume 1. Text.*, 25:246.



Figure 3.25. Eastern shrine with Alodawpyi Buddha (left), 21 February 2016. Application of gold leaf (right), 19 August 2015. Photographs: Heidi Tan.

As observed in previous chapters, the choice of area for touching or gilding is often guided by the state of one's health, with the heart, chest, stomach and knees the areas of particular concern. The perceptibly higher placement of the image compared to the original at the museum encourages pilgrims to apply gold leaf to the torso, legs and hands. Over time the defining attribute, the gesture of teaching, has receded with the melding of the hands under layers of gilding (fig.3.25, right).<sup>85</sup> The stark change in appearance is more pronounced than the patchy discolourations of the original seated Buddha at the museum. Here the quality of touch betrays the need to leave residues of gold and the careful management of this ritual. The extent of gradual morphing of the form suggests that few apart from U Aung Kyaing would recall that the image when first installed had been finished to look more like its sandstone prototype.<sup>86</sup> This change in the form raises the question of the longevity of the image and the possibility of replacement sometime in the future. Several stark white copies remain in storage on the brick floor of a nearby temple as if in limbo, waiting for their time to be activated as Alodawpyi Buddha.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>85</sup> A photograph published in 1998 illustrates a brilliant lacquer-red backslab and crisply moulded bodily features with the hands clearly delineated in the teaching gesture. Khin Maung Nyunt, *The Pagodas and Monuments of Bagan. Volume 2* (Yangon: Ministry of Information, 1998), 109, <http://www.nlb.gov.sg/biblio/10863669>.

<sup>86</sup> U Aung Kyaing, 20 February 2016.

<sup>87</sup> The accidental discovery of this site was a reminder of the constant need for storage even for replicas in waiting. Fieldwork, 2 January 2016. See Appendix 1. B.33.

A sign prohibits gilding of the face. This zoning off of the upper body local informants say, is reserved for VIPs. It may be a reference to past donors such as the Mandalay-based gem-merchant who gifted a diamond in 1999. The merit-sharing ceremony was officiated by Alodawpyi Sayadaw and General Khin Nyunt. *The New Light of Myanmar* reported that the merchant handed the diamond to the General who then ‘on behalf of the well-wishers, presented the diamond as Onnalon-mway-shindaw to the Buddha image’.<sup>88</sup> Today two gems are visible; one that represents the onnalon-mway-shindaw, the tufted whorl of hair at the centre of the Buddha’s forehead or *ūrṇā* (S), and one in the flame finial that rises from the cranial bump or *uṣṇīṣa* (S).



Figure 3.26. Small Buddha in the lap of a larger image in the inner western niche (left), 19 August 2015. Miniature images in the lap of the powerful ‘Mahamuni’ image, Kyauktaw Mahamuni Temple (right), 8 January 2016. Photographs: Heidi Tan.

The three other directional shrines around the central tower have replica images and attract pilgrims who meditate and make offerings at their altars. Together with images in the outer wall niches, they receive new altar mats from donors each season embroidered with the words *Alodawpyi ba-zeh* or ‘May your wishes be fulfilled’.<sup>89</sup> Miniature images are often placed next to or on the lap of these larger images so as to

<sup>88</sup> The New Light of Myanmar, ‘Secretary-1 Attends Merit-Sharing Ceremony for Offering Shwethingan to Alodawpyi Pagoda’, *The New Light of Myanmar*, 22 December 1999, <http://www.burmalibrary.org/NLM/archives/1999-12/msg00020.html>.

<sup>89</sup> Most of these other replicas were cast from images retrieved from the Nagayon Temple. U Aung Kyaing, 20 February 2016.

absorb their energy (fig.3.26, left). This was observed at famous temples with powerful images such as the Kyauktaw Mahamuni Pagoda in Mrauk-U (fig.3.26, right). These plaster miniatures are acquired at a stall that stocks images made by Win Brothers in the temple grounds. Several informants said that they had such images in their home shrines, and that they took additional images home for friends and family.<sup>90</sup> According to U Tin, this nesting of the images close to a powerful Buddha is a way to infuse them with its energy.<sup>91</sup>

The replication of images in miniature entails another kind of reproduction, where the maker sculpts a clay prototype from which plaster copies are cast in great quantities. These second-generation copies are more affordable for a greater number of pilgrims to ‘invite’ the image of the Buddha into their homes. Buddha images in this sense cannot be ‘bought’ but are acquired at a sculpture shop or *babu-zain* (M). A ‘nibbāna goods’ shop or *neibban-koun zain* (M) also stocks Buddha images along with a range of ritual items, monks’ accoutrements and nat images.<sup>92</sup>



Figure 3.27 Images of Alodawpyi Buddha made by the Win Brothers company (left). Two examples comparing Win Brothers’ work and a competitor’s (right). Alodawpyi Pagoda Sculpture Shop, 11 August 2016. Photographs: Heidi Tan.

The Win Brothers sculpture shop within the temple grounds unlike other outlets does not display price tags partly out of respect for the convention mentioned above, but also because it prides itself on the superior quality of their images. Durability of the plaster and the paint are demonstrated by juxtaposing an example of inferior quality from another workshop (fig.3.27). The company’s logo ‘WB’ is incised by hand on the reverse to establish the authenticity of these images and discourage competitors from copying them. The younger of the Win brothers, U Tin, expressed concern about the lack of quality in their competitors’ works saying that customers had complained about

<sup>90</sup> Fieldwork 11 August 2016, Alodawpyi Pagoda, Bagan.

<sup>91</sup> The term *yin-ngwe-hlone* was used to describe this practice (see Glossary). U Tin, 11 August 2016.

<sup>92</sup> Ma Ohnmar Myo, personal communication, 15 April 2016.

images breaking. Reminders of this had been seen at pagoda museums across the country where damaged images had been left on the floor or propped against a wall in preference to keeping such images at home or risk having to be disposed of in an inauspicious way.<sup>93</sup> Photographic reproductions of the gilded replica in the form of printed cards are also distributed by caretakers. Prayers printed on the reverse renders these images as potent portable reminders for use on home shrines.<sup>94</sup>

#### *Authenticity in the Making of Alodawpyi Buddha*

The need to protect the authenticity of Win Brothers' work became more acute in the case of specially commissioned images. In 2012 a donor from Yangon donated one which occupies the south-western window niche (fig.3.28, left). The commemoration of deceased parents was another example of the transfer of merit as discussed in Chapter One (see *Gilding for Protection*). In this case the donor Khin Swe Win included her children, their spouses and a great grandchild all of whom shared in the merit. The lengthy credit indicates the donor's association with the civil service:

No. 108 46<sup>th</sup> Street, Yangon;  
Deceased parents  
(U Hla Kyo) + (Daw Khin Than Win) (retired) Ministry of Home Affairs  
Donated to [in memory of]<sup>95</sup>  
Daughter Khin Swe Win (Baby) (Ministry of Home Affairs);  
Grandchildren – Mya Pyu Pya + Nay Myo Aung;  
Yan Ling Aung + Mae Thu Win;  
Great Grandchild - Hein Htut Zaw;  
Donated by them.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Moe Aung Lwin, personal communication and fieldwork, 29 August 2015. Several examples were found not only at pagodas but also pagoda museums such as the Antiques Museum (Shehaung Pya-daik) at Thihoshin Pagoda.

<sup>94</sup> Myanmar colleagues studying in London set up temporary shrines with photographic images of the Buddha, including this particular image of Alodawpyi Buddha in their room for daily offerings and prayers. Ma Nan Htaik, personal communication, 30 October 2017.

<sup>95</sup> Brackets denote names of deceased family members, whilst the '+' sign denotes they are a couple. The wife Daw Khin Than Win had retired from a ministry job.

<sup>96</sup> Translated by Yamin Htay, 13 November 2017.



Figure 3.28 Specially commissioned reproduction images of Alodawpyi Buddha by Win Brothers donated in 2012 to Alodawpyi Pagoda (left) and Thihoshin Pagoda, Pakkoku (right), 19-21 August 2015. Photographs: Heidi Tan.

Whilst smaller than the Alodawpyi Buddha the rare appearance of such images suggest that they come at some considerable expense to the donor. Two other examples were found of similar size nearby; one in a shrine at a riverside restaurant for tourists and another almost exactly like the first example that was also donated in 2012 to the Thihoshin Temple in Pakokku, north of Bagan (fig.3.28, right). This image is framed by a cluster of laminated prayer sheets and a large caption as outlined below:

Bagan Period A.D.12th century  
 Kyanzitha Mingyi  
 Made a wish to construct a temple  
 Noble Alodawpyi Hpaya  
 Donors  
 U Khin (Township Education Officer - retired + Daw Kin Win Yi (Assistant Lecturer - retired)  
 1374 year, Tawthalin, 14th day waxing moon, Saturday, 29-9-2012.<sup>97</sup>

The unusual inclusion of details of the date and royal patron indicates a need to establish the authenticity of the image and also to reflect the social status of the donors who were both civil servants. However, the term 'hpaya' is left un-translated here in recognition of its dual meaning – it could also be taken to refer to the temple, as discussed below (see *Narratives of Authenticity*). This extensive caption recalls

<sup>97</sup> Fieldwork 21 August 2015. My thanks to Theint Theint Aung for edits to the translation of this caption.

Dudley's concerns cited earlier about the prevalence of textual rather than haptic engagements with museum objects (see this chapter: *Merit-Making on Display*). In this case, however, the texts invite devotees to engage with the images by making ritual offerings in the form of wish fulfilling prayers and flower garlands.

Although concealed, the plaster medium is germane to the process of casting images where the accurate replication of a prototype is essential. This was alluded to by the artist U Tin who recalled making several models before arriving at the final design for the special image that was donated to the Alodawpyi Pagoda. He emphasised that the production of scaled models of the original is a mark of their work as 'real artists'.<sup>98</sup> To support the authenticity of his work, he added that his work had resale value as pagoda trustees had previously approached him to sell images from their collections without realising they were originally his creations.<sup>99</sup>



Figure 3.29 Artist U Thein Zaw Lin removes a plaster image from its silicon mould (left) and finishes the finer details by hand. New Bagan, 19 August 2015. Photographs: Heidi Tan.

An alternative view of the authenticity and replication was given by the image-maker U Thein Zaw Lin, a former student of U Tin's.<sup>100</sup> Initially he had needed the permission of his teachers to make Alodawpyi Buddha and other images as they were also making these, but eventually was allowed to do so.<sup>101</sup> Demand remained strong enough to withstand the increase in production centres as Alodawpyi is the most popular Buddha image with around 40 sales per month (fig.3.29). He clarified that he had not seen the

<sup>98</sup> U Tin, 22 February 2016.

<sup>99</sup> The cost of these larger reproductions when queried could not be established, which suggested that such commissions are probably highly negotiable. U Tin, interview with the author 22 February 2016.

<sup>100</sup> U Thein Zaw Lin is helped by his wife at their home in Thiripyitsaya ward in New Bagan. Now in his thirties he had started learning with Win Brothers when he was fifteen years old. He set up his own business in 2012. U Thein Zaw Lin, interview with the author and interpreter Moe Aung Lwin, 19 August 2015.

<sup>101</sup> Around 70 to 80 of the small images are sold per month especially in December. Thein Zaw Lin, interview with the author and interpreter Moe Aung Lwin, 19 August 2015.



seated Buddha at the museum but instead used his memory of the replica image at the pagoda as a prototype for his original hand-sculpted clay model. He had not heard any stories of how the Alodawpyi Buddha had come to reside in the temple but was happy to be making an income and felt that he was helping others to keep memories of the temple. Significantly, he also felt that he made merit each time he produced an image.<sup>102</sup>

### *Narratives of Authenticity*

In contrast to the limited provision of text panels at the Bagan Archaeological Museum discussed in the previous chapter, here at the Alodawpyi Pagoda two lengthy information panels are sited at prominent points of entry. The panels convey messages from the trustees and the Alodawpyi Sayadaw respectively. The panels establish the temple as an auspicious site but whilst the first text panel distinguishes it as a relic temple, the second focuses on the ritual means to obtain wishes at the shrine of Alodawpyi Buddha (Appendix 3, 3.1).

Here within a single temple is another example of how different agents assert what they deem to be appropriate forms of veneration. As Richard Davis notes, object lives are about reframing identities and are contingent on context and different audiences.<sup>103</sup> The texts preface each step of the pilgrim's way as they proceed into the site, firstly by attempting to frame their expectations, and secondly by guiding their ritual actions. The need to establish the identity of the site as historically and spiritually authentic brings the replica images to the heart of the matter, as discussed further below.

#### *Narrative One: A Relic Stupa with No Images*

The first panel is encountered after one passes the flower-sellers and arrives at the top of the stairs in the main entrance pavilion where booklets and souvenir postcards can be bought (fig.3.30, left). Undated, but signed by the temple trustees, it introduces the temple as an 'historic' relic stupa or *dhatu zedi* (M) that was built by King Kyanzittha in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. It states that the name 'Alodawpyi' refers only to the relic stupa and that it became famous in 1992 although no Buddha image resided there at the time.<sup>104</sup> The text makes no claim to have royal relics such as those at the Yadana Man Aung

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<sup>102</sup> U Thein Zaw Lin, 19 August 2015.

<sup>103</sup> Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, 11.

<sup>104</sup> Relics can be enshrined in three places: on the spire within the banana bud, the middle chamber within the dome, and lower chamber within the terrace. Aye Aye Thinn interview 13 August 2016. See Appendix 3.

Temple. However, local lore speaks of a ruler whose wishes were granted, perhaps a reference to the patron King Kyanzitha, who is said to have prayed at the temple before going to battle.<sup>105</sup>

The text implies that because of the lack of images the Alodawpyi Sayadaw asked the Department of Archaeology to make four images of the Buddha that could be installed inside so that devotees and monks could make offerings of alms, flowers, water, fruit and lights. It identifies U Win as the maker of ‘the image in dharmacakra mudrā’ which had been copied from one in the Bagan Archaeological Museum, and that a total of thirteen images were made. It ends by reiterating that the images were made in 1992 and that therefore the name ‘Alodawpyi’ refers only to the temple and not the images.



Figure 3.30 Narrative of the temple at main entrance (left), narrative of the wish fulfilling ritual at the eastern vestibule (right), 21 February 2016, 19 August 2015. Photographs: Heidi Tan.

What emerges from this rendition of events is that the replica, known as Alodawpyi Buddha, started its life in 1992. The chronology of events becomes clearer when the panel is read in conjunction with a second panel discussed below. The identification ‘image in dharmacakra mudrā’ provides a didactic account compared to the sparsely worded label for the seated Buddha at the museum. Whilst the panel seeks to correct attitudes related to the cult of image worship, it inadvertently draws attention to the

<sup>105</sup> U Aung Kyaing, interview with the author, 20 February 2016. Kyaw Lat, *Art and Architecture of Bagan and Historical Background.*, 107. Such sites are often called aung-mye or ‘victory ground’.

replica image which is singled out here as special from the remaining group of replicas that are placed around the core.

A survey of pilgrims who have visited the temple before reflects some of the perceptions that the trustees wish to correct.<sup>106</sup> Of the seven interviewed four said that they had small images of the Alodawpyi Buddha in their home shrines and two said that they had taken images back to their homes to give to friends and family, or parents. And all four said they had experiences of having wishes fulfilled, or were undergoing the experience, for example two were experiencing a gradual accumulation of wealth. Significantly five of the seven participants said that they had seen or had heard about the seated Buddha at the museum.

Only two informants had read the text panel. U Soe Lwin, a merchant from Bago who had visited more than six times, said that he regularly gave images to friends and family. When asked if he had visited the museum, he replied that he had and that he would be going again, although he felt it was unusual to venerate images at the museum.<sup>107</sup> The electrical engineer from Bagan who visits daily and had once won the lottery, had read the panel and despite having seen the seated image at the museum, reiterated his belief that the Buddha at the eastern entrance is famous. He also recollected that the stupa behind the temple had once been renovated by another monk.<sup>108</sup> This alludes to the fact that the temple was part of a larger complex of 15 buildings a number of which were damaged in the earthquake of 1975. The text omits mention of the wider site which may have contributed to the auspiciousness of the temple. The large stupa the visitor had thought to point out is known as Sint Zedi situated just behind the temple. The dome and spire are finished in glazed bricks, a rare feature at Bagan that must have been an important donation in its time.<sup>109</sup>

Others had also seen the seated Buddha at the museum despite not having read about it on the panel. Phone Myint Thu from Bago commented that the Alodawpyi Buddha at the temple is more powerful since rituals are limited at the museum, whilst Dweh Ma Soe a ministry auditor from Magwe region who has visited the temple more than ten times had heard of the original at the museum and said that if she were to visit she

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<sup>106</sup> Interviews were conducted with seven informants who were visiting the pagoda. These were conducted around the seating area between the main entrance and the eastern entryway to the temple, in view of the text panels discussed above as well as the outlet for acquiring images. Fieldwork undertaken 11 August 2016. Translator: Sithu Htun Soe. See Appendix 3.3.

<sup>107</sup> Appendix 3.3, no. 2.

<sup>108</sup> Appendix 3.3 nos.7.

<sup>109</sup> Pichard, *Inventory of Monuments at Pagan*, 2:175.

would venerate the seated Buddha.<sup>110</sup> Those who are not Buddhist also take an interest in the images. Ma Saung Win, an NGO worker from Myitkyina who was visiting the temple with friends and family on her second visit to the area, expressed some knowledge of the temple and confirmed that she was aware of the replica images in the temples although she said that she did not know how to recognise the originals. She confirmed however, that she had seen 'Alodawpyi Buddha' at the museum.<sup>111</sup>

#### Narrative Two: Consecration of the Image

The presence of a second panel in the eastern entryway raises some ambiguity as to the intentions of these narratives (fig.3.30, right). While the first panel presented the temple as the object of true worship, the second implies otherwise as its placement within the vestibule foregrounds the shrine of Alodawpyi Buddha.<sup>112</sup> Prefaced by a hand-drawn portrait of the Alodawpyi Sayadaw, the panel credits him with the discovery of the pagoda in 1987 and its subsequent renovation which was completed in November 1992. The elaborate offerings made at the consecration ritual are itemised as are the many places from which devotees came. The last section of the text describes three extraordinary events which include the communal sighting of different coloured lights from the reliquary at the upper section of the stupa, personal sensations of mental clarity and strong intentions to make offerings, and the taking of five precepts and recitation of the Buddha's nine special qualities or *goundaw* (M) in order to obtain a special wish.

Although signed by the trustees the panel is imbued with the visual presence of the Sayadaw and associates the efficacy of the site with his advisory on specific rituals. However, the focal point of the text is the Buddha consecration ritual during which devotees shared in the merits of the pagoda and made wishes during the Buddha's consecration ceremony or *anekazar tin-bwe* (M). This entailed the recitation of the first two verses the Buddha uttered when he attained Enlightenment. These start with 'anekajātisāmsaraṃ' or 'infinitely numerous are the existences in the round of rebirths'.<sup>113</sup> This was the recitation that U Aung Kyaing recalled making prior to the consecration of the replica.<sup>114</sup> It comprises verses from the *Dhammapada* which

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<sup>110</sup> See Appendix 3.3, nos. 1,6.

<sup>111</sup> Appendix 3.3, no.4.

<sup>112</sup> Fieldwork, 11 August 2016. Translator: Sithu Htun Soe. See Appendix 3.3.

<sup>113</sup> Committee for Compiling A Dictionary of Buddhist Terms, Ministry of Religious Affairs, *A Dictionary of Buddhist Terms*, 42. Also the inauguration of a king. Pali Text Society, 'The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary', Dictionary, 1925-1921, <http://dsal.srv02.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.1:1:758.pali>.

<sup>114</sup> U Aung Kyaing, 20 February 2016.

according to Spiro may be recited by anyone although should preferably be done by a monk:

Now are you seen, O builder of the house,  
you will not build the house again.  
All your rafters are broken, your ridgepole is destroyed,  
the mind, set on the attainment of nirvana,  
has attained the extinction of desires.<sup>115</sup>

Although the panel referred to the moment of consecration as wish fulfilling and not to the replica image per se, the allusion to the 'builder of the house' is a personification of the Buddha's own moment of realisation. Thus, both pagoda and Buddha encapsulated in the term 'hpaya', may be understood as conflated and devotees see both a replica of a museum object and a wish fulfilling image. This recalls Tythacott's observation of how objects are redefined as they travel through different 'interpretive spheres' and acquire multiple meanings.<sup>116</sup> The co-existence of both meanings demonstrated that the ideal 'social career' of the object was defined by those in a position to assert their authority, while others chose to see in the ways they best understood. The conflation of meanings recalls the dual aims of the museum at the Shwedagon Pagoda where sacred objects could be displayed both for study and veneration.

### Many Lives on Display

As discussed above the ritual life of the seated Buddha at the museum is revealed when museum staff and visitors choose to interact with the image. It is a relatively quiet life in contrast to the constant cycle of rituals around Alodawpyi Buddha at the temple. The choices made by visitors at the museum and temple varied according to the needs of individuals, their sense of place and intention to make merit. The choices made by curators at the museum also reflected the range of institutional and individual ways in which they related to the seated Buddha. The more formally constituted means such as the consecration ritual performed in 2015 before and after the image travelled to New York was a public event that was documented and reported online.

A subsequent foray to the ACM in Singapore for the exhibition *Cities and Kings: Ancient Treasures from Myanmar* (2 December 2016–5 March 2017), brought out the living ritual life of the seated Buddha in more tangible ways than in the previous

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<sup>115</sup> Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*, 205.

<sup>116</sup> Tythacott, *The Lives of Chinese Objects*, 7.

year.<sup>117</sup> Rarity and beauty were important criteria for the selection of objects but permission to borrow 'one of the most sacred Buddha images as well as other fine works' was one of the achievements of the exhibition.<sup>118</sup> Although the exhibition was not focussed on religion per se, curator Stephen Murphy acknowledged the inclusion of various kinds of religious images including nat figures, that would have significance for residents from Myanmar and Buddhists from other countries.<sup>119</sup> Awareness of the special significance of the seated Buddha from Bagan had already been raised since its display in New York and the Singapore media noted that it had already attracted offerings while on display. Murphy noted that prayers had been offered for a safe journey before the image left Yangon and that monks had welcomed the image on arrival in Singapore. The image therefore ' "blurs the lines between museum and place of worship" '.<sup>120</sup>

Before the seated Buddha travelled to Singapore, a consecration ritual was arranged by Daw Baby and staff that included the team of packers from Yangon. Curators of the exhibition documented the event and worked with Burmese community members including resident Burmese monks in Singapore to arrange rituals to welcome the image during installation of the exhibition. A number of staff made donations towards this event.<sup>121</sup> Documentation of the rituals was incorporated in a silent video set into the plinth. Although digital technologies had more prominence in the early 2000s when the museum was launched, over the years a more ocularcentric approach entailed a reduction in the use of moving images and sound.<sup>122</sup> This has not however precluded the inclusion of other kinds of visitor engagements that speak to the re-contextualisation of objects, one of which is a protocol for accommodating ritual offerings.

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<sup>117</sup> The exhibition was premised on a celebration of 50 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries, which the author had been involved in the planning of some years earlier.

<sup>118</sup> Curator Stephen Murphy emphasised the collaborative nature of the show and hopes of inspiring interest in the public to visit Myanmar "...as it reopens to the world again". Asian Civilisations Museum, 'Asian Civilisations Museum Launches Milestone Exhibition on Ancient Treasures from Myanmar' (Asian Civilisations Museum, 29 November 2016), [http://acm.org.sg/~media/acm/document/about%20us/media/press%20releases/media%20release\\_cities%20and%20kings%20-%20finalwoembargolinerforwebsite.docx](http://acm.org.sg/~media/acm/document/about%20us/media/press%20releases/media%20release_cities%20and%20kings%20-%20finalwoembargolinerforwebsite.docx).

<sup>119</sup> Lin, Cheryl, 'Myanmar's Treasures on Display at Asian Civilisations Museum', *The Straits Times*, 3 December 2016, sec. Lifestyle, <http://www.straitstimes.com/uncategorized/a-look-at-myanmars-history>.

<sup>120</sup> Lin, Cheryl.

<sup>121</sup> Conan Cheong, personal communication, 2 December 2016.

<sup>122</sup> The museum has gradually repositioned 'ancestral cultures', the object of its earlier mission, within the broader approach that addresses the 'artistic heritage of Asia'. 'About ACM', Asian Civilisations Museum. Understanding Asia Through Singapore, 2017, <http://acm.org.sg/en/about-acm>.



Figure 3.31. Buddha seated in dharmachakra mudrā, 7 December 2016. Photograph courtesy of Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore and Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture.

Placed well back on a wide plinth the seated Buddha commanded a prominent position to one side of the gallery (fig.3.31). In addition to the warm raking lights that illuminated the sandstone as seen in New York, the image was also backlit by diffused natural light borrowed from the glass atrium of the new wing just beyond. The use of a frosted glass panel signalled an attempt by the exhibition team to work in new ways with different light sources.<sup>123</sup> The clear cut-out profile that frames the image alludes to a lobed niche of the type found at the Alodawpyi Pagoda.

At the foot of the display a caption invited visitors to 'make offerings to the art on display in this gallery'. This was edited to restrict offerings to flowers, after a visitor arrived with offerings that included milk during the first weeks of the exhibition.<sup>124</sup> The museum has accommodated such donations in the past as there is a strong Buddhist following in Singapore, and a protocol for managing donations was developed that included the daily clearance of flowers by security staff.<sup>125</sup> While the plinth for offerings

<sup>123</sup> Jeff Cheong, Muhammed Noor Aliff, personal communication, 20–21 November 2017.

<sup>124</sup> Stephen Murphy, personal communication, 18 November 2017.

<sup>125</sup> According to a report of 2015 compiled by the Department of Statistics 43.2% claimed to practice Buddhism or Taoism in Singapore.  
[https://www.singstat.gov.sg/media/files/visualising\\_data/infographics/ghs/highlights-of-ghs2015.pdf](https://www.singstat.gov.sg/media/files/visualising_data/infographics/ghs/highlights-of-ghs2015.pdf)

hardly constitutes a shrine, the positioning of the image to one side of the gallery provided ample space for gathering in front of the image for the ritual welcome and for rituals during the exhibition. Unlike in New York where the image was a prominent gathering point at the start of the exhibition, here the image drew visitors' attention to one side once inside the display area.

These arrangements demonstrated the extent to which museum curators have actively sought to encourage visitorship from communities who may not normally visit the museum. If these attempts to have visitors linger and partake in embodied forms of knowledge-making appear to be the reverse of the strict protocols at the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum, it is a reflection of the degree to which the museum is distanced from its source communities and actively seeks to encourage their participation. It is also a reminder that other modes of seeing can parallel the museum's tendency to emphasise the aesthetic qualities of exhibits. This resonates with Chuang Yiao-hwei's reflections on the effectiveness of including a ritual space or photographic documentation of such spaces within exhibitions of Buddhist objects. While she concedes museums function differently from temples, a place for visitors to 'relax, ponder and meditate' can nonetheless mitigate the limited experience of viewing Buddhist objects solely on the basis of their aesthetic qualities.<sup>126</sup>

The exhibition label alluded to unstable meanings of the stone image – the conjectural and variant interpretations of the gesture, the loss of painted decoration – and pointed to what is known of its contemporary significance through its plaster replica and its association with patrons of the temple. It was a summary version of the exhibition catalogue entry written by the author, which was accompanied by a photograph of the Alodawpyi Buddha in situ at the temple. The caption reads:

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<sup>126</sup> Chuang cites a living altar that included meditation spaces, interpretive labels and access for local Buddhists who participated in the display during an interfaith event at the Liverpool Museum in 1993, as an example of a 'real and meaningful display'. Chuang Yiao-hwei, 'Presenting Buddhism in Museums', 116.



Buddha seated in *dharmachackra mudrā*  
Bagan, 11<sup>th</sup> century  
Sandstone  
Bagan Archaeological Museum

With hands in the teaching gesture, this Buddha image is associated with the First Sermon at Sarnath. In Bagan, the gesture also relates to episodes of defeating the heretics of Savatthi and the demon Alavaka. A report from 1918 describes a throne painted on the backslab, but no trace remains.

A plaster replica of this image was installed at the Alodawpyi Pagoda in Bagan, surrounded by 650 painted scenes of the Buddha preaching. It has risen to fame through the patronage of well-known donors. Meanwhile, this original stone image in the Bagan museum attracts many pilgrims, and miniature versions are donated to shrines around the country.<sup>127</sup>

On its return in March 2017 the seated Buddha was accompanied by the label as requested by Daw Baby for inclusion with the permanent display in Bagan.<sup>128</sup> The multiplicity of their lives has long been a part of the oral traditions that surround famous Buddha images in Myanmar. These new articulations suggest that it is also possible to write about merit-making in terms of the agency that objects have, regardless of where they are displayed. Like the new narratives that describe gifts as meritorious within the lower floors of the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum, the caption conveys a notion of the social world that the replica and the seated Buddha now inhabit. The incorporation of this new information into the permanent display represents a small but significant move towards re-connecting sacred objects with their original or adopted homes around Bagan.<sup>129</sup> While the biographical approach sits well within the Singapore museum's remit, it remains to be seen whether the lives of the seated wish fulfilling Buddha may bring renewed attention to the relationships between the museum, its meritorious curators and the temples of Bagan.

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<sup>127</sup> Heidi Tan, 'Buddha Seated in Dharmachakra Mudra', in *Cities and Kings. Ancient Treasures from Myanmar*. (Singapore: Asian Civilisations Museum, 2016), 104–5.

<sup>128</sup> Conan Cheong, Personal communication, 22 March 2017.

<sup>129</sup> It is also a step towards the integrated approach currently being advocated for the management of Bagan. Weise, 'Safeguarding Bagan'.

## Conclusion

This chapter identified and analysed attributes of the Bagan Archaeological Museum that demonstrated comparable practices with its pagoda museum counterparts. The museum's unique proximity to sacred sites in its earliest years as the Pagan Museum, set a precedent for spaces of safekeeping among monasteries and temples. It established an appropriate model for keeping and displaying objects that was reproduced at small-scale pagoda museums of the Independence period, in particular the Outer Museum discussed in the previous chapter. Taw Sein Ko's work with monastery collections in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century also set a precedent for future collaborations between the agents of the state and the pagodas as discussed in Chapter One – Luce's deposits at the Shwebonpwint Pagoda Museum in 1948 and the ministry's nascent exhibitions at the Shwedagon Pagoda in the early 1950s were early examples of this.

The chapter analysed the spatial qualities of the Bagan Archaeological Museum, the monumental re-imagined palace-style museum that opened in 1998 that has since been critically re-examined for its relevance to the sacred landscape. Although physically prominent at the centre of a national pilgrimage network, the museum differed from the pagoda and temple museum in that its collection of sandstone Buddha images remained decontextualized from the sites where they were originally collected. However, it shared the same monothematic focus on objects of merit-making, albeit transposed by a chronological framework of 11<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries. And like the predominant categories of stupas and Buddha images discussed in Chapter One, the categories 'Ancient Monuments' and 'Buddha Images', were the most extensively displayed. Exhibited in the same ordered mode, the displays demonstrated a precedence for the 'systematic' approach to those at the renovated Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum.

Decontextualized against the white walls of the showrooms, these objects gave the permanent exhibitions the quality of a 'cultural product' marked by attempts to 'produce' attributes of the sacred.<sup>130</sup> The spatial qualities of the museum such as the building's auspicious east-facing orientation combined with the framing of a meta-narrative of merit-making encouraged visitors to replicate patterns of ritual visiting at Bagan.

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<sup>130</sup> Souhami, 'Exhibition Production as Processes of Translation', 15.

As observed at the pagoda and temple museums discussed earlier, visitors showed an overriding interest in rituals of merit-making in the Buddha Images Showroom. Unlike the pagoda museum, a limited introduction to mudrā provided an organising principle for the displays. However, visitors demonstrated a preference for their own interpretations based on the Buddha's biographical events or acknowledged the challenges of the technical approach that required more information. The open display of the large collection of sandstone images collected from the temples demonstrated an austere protocol of respect. Yet elements of the iconographic programme constructed a ritual *mise en scène* where like the shrine room at the renovated Shwedagon Pagoda Museum, elements of framing and organisation of the displays played into devotees' interests and encouraged ritual activity. Their circumambulations, gestures of prayer and forms of haptic engagement demonstrated that visitors engaged their own 'field of vision' in the search for the sacred.<sup>131</sup> For example, while their identification of potent images in the showroom may be attributed to the latent appeal of 'lateral symmetry' as Wingfield asserts, for devotees their attraction was attributed to the qualities of beauty and auspiciousness due to their east-facing orientation.<sup>132</sup>

Different forms of haptic engagement from ritual touching to exploring the qualities of the sandstone further confirmed that like the shrine room discussed in Chapter One, the archaeological museum too conformed with Gaskell's notion of ambiguity where sacred objects could be understood in different ways and in accordance with the needs of visitors (see Chapter One: *Devotion in the Re-framed Shrine*, Chapter Two: *Framing the Prayer Halls*).<sup>133</sup>

Finally, the chapter also demonstrated how a notion of the seated Buddha's biography revealed its multiple meanings as it moved through different 'regimes of value' at various points in its life.<sup>134</sup> For much of its early life in the museum, the seated Buddha was one among many archaeological objects kept at the Pagan Museum or stored underground during wartime. Reified for its Gupta-like attributes and a Mon inscription by early curators, its identity began to shift in the early 1990s when its replica was cast for government-sponsored temple renovations. It assumed a double life when the consecrated replica took up residence at the Alodawpyi Pagoda in 1992. While Alodawpyi Buddha rose to fame the seated Buddha went on display in 1998 identified

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<sup>131</sup> Souhami, 50–51.

<sup>132</sup> Wingfield, 'Touching the Buddha. Encounters with a Charismatic Object', 57.

<sup>133</sup> Gaskell, 'Sacred to Profane and Back Again', 152–54.

<sup>134</sup> Kopytoff, Igor, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process", 66–67.

only by mudrā and through inference as the Teaching Buddha. Staff and visitors who recognised both images as potent demonstrated that lives of sacred objects are conflated where variants or duplications of the same image co-exist. Opinions varied about the efficacy of either image among visitors, although the regular rituals performed by staff at the museum demonstrated the reverence by which the seated Buddha was held. The installation of a temporary shrine with elaborate offerings associated with the Alodawpyi Pagoda in the Buddha Images Showroom each year recalls Grimes observation that the sacred is a momentary cultural process.<sup>135</sup>

Such moments were captured at the Alodawpyi Temple in text panels that both endorsed the auspiciousness of the temple and the wish fulfilling moment of the consecration of the replica Buddha image in 1992. One panel asserted the authenticity of the temple, the other the authenticity of wish fulfilling rituals. Despite the authoritative assertion of knowledge demonstrated at the temple, devotees continued to venerate the Alodawpyi Buddha and acquire small images for friends and family. Their informal and embodied knowledge of ritual at the temple would be conveyed to the museum much like at the pagoda and temple museums discussed earlier.

As observed above, the travels of the seated Buddha for international exhibitions in 2015 and 2016 elicited different curatorial approaches to its display and interpretation. While the first framed the image as art, the second dwelt on the dual lives of the seated Buddha. ACM's display label demonstrated that the replica was complicit in the life of the seated Buddha as it travelled across different 'interpretive spheres'.<sup>136</sup> Meaning therefore not only accrues through movement but is also carried across and incorporated within these spheres. Just as devotees brought the memories of Alodawpyi Buddha from the temple to the museum, these associations then travelled onwards with the seated Buddha. The subsequent incorporation of the ACM's label at Bagan was recognition of the polysemic quality of the seated Buddha that remained both an historic object of merit-making and a potent wish fulfilling Buddha.

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<sup>135</sup> Grimes, 'Sacred Objects in Museum Spaces', 419.

<sup>136</sup> Tythacott, *The Lives of Chinese Objects*, 7.

## CONCLUSION

The thesis has identified and analysed a number of distinctive attributes of pagoda museums as they related to the dimensions of space, curatorial practice and the interpretation of objects. The chapters addressed each of these dimensions as they were encountered during my visits to the sites, starting with the spatial relationship of the museum to the site and internal spatial arrangements as observed through visitors' responses, curators' activities that are conceived of as meritorious practices, and the interpretative framing of sacred objects through the medium of display.

### A Space of Merit-making

The thesis demonstrated how the term 'pagoda museum' defines a museological entity that developed from within the ritual context of the pagoda. The historical precedents discussed in Chapter One identified the notion of a 'site museum' situated in close proximity to the pagoda during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, while spaces of safekeeping at the monasteries and the Paribawga Daik (1919) at the Shwedagon Pagoda existed in parallel. From the earliest stage the pagoda museum established the rationale for a space of safekeeping in proximity to the stupa or sacred centre and its accumulations of ritual offerings. Since these times the abundance of collections within monasteries, pagodas and their museums, have made them intermittent sources for enriching the collections of the state museums.

More specifically, the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum demonstrated how its remoteness on the margins of the pagoda platform combined with the unusual mix of sacred and mundane objects presented an inner world separated spatially and temporally from the world outside.<sup>1</sup> The surprisingly eclectic nature of the collection that manifested the heterotopic quality recognisable of certain micromuseums, was however diminished with the renovations of 2016. Conversely, the two other sites manifested different qualities as they demonstrated other forms of proximity to the sacred centre and held collections that were comparatively homogenous. At Yadana Man Aung Temple, the 'seamlessness' of the Inner Museum within the walls of the temple distinguished it as a variant of the pagoda museum.<sup>2</sup> The museum's framing of the ritual spaces within the

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<sup>1</sup> Candlin, *Micromuseology*, 182–83.

<sup>2</sup> Candlin, 153.

temple emphasised the ritual significance of its contents, which as offerings to the Buddha imbued the auspicious temple with the merits of past donors. Similarly, the Bagan Archaeological Museum's proximity to the centre of a pilgrimage network brought it directly into the pathways of devotees who appropriated the monumental state museum as a site for merit-making.

In all three cases, their spatial qualities were further revealed through the devotees' ritual use of the museum for merit-making. Sustaining this core ritual of the Theravāda tradition was a defining 'monothematic' attribute of pagoda museums. This focussed ritual purpose expands on the notion that was applied in a more limited way to micromuseums and the homogenous nature of their collections.<sup>3</sup> Responses to the renovated Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum and the Buddha Images Showroom at Bagan took the form of ritual circumambulation and veneration. At the former these manifested as a response to the new 'iconographic programme' where pathways around a re-centred model stupa replicated the liminal moments of ritual undertaken within the pagoda at large.<sup>4</sup> However, at Bagan the austere displays framed each Buddha image in a subtle ritual *mise en scène* that encouraged devotees to engage with the numinous qualities of the images as they would at the temple.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, the Inner Museum received little direct engagement as visitors' rituals were oriented towards the central shrine. Yet both the Buddha Images Showroom and the Inner Museum were marked by other forms of behaviour. These included informal and 'encoded' ways of understanding objects that drew on associations and memories of the historic temple and its social life.<sup>6</sup> The Showroom was unique among state museums in that haptic engagements were tacitly accommodated. Ritual and exploratory touching demonstrated that visitors' embodied knowledge and sensory experiences played a significant role in their experience of the museum.<sup>7</sup> Even when strict protocols prevailed, for example at the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum, potent guardian figures with a patina of ritual touching and traces of gilding tacitly invited viewers to engage sensorially.

Another unique attribute of the internal spatial quality of the pagoda museum was revealed through visitors' responses to the predominance of abundant displays. These were subject to the 'museum effect' to the point of creating 'visual interest' not for the

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<sup>3</sup> Candlin, 154–55.

<sup>4</sup> Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 8; Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 197.

<sup>5</sup> Souhami, 'Exhibition Production as Processes of Translation', 50–51.

<sup>6</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 109.

<sup>7</sup> Dudley, *Museum Materialities*, 5.

purpose of presenting 'art' as in the Western museum, but rather as a means to see the Buddha and the objects of merit-making.<sup>8</sup> The importance of abundance was confirmed by visitors who expressed a preference for this over the paucity of displays at the National Museum. Extensive displays signified the accumulation of merit and through their visibility the regeneration of merit. Yet the mechanisms of safekeeping that were prevalent at pagoda museums demonstrated a paradox in these displays, in which the means to protect also obscured the visibility of the gifts. However, ritual activities conducted at the foot of barricaded displays at the Bagan Archaeological Museum demonstrated that obfuscation was no deterrent to ritual. Similar observations were made at monastery museums in Thailand.<sup>9</sup>

And finally, the thesis demonstrated how shrines were a unique spatial attribute of pagoda museums. Visitors demonstrated varying perceptions of the sacred in the newly encased shrine room at the Shwedagon Pagoda and at the relic shrine within the Inner Museum. For some, the shrine room in the pagoda museum was an authentic ritual space for meditation, for others a contested re-presentation or 'cultural product' that required scrutiny.<sup>10</sup> The degree to which the shrine conformed to notions of authenticity was contingent on personal preferences such as the ambience required for meditation or familiarity with the customary protocols for the programming of such spaces. These responses demonstrated that contradictory preferences and different kinds of embodied knowledge co-existed and gave the shrine room an ambiguous quality that resonated with the complex nature of shrine displays observed in Western museums.<sup>11</sup> A similar phenomenon was observed in the relic shrine display at the Inner Museum which received responses ranging from donations and prayers to curiosity over the large amounts of cash that lay within the shrine. Distinctions between the secular space of the Western museum and the sacred space of the shrine it attempts to reconstruct could not easily be made in either of these cases. Furthermore, devotees demonstrated that like their Tibetan counterparts in Dharamsala, no particular understanding of the sacred prevailed as individuals took different paths to pursue spiritual goals.<sup>12</sup> Meditation was one, devotional worship of Buddha images was the other.

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<sup>8</sup> Alpers, 'The Museum as a Way of Seeing', 26–27.

<sup>9</sup> Paritta Chalermpong Koanantakool, 'Contextualising Objects in Monastery Museums in Thailand', 159.

<sup>10</sup> Souhami, 'Exhibition Production as Processes of Translation', 50–51.

<sup>11</sup> Gaskell, 'Sacred to Profane and Back Again', 149–50.

<sup>12</sup> Clark, 'Exhibiting the Exotic, Simulating the Sacred: Tibetan Shrines at British and American Museums', 14.

## Meritorious Curating

The thesis demonstrated that curatorial practices at pagoda museums comprised a range of duties that were based on a shared protocol of respect. This was understood by volunteer-keeper U Maung Maung Gyi as predicated on the status of the objects as belonging to the Buddha. The awareness of a meritorious practice was acknowledged in terms of the voluntary nature of the role that was furthermore conceived as a service to the Buddha. Conventional duties of safekeeping and care were observed on a grand scale at the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum including inventory checks and works that were considered improvements such as the cleaning of objects to look new, the re-gilding of Buddha images, and the renovation of the displays in 2015. The underlying premise for the displays, to inspire further merit-making, demonstrated that the curatorial remit was itself an act of merit.

The incremental rearrangements and cleaning of the displays at the Inner Museum were no less motivated by this intention. Furthermore, the concern to maintain the underlying reciprocal relationship between donors and the pagoda's 'field of merit' demonstrated that meritorious curating is a social practice that shares this similarity with other forms of local keeping practices in Southeast Asia.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the active use of objects in and around the Inner Museum by trustee-keeper U Mya Thaung included displays of ancestral portraits, royal manuscripts, ancient Buddha images and documentation of sacred light to provide auspicious reminders of the rulers and their powerful relics at the centre of the temple; the source of merit and protection for Shan Buddhists.<sup>14</sup>

Curators in Bagan demonstrated another form of ritual activation in the sustenance of merit-making, notably through the replication of ancient Buddha images and the reinstallation of their plaster replicas in the temples. In the case of the seated Buddha its replica became famous as the Alodawpyi or Wish Fulfilling Buddha after its consecration in the temple of that name. Both original and replica continued to be venerated at the museum and temple respectively. Bagan curators' protocols of respect around sacred images whilst tempered by conservation requirements, nonetheless demonstrated that ritual care including merit-making was conceived as

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<sup>13</sup> Paritta Chalernpow Koanantakool, 'Contextualising Objects in Monastery Museums in Thailand'. Kreps, 'Thai Monastery Museums. Contemporary Expressions of Ancient Traditions', 236–37.

<sup>14</sup> Tannenbaum, *Who Can Compete Against the World? Power-Protection and Buddhism in Shan Worldview*, 75.



part of this practice. The range of ritual activities from the uttering of consecration stanzas to the organisation of the annual Waso ceremony, demonstrated the meritorious intent of curators U Aung Kyaing and Daw Baby.

## Objects of Merit-making

The thesis identified a number of ways in which objects were interpreted by curators, for example, through formal means such as the Shwedagon Pagoda's Work Plan and interpretives which were used to varying degrees at all three sites. However, it also demonstrated that informal articulations were made by keepers, for example through the trustees' personal presentations or during the inspection of rare objects at the Inner Museum.

However, in all three cases, a concern was demonstrated to present objects for a wider audience through reference to the broader objectives of the museum, or the use of new taxonomies or interpretive elements within the displays. At the renovated Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum, the dual aims to encourage the study and veneration of its collections were mapped as themes that acknowledged both the 'formal' and 'functional' meanings of objects.<sup>15</sup> Hence the many Buddha image displays were ordered according to materials with descriptive titles that alluded to their formal material attributes and function as Buddha images. Furthermore, in an effort to reach out to new audiences, the first bilingual text panels were devised by museum consultant Daw Nu Mra Zan to interpret unique groups of ritual objects. By drawing on different levels of meaning, the panels established a means to recognise the 'polysemic' qualities of the collection.<sup>16</sup> The special class of 'devotional objects' was described as symbolic of religious allegories, as exquisite forms of craftsmanship, as well as fulfilling their donors' requirements to cultivate merit.

In contrast to these systematised means of ordering and constructing knowledge, objects within the Inner Museum were more enigmatically framed and contextualised by the iconographic programme of the temple. Although labelled in some detail, the significance of the royal manuscripts became more visceral when U Mya Thaung took them out for inspection. A sensory understanding of the manuscripts and their true

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<sup>15</sup> Ronald Grimes L., 'Sacred Objects in Museum Spaces', *Studies in Religion/ Sciences Religieuses* 21, no. 4 (1992): 423.

<sup>16</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 77.

state of decay converged at this point with their significance as 'ancient heritage' and rare objects, two objectives espoused by the trustee for the Inner Museum. Furthermore, their deeper significance was demonstrated through their handling as 'contact points' for the senses,<sup>17</sup> to recognise their metonymic value as marks of Shan identity. Displayed in view of the powerful Yadana Man Aung Buddha, the manuscripts pointed to historical relations with the Burmese court and the conflation of merit that the Shan ancestral ruler and Burmese king had shared through the building of the temple and the enshrinement of their relics with those of the Buddha's.

While the highly ordered arrangements and formalised interpretive methods at the Shwedagon Pagoda contrasted with the contextualised displays at the Inner Museum, the interpretation of Buddha images at the Bagan Archaeological Museum remained more ambiguous in its approach. While consistent labelling restricted their interpretation to the limited format of the 'object-information package',<sup>18</sup> other framing elements as mentioned above drew attention to the sacred qualities of the images. The category 'Buddha Images' was one of the most extensively displayed and unlike the National Museum's collection was not subject to reinterpretation as 'Buddhist Art'. Furthermore, the replication of images made during the early 1990s had created a legacy of ritual activity within the temples that was repatriated to the museum by devotees. Their rituals of visiting the museum as part of the pilgrimage circuit of Bagan brought renewed meaning to the original sandstone images. The biography of the potent seated Buddha's life in the museum and its replica's parallel life in the temple were drawn together through the collective rituals of merit-making. Their movements at different times in their lives generated new meanings as they encountered different 'interpretive spheres'.<sup>19</sup> Thus the seated Buddha moved from its former sacred site to become the personification of dharmacakra mudrā or the teaching gesture in the archaeological museum, while the replica's consecration and subsequent veneration enhanced the potency of the original. Notably, each of the images drew attention to the ambiguities with which they were displayed. The museum's austere and systematic mode of display was both prohibitive in the use of barriers for example, yet surprisingly accommodating of ritual behaviour. The temple's devotional and multi-sensory ambience contrasted starkly with the showroom, yet conflicting authoritative narratives remained ambiguous in their determination of its potency. Recognition of its value as

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<sup>17</sup> Jeffrey David Feldman, 'Contact Points: Museums and the Lost Body Problem', in *Sensible Objects. Colonialism, Museums, and Material Culture* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2006), 255–56.

<sup>18</sup> Dudley, *Museum Materialities*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Louise Tythacott, *The Lives of Chinese Objects. Buddhism, Imperialism and Display* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), 114.

'art' during the exhibition in New York (2015) and of its conflated identity during the exhibition in Singapore (2016), brought a small but significant change to the interpretation of the seated Buddha. New labelling in the showroom further formalised its multivalent quality and marked a moment of renewal in thinking about the somewhat fixed category of 'Buddha images'.

In conclusion, the thesis has demonstrated the significance of several unique attributes of the pagoda museum. Proximity to the temples and connecting pilgrimage networks, a dedication to the sustenance of merit-making, the meritorious activities of curators, and a broadening of the interpretive frames of reference for objects, are qualities which enable pagoda museums to thrive as museological entities. Finally, the relationship with its constituents, seen in the constant flow of devotees, is key to the pagoda museum. While challenging to the state museum that remains bound by conservation protocols, the role of devotees in keeping objects ritually active cannot be underestimated. Their rituals of visiting have demonstrated in all three case studies that what is perceived as the sacred is experienced as a series of liminal moments by individuals who create their own paths. To return to the observation at the start of the thesis, a visit to the pagoda museum is not only about finding the museum but also about tracing the paths that are taken around it by devotees. Ultimately the pagoda museum is a space for devotees to see the Buddha, make, share and transfer merit and seek blessings. In times of renewal it is also a good place to begin to recognise how devotees' changing needs and interests in different forms of knowledge can be encouraged in their search for the sacred.

## GLOSSARY<sup>1</sup>

M – Myanmar  
P – Pali  
S – Sanskrit  
Sh – Shan

abhaya mudrā (S), abhaya muddā (P):

gesture of fearlessness; see mudrā

Alinka kyaw-zwa (M အလင်္ကာကျော်စွာ):

renowned ornament of the state, the highest honour available for artists e.g. Saw Maung

Alopyi (M အလိုပြည့်):

wishes fulfilled (see sutaungpyi)

Alodawpyi (M အလိုတော်ပြည့်):

same as Alopyi, the honorific ‘daw’ is typically more formal

a-meh-zi (M အမဲဆီ):

grease used as a separator in plaster casting

anekaza tin-bweh (M အနေကဇာ တင်ပွဲ), abhiseka (P), abhiṣeka (S):

ceremony of consecrating a Buddha image

Apyin Pya-daik (M အပြင် ပြတိုက်):

‘Outer Museum’ at Yadana Man Aung Temple, see pya-daik

arhat (S), arahant (P), yahanda (M ရဟန္တာ):

one who has insight into the true nature of existence, who has attained nibbana

asaunt-ashauk (M အစောင့်အရှောက်):

guardianship, protection

Atwin Pya-daik (M အတွင်းပြတိုက်):

‘Inner Museum’ at Yadana Man Aung Temple; see pya-daik

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<sup>1</sup> Definitions are drawn primarily from the following: Myanmar Language Commission, ‘Myanmar-English Dictionary’. Pali Text Society, ‘The Pali Text Society’s Pali-English Dictionary’. Damien Keown, *A Dictionary of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Robert E. Buswell and Donald S. Lopez, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014).

- aung-mye (M အောင်မြေ), jayabhūmi (P), *zayabumi* (M pronunciation):  
victory ground
- aw-wada-sariya sayadaw (M သြဝါဒစရိယ ဆရာတော်):  
monk who gives counsel and advice
- awza (M သြဇာ): influence
- baw (M ဘော်): silver
- bet-soun yeh-sheh pyu-pyin mun-man-gyin (M ဘက်စုံရေရှည်ပြုပြင်မွမ်းမံခြင်း):  
All Round Perpetual Renovation; see pyu-pyin htein their
- bhūmisparśa mudrā (S), bhūmipatta muddā (P):  
gesture of calling the earth to witness; see mudrā
- Bouda-bada (M ဗုဒ္ဓဘာသာ): religion of the Buddha, Buddhism
- Bouda sin-du-daw (M ဗုဒ္ဓဆင်းတုတော်):  
Buddha image, the honorific 'daw' is more respectful
- Bouda-win (M ဗုဒ္ဓဝင်), Buddhavamsa (P):  
life of Buddha
- cakravartin (S), cakkavattin (P): (M setkya-wade-min စကြာဝတေးမင်း):  
he who sets the wheel rolling, a wise and just ruler,  
universal ruler
- chinthe (M ခြင်္သေ့): lion
- dago (M တန်ခိုး): power, potency
- dago shi-da-baw (M တန်ခိုးရှိတာပေါ့):  
definitely has power
- Dagu (M တန်ခူး): first month of the traditional Burmese year around April
- dagun-dain (M တံခွန်တိုင်): flag post
- dāna (P), dana (M ဒါန): giving; generosity; a source of merit

- dat-daw zedi (M ၵတ်တော်စေတီ) / dhatu zedi (M ၵတုစေတီ):  
stupa with enshrined relics of Buddha or arhat
- dharma (S), dhamma (P), dama (M ၵမ္မ), taya (M တရား):  
teachings of the Buddha
- dharmacakra mudrā (S), dhammacakka muddā (P),  
damasekya moudra (M ၵမ္မစကြာ မုဒြာ):  
turning the Wheel of Law, gesture of giving the First Sermon; see mudrā
- dhyana mudrā (S), jhāna muddā (P), zanna moudra (M စှာနမုဒြာ):  
meditation gesture; see mudrā
- Dutiya Hnyun-kya-Ye-Hmu (M ဒုတိယညွှန်ကြားရေးမှူး):  
Deputy Director
- duyin-gauk (M ဒုရင်ကောက်): roof finial in the shape of a peacock chest
- Eh-gan Dazaung (M ဧည့်ခံတန်ဆောင်):  
Reception Hall
- galoun (M ဂဠုန်): garuda, mythical king of birds
- gandhakuti (M ဂန္ဓကုဋီ), gandhakuṭi (P):  
perfumed chamber
- gaw-paka (M ဂေါပက), gopaka (S, P):  
pagoda trustee
- goundaw (M ဂုဏ်တော်): guṇa (P):  
nine special qualities of the Buddha: ‘purified of all impurities, a Supreme (in contrast to a silent) Buddha, possessing supernormal powers, blissful, world-knower, pointer of the truth, master of gods and men, supremely enlightened, Lord of the six powers’.<sup>2</sup>
- gu-hpaya (M ဂူ ဘုရား): cave temple; see pahto
- hintha (M ဟင်္သာ), haṃsa (S, P):  
type of goose found in Mon culture

<sup>2</sup> Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism*, 176.

- hinthabada (M ဟင်္သိပဒါး), haṃsapāda (P):  
red cinnabar
- hnget-mana (M ငှက်မြတ်နား):  
lit. 'bird resting place', flag-shaped vane on the umbrella finial
- hpaya (M ဘုရား):  
the Buddha, image of the Buddha, stupa, pagoda,  
respectful form of address towards monks and royalty;  
see also gu-hpaya, pahto, stupa, zedi
- hpon (M ဘုန်း), puñña (P), puṇya (S):  
power; glory
- hsun-ok (M ဆွမ်းအုပ်):  
offering vessel usually with tiered cover
- hsweh-leh (M ဆည်းလည်း):  
small bells hung around the tip of a stupa
- htarpana (M ဣပနာ), ṭhapana (P):  
enshrined relics
- hti, hti-daw (M ထီး၊ ထီးတော်):  
umbrella finial, part of royal regalia
- htwa (M ထွာ):  
hand span between thumb and index finger equal to six inches; see taun
- jātaka (P), zat (M ဇာတ်):  
stories of the Buddha's 550 previous lives
- kahtein (M ကထိန်), kathina (P):  
offering of robes usually between October and November
- kammawa (M ကမ္မဝါ), kammavācā (P):  
texts recited at monastic ordinations and other ceremonies, found on lacquered manuscripts
- kanout (M ကနုတ်):  
stylised lotus and scrolling foliate motifs in traditional art
- karaweik (M ကရဝိက်): kavika (P):  
mythical bird with melodious cry

karma (S), kamma (P), kan (M ကံ):	action, deed, one's fortune as determined by past actions
Kason (M ကဆုန်):	second month of the traditional Burmese year around May, full moon marks the birth and death of the Buddha
khandaka (P); khaṇḍaka (S) (M: division; akhan (M အခန်း):	chapter, sections of monk's patched robe
Kinnari (P) (M keinnari ကိန္နရီ):	female mythical bird with human head and torso, kinnara (P) (M ကိန္နရာ) is the male
kutho (M ကုသိုလ်), kusala (P):	merit, gained by doing good deeds
kyat (M ကျပ်):	unit of currency and of weight
kyat-tha (M ကျပ်သား):	unit of weight 100 <sup>th</sup> s of a viss, see pei-tha
kyi-nyo tada-pwa (M ကြည်ညို သဒ္ဒါပွား):	to multiply respect and faith
laba moudra (M လာဘမုဒြာ), lābha muddā (P), lābha mudrā (S):	gesture of prosperity
lahpet-thouk (M လက်ဖက်သုတ်):	tea-leaf salad
Let-thauk Hnyun-kya-Ye-Hmu (M လက်ထောက်ညွှန်ကြားရေးမှူး):	Assistant Director
Le-zu Dat-poun (M လေးဆူဓါတ်ပုံ):	repository of the Four Relics, another name for the Shwedagon Pagoda
lin-lun (M လင်းလွန်း):	tree bearing fragrant flowers (Buchanania latifolia), fragrant wood used to make the Yadana Man Aung Buddha image, also known as Rajayatana Tree
lokiya (P), lawkiya (M လောကီယ):	worldly, belonging to this world



- manoutthi-ha (M မနုဿီဟ): mythical squatting creature with human male torso and lion's hindquarters
- mawgun-daik (M မော်ကွန်းတိုက်):  
archive building
- mudrā (S): muddā (P), moudra (M မုဒြာ):  
sign or symbolic hand gestures; see abhaya mudrā, bhūmisparśa mudrā, dharmacakra mudrā, dhyana mudrā, lābha mudrā, varada mudrā
- Nadaw (M နတ်တော်): ninth month of the traditional Burmese year in December
- nat (M နတ်): non-human beings including gods in the Buddhist heavenly realms, the royal pantheon of 37 nats and local spirits
- nawarat (M နဝရတ်), navaratna (S):  
auspicious nine gems
- Nayon (M နယုန်): third month of the traditional Burmese year around June
- neibban-koun zain (M နိဗ္ဗန်ကုန်ဆိုင်):  
lit. 'nibbāna goods shop' where Buddha images, ritual items, monks' accoutrements and nat images can be acquired
- nibat-taw (M နိပါတ်၊ နိပါတ်တော်), nipāta (P):  
last ten stories of the Buddha's 550 previous lives
- nirvāṇa (S), nibbāna (P), neibban (M နိဗ္ဗန်):  
state of release from the cycle of rebirth, the spiritual goal, salvation
- onnalon-mway-shindaw (M ဥဏ္ဍလုံမွေးရှင်တော်), ūṇā (S), uṇṇa (P):  
tufted whorl of hair at the centre of Buddha's forehead
- oudeittha zedi (M ဥဒ္ဓိဿစေတီ), uddesika cetiya (P):  
indicative or commemorative relics of Buddha, images or pagodas dedicated to the Buddha
- padamya (M ပတ္တမြား): ruby, first of the nine gems
- padethabin (M ပဒေသာပင်): offering tree, wish fulfilling tree

pagoda:	a tiered style of stupa especially in East Asia, probably from the Portuguese pagode derived from Sanskrit bhagavat 'blessed' or Persian butkada 'idol house'; see hpaya
pahto (M ပုထိုး):	temple (hollow stupa type); see gu-hpaya
palin (M ပလ္လင်), pallaṅka (P):	throne
panet-yaik (M ပန္တက်ရိုက်):	to drive in a stake
pan seh-myo (M ပန်း ဆယ်မျိုး):	Ten Flowers of traditional Myanmar arts: bronze-casting (badin ပန်းတိုင်း), blacksmithing (babeḥ ပန်းပဲ), silver and gold smithing (badein ပန်းထိမ်), wood and ivory carving (babu ပန်းပု), stucco work (pan-daw ပန်းတော့), stonecarving (pan-tamaw ပန်းတမော့), masonry and brickwork (bayan ပန်းရန်), wood-turning (pan-but ပန်းပွတ်), painting (bagyi ပန်းချီ), and lacquerwork (pan-yun ပန်းယွန်း)
parabaik (M ပုရပိုက်):	folded book made of paper, cloth or metal
paribawga (M ပရိဘောဂ), paribhoga or pāribhogika (P):	utensils or relics used by the Buddha such as an umbrella, bowl, staff, etc.
parinibbāna (P), parinirvāṇa (S), pari-neibban (M ပရိနိဗ္ဗာန်)	release from cravings and attachments to life
pe (M ပဲ):	1/16 <sup>th</sup> tical, unit of weight; 1/16 <sup>th</sup> inch, unit of measurement; 1/20 <sup>th</sup> old Myanmar kyat, unit of currency
pei (M ပေ):	one foot, unit of measurement
pei-tha (M ပိဿာ):	one viss, unit of weight equal to 100 ticals
pe-za (M ပေစာ):	palm-leaf manuscript
pin (M ပင်):	invite respectfully e.g. a Buddha image into one's home

pitakat-taik (M ပိဋကတ်တိုက်):

Buddhist scripture library

puññakkhetta (P), punya-ketta (M ပုညက္ခေတ္တ), puṇyakṣetra (S):

field of merit e.g. the Buddha's field of merit is greatest followed by the monks', gifts to them yield much merit

Pu-zaw Wut-pyu Khan (M ပူဇော်ဝတ်ပြုခန်း):

lit. to worship (pu-zaw ပူဇော်), do obeisance (wut-pyu ဝတ်ပြု), room (khan ခန်း); see shikkho.

pya (M ပြ):

to show, display, exhibit; see pya-daik, pya-khan

pya (M ပြး):

1/100<sup>th</sup> of a kyat, unit of currency

pya-bwe (M ပြပွဲ):

exhibition, show, fair

pya-daik (M ပြတိုက်):

lit. exhibit building, museum

Pyadaik Sit-se-ye Pinya-shin (M ပြတိုက်စစ်ဆေးရေးပညာရှင်):

Museum Inspection Expert

Pyadaik Htana-Hmu (M ပြတိုက်ဌာနမှူး):

Museum Department Officer

Pyadaik Ta-Wun-Gan (M ပြတိုက်တာဝန်ခံ):

Museum Officer (position at the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum)

pya-khan (M ပြခန်း):

exhibit room, showroom, gallery

pya-that (M ပြာသာဒ်), prāsāda (S):

three, five or seven-tiered tower, found in Burmese royal and Buddhist architecture, usually placed above a hall the ruler's throne or altar for the Buddha

Pyatho (M ပြာသို):

tenth month of traditional Burmese year around January

pyinsa-lawha (M ပဉ္စလောဟာ):

five-metal alloy of gold, silver, copper, iron and lead, associated with auspicious Buddha images

- pyu-pyin htein-thein (M ပြုပြင်ထိန်းသိမ်း):  
improve/repair (and) preserve/keep
- sagyi-daik (M စာကြည့်တိုက်): library
- san kyaung (M စံ ကျောင်း): lit. 'stay (of royalty) monastery'; temporary residence or  
'staging hall' for Buddha images
- sanit-kya-deh (M စနစ်ကျတယ်):  
to be systematic
- sanit-tagya (M စနစ်တကျ): systematically
- sao hpaya loun main kon (M စဝ်ဖရားလုံးမိုင်းကွန်း)
- sao phra loung moeng koun (Sh လင်းကြိုးလှိုင်းမိုင်းဂူဆင်း):  
Buddhas that descended to the mundane world (Sao Shwe Thaik's description of the Phaung Daw Oo Buddhas)
- sāsana (P, S), thathana (M သာသနာ):  
Buddhist faith, practice
- sawbwa (M စော်ဘွား), saopha (Sh လင်းဒုဂ်):  
lit. Lord of the Sky, Shan prince
- sayagyi (M ဆရာကြီး): senior male teacher, term of respect
- sazigyo (M စာစည်းကြိုး): manuscript binding ribbon
- seidana wun-dan (M စေတနာ့ဝန်ထမ်း):  
volunteer
- seinbu-daw (M စိန်ပွဲတော်): diamond bud on the umbrella finial
- sekya (M စကြာ), chakra (S), cakka (P):  
wheel e.g. sutaungpyi sekya or wish fulfilling carousel;  
see dharmacakra, dhammacakka, damasekya
- Shehaung Bouda Yoke-pwa-mya Dazaung  
(M ရှေးဟောင်းဗုဒ္ဓရုပ်ပွားများတန်ဆောင်):  
Hall of Ancient Buddha Images

shehaung pyitsi (M ရှေးဟောင်းပစ္စည်း):	ancient things
shikkho (M ရှိခိုး):	do obeisance
shwe-daik (M ရွှေတိုက်):	royal treasury
stupa (S), thūpa (P):	reliquary mound with relics or possessions of the Buddha, reminder of the Buddha; see pagoda, hpaya, zedi
sutaungpyi (M ဆုတောင်းပြည့်):	prayers fulfilled; see alopyi
Tabaung (M တပေါင်း):	12 <sup>th</sup> month of the traditional Burmese year around March
taun (M တောင်):	three hand-spans, unit of measurement equal to 18 inches
Tawthalin (M တော်သလင်း):	sixth month of the traditional Burmese year around October
Thadingyut (M သီတင်းကျွတ်):	seventh month of the traditional Burmese year around September, full moon marks the end of the rainy season retreat and Buddha's return from Tavatimsa Heaven
thapye-pan (M သပြေပန်း):	Eugenia / Victory leaves
tha-yo (M သား ရိုး):	lit. 'flesh and bones', lacquer putty
thein (M: သိန်း):	100,000 kyats, or one lakh (S lakṣa)
Theravāda (P), hterawada (M ထေရဝါဒ pronunciation):	way of the elders, one of the great traditions of Buddhism
thila (M သီလ), sīla (S, P):	moral behaviour / precept
thitsi (M သစ်စေး):	lacquer sap from the tree Melanorrhoea usitata

- Tipitaka (P) (M တိပိဋက), Tripiṭaka (S):  
the 'Three Baskets' or collections of texts of the Pali Canon that comprises the Sutta (discourses), Vinaya (code of conduct) and Abhidhamma ('higher teaching')
- uṣṇīṣa (S): cranial protuberance on the Buddha's head
- U-zi Aya-shi (M ဦးစီးအရာရှိ): Staff Officer
- varada mudrā (S), vara muddā (P):  
wish-giving gesture; see mudrā
- vipassanā (P), wipatthana (M ဝိပဿနာ):  
insight
- Wagaung (M ဝါခေါင်): fifth month of the traditional Burmese year around August
- Waso (M ဝါဆို), vassa (P): fourth month of the traditional Burmese year around July,  
start of the three-month rainy season retreat when Buddha delivered the First Sermon
- weikza (M ဝိဇ္ဇာ), vijjā (P): ancient system of knowledge, practitioner of occult arts  
and alchemy, wizard-monk
- Yadana Man Aung Hpaya (M ရတနာမာရ်အောင်ဘုရား):  
Victorious Jewel temple commemorating the Buddha's victory over Māra
- yaung-daw hpwint (M ရောင်တော်ဖွင့်):  
to clean pagodas or images of Buddha
- yaungyi-daw (M ရောင်ခြည်တော်):  
rays of light including brown, gold, red and white that emanate from the image of Buddha
- yin-ngwe-hlone (M ရင်ငွေ့လှုံ):  
natural bodily warmth e.g. from a mother's breast<sup>3</sup> or the Buddha, refers to the nestling of smaller Buddha images to absorb energy from a more powerful image

<sup>3</sup> Adoniram Judson and Robert C. Stevenson, *Judson's Burmese-English Dictionary. Revised and Enlarged* (Rangoon: The Superintendent, Government Printing, Burma, 1893), 919, <http://archive.org/details/1528288.0001.001.umich.edu>.

yun-hto (M ယွန်ထိုး): lacquer with incised decoration

zedi (M ဧတီ), cetiya (P), caitya (S):

solid bell-shaped monument, reliquary, reminder of the Buddha; see dat-daw zedi, hpaya, pagoda, stupa

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### Chapter Three

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# CHRONOLOGY<sup>1</sup>

## *West/Northwest Myanar*

Arakan	ca. 200–1000 CE
Lemro	11 <sup>th</sup> –14 <sup>th</sup> century
Mrauk U	1433–1784

## *Central and Upper Myanmar*

Pyu	ca. 100CE–9 <sup>th</sup> century
Early Bagan	849–1044
Bagan Period	11 <sup>th</sup> century–1297
• Anawrahta	ca. 1044–ca. 1077
• Kyanzittha	ca. 1084–ca. 1112
• Alaungsithu	r. 1113–1160
• Narathihapate	r. 1256–1287
Inwa/Ava Period	1364–1555
Toungoo Period	1486–1599
Restored Toungoo/Naungyan	1597–1752
Konbaung Dynasty	1752–1885
• Alaungpaya	r. 1752–1760
• Hsinbyushin	r. 1763–1776
• Singu	r. 1776–1781
• Bodawpaya	r. 1782–1819
• Bagyidaw	r. 1819–1837
• Tharawaddy	r. 1837–1846
• Mindon	r. 1853–1878
• Thibaw	r. 1878–1885

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Stephen Murphy A., *Cities and Kings. Ancient Treasures from Myanmar*. (Singapore: Asian Civilisations Museum, 2016), 166–67.

## *Lower Myanmar*

Mon	ca.100CE–9 <sup>th</sup> century
Hanthawaddy Bago	1369–1537
• Shinsawbu	ca.1453–1470
• Dhammazedì	r.1470–1492
Restored Hanthawaddy	1740–1757
First Anglo-Burmese War	1824
Second Anglo-Burmese War	1852
Third Anglo-Burmese War	1884–5
Province of India	1 January 1886 –1 April 1937
Japanese Occupation	1942–45
Independence – Union of Burma	4 January 1948
U Nu	1948–1956 1956–1957
Caretaker Government	1958–1960
U Nu	1960–1962
General Ne Win; Burma Socialist Program Party	1962–1988
Union of Myanmar – SLORC/SDPC <sup>2</sup>	1988–2011
• President General Than Shwe	1992–2011
• President Thein Sein	2011–2016
New government – NLD <sup>3</sup>	8 November 2015

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<sup>2</sup> SLORC; State Law and Order Restoration Council. SPDC; State Peace and Development Council.

<sup>3</sup> National League for Democracy.



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## APPENDICES

## Appendix 1. Survey of Sites (2015–2016)



A. Religious sites with designated museum (21)

B. Religious sites with collections of 'ancient things' in situ, collected, stored and/or informally displayed (50)

C. State museums run by the Department of Archaeology (DOA) supported by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture (13)




Total: 84




### A. Religious sites with designated museums (21)




Place and date visited	Details of Building/s	Notes on the collection, display and other information	Photo
A.1. Bandula Monastery, Mrauk-U. Visited 7 January 2016.	<p>Raised wooden building with monks' quarters and displays in numbered showcases. Situated along the main entrance route to the Sandamuni Hpayagyi Kyaung Daik.</p> <p>A building pillar credits the donor and is dated 1316 ME, or 1954.</p>	<p>A large collection of Buddha images, relics and reliquaries, Pyu period coins, international currency, glass lamps, clocks, calculators, paintings, dried puffer fish, paintings, unexplained vignette of a floating rock, etc.</p> <p>Informants suggest the collection was started by U Sila around 90 years ago. The DOA currently provides assistance with an inventory.</p> <p>The monastery donated a relic to the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple in Singapore in August 2002.<sup>761</sup></p>	
A.2. Botahtaung Pagoda, Yangon. Visited 31 August 2015.	<p>The pagoda was bombed in 1943 and was subsequently rebuilt (1948–1953). 700 relics were retrieved from the site.<sup>762</sup> A sacred hair relic is enshrined at the centre, surrounded by showcases within the walls of the octagonal pagoda. The displays are protected by steel gates which remain closed.</p>	<p>Showcases display mainly gifts given after the rebuilding. Buddha images, silver wishing trees, stupas and reliquaries, clay sealings, offering bowls, betel boxes. A separate museum building had remained closed for renovation to be funded by proceeds from renting space for market stalls.</p> <p>A text panel in an adjacent hall details the history of the return of the 'Royal Palace Buddha', a Five Metal Buddha image cast by King Mindon in 1859, which was taken to Britain after 1885. It was exhibited at the V&amp;A Museum until it was returned in 1951. It was installed in its current shrine in 1981.</p>	

<sup>761</sup> Justin Thomas McDaniel, *Architects of Buddhist Leisure: Socially Disengaged Buddhism in Asia's Museums, Monuments and Amusement Parks* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017), 136, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/49883>.

<sup>762</sup> Donald Martin Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma. Myth and Folklore in an Evolving Spiritual Realm* (Bangkok: River Books, 2011), 114.

<p>A.3. Alein Nga Sint Pagoda, Minthama, Yangon. Visited 13 February 2016.</p>	<p>Alein Nga Sint Pagoda Museum. Built in 1954 by Maha Saywingaba Sayadaw (U Thuriya) a Kayin monk.</p>	<p>The low wooden building houses a collection in a large room that is oriented towards a shrine with potent Buddha images set up behind glass. Visitors say prayers and make offerings seated at a low altar with donation boxes in front of the display. The bright green walls of the room are lined with small teak showcases labelled 'many ancient things'. Donations include two portrait paintings of Kayin figures.</p>	
<p>A.4. Kyantha Gyi Pagoda, Mandalay. Visited 24 August 2015.</p>	<p>i. Aung Theikdi Gandhakuti Building is dated 1987. The caretaker is a painter who works at his desk and sells paintings at one corner of the room.</p>	<p>The building displays donations from Dr. U Thein Aung and Daw Mya Mya Than. These comprise Buddha images and silver reliquaries arranged on tiered plinths stacked within a long wall case around three sides of the building. The centre of the display is arranged as a shrine with a low plinth outside the case that allows for prayers and offerings to be made.</p> <p>DOA assisted with the re-installation of displays and captions in 2012.</p>	
	<p>ii. Southern entrance signboard: Wish Fulfilling Buddha, Pagoda Trustee Office. A Building plaque is dated 1973. An old pya-that is still in situ outside.</p>	<p>The museum is situated within the trustee's office. A lengthy wall case with donations of mainly Buddha images ranges either side of a shrine. The collection includes Chinese Laughing Buddha images (U Ti Buo), vinyl records, lacquer, Chinese porcelain vases, hanging glass balls, plaster chinthe figures, Bo Bo Aung and Bo Ming Gaung images, Scottish transferware bowls, nail clippers from a famous monk. The shrine houses a wish fulfilling Buddha and is where donation ceremonies are conducted.</p>	




<p>A.5. Kyantha Ya Pagoda, Mandalay. Visited 24 August, 2015.</p>	<p>i. Mingala Eh Pya-daik or Auspicious Reception Museum, next to donation office at main entrance.</p>	<p>Large teak showcases line the walls, one dated to 1962, another with broken glass. These house mainly Buddha images on tall tiered plinths, arranged either side of a large crowned marble image on pedestal. Other images include: plaster Alodawpyi Buddha images, Chinese Guanyin images and a miniature replica of the Sarnath style Teaching Buddha. Adjacent cases include: old hti-daw, Japanese porcelain, glass monks' bowls, ruby-encrusted stupa, colonial glass lamps, fans, lacquerware, unusual natural objects and clay tablets donated by Kyanthaya Nayaka Mingala Kyaung Sayadaw whose plaster effigy is enshrined in the main hall. Space is also used to store furniture, electrical equipment, carpets etc.</p>	
	<p>ii. Swe-daw Pya-daik or Tooth Relic Museum, is surrounded by a group of shrines to the 28 Buddhas in similar architectural style and dated to 1307 ME, or 1945.</p>	<p>A dimly lit interior reveals a large teak showcase constructed in octagonal formation around a tooth relic display at the centre. It is a replica of the Kandy tooth relic. There are mainly Buddha images including examples from India, China, Tibet and Japan, groups of seashells, peacock feathers and miniature silver trees. Light bulbs are placed along the shelves to illuminate the displays. Outside the showcases are carved figures of monks and a large Sawfish beak. This building is kept locked but was opened on request.</p>	
	<p>iii. Dat-daw Pya-daik or Relic Museum, dated 1314 ME or 1952. While the newly painted exterior is painted in pastel hues, the interior is noticeably more colourful with pastel green walls, vivid green structural beams and red trim to the showcase. A patch of original encaustic floor tiles with European bouquet motifs has also been preserved.</p>	<p>A large teak wall case houses a shrine at the centre with a crowned Buddha on a pedestal, flanked by displays of sacred objects including numerous brass Buddha images, glass images, relics in reliquaries, palm leaf manuscripts, lacquer offering vessels, sheet silver model stupas, and a framed illustrated print of the Temple of the Tooth and its patrons in Kandy, Sri Lanka.</p> <p>The display was renovated in 2011.</p>	




<p>A.6. Kyaukdaw Gyi Pagoda, Mindhamma Hill, Yangon. Visited 4 February, 2016.</p>	<p>Lokachantha Abhya Labamuni Pagoda Archive and Museum is a two-storey building within the grounds of the pagoda.</p>	<p>The display includes a model of the pagoda and its landscape, surrounded by photographs that document the journey of the largest marble Buddha in Myanmar, brought by river from the Sagyin Hills north of Mandalay to Yangon in 2000.</p> <p>Displays were set up by Daw Nu Mra Zan.</p>	
<p>A.7. Kyauktaw Mahamuni Pagoda, Kyauktaw Township, Mrauk-U. Visited 8 January, 2016.</p>	<p>Kyauktaw Mahamuni Pagoda Museum.</p> <p>Assistance was received from the DOA to establish the museum within this walled site, the home of the Mahamuni Buddha and most revered temple in Rakhine State.</p>	<p>The collection includes sandstone sculptures, local earthenware and trade ceramics. Remains of larger images are also kept on the main platform and in small shrine rooms around the base of the pagoda platform. They were found in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and are thought to date to the late 5<sup>th</sup> century on the basis of an inscription on the reverse of one that is similar to northern Gupta script.<sup>763</sup></p>	
<p>A.8. Mahamuni Pagoda, Mandalay. Visited 24 August, 2015.</p>	<p>There are six main areas that display objects. Renovations with assistance from Daw Nu Mra Zan were carried out in 2017 and opened 22 April 2018</p> <p>i. Bronze Figures Showroom</p>	<p>Ancient things reside outside of the museum as well, notably the Mahamuni Buddha that is believed to have been cast during the Buddha's lifetime in Rakhine State where it resided at the Kyautaw Mahamuni Pagoda.</p> <p>A group of four Khmer bronze images include a male guardian figure, two kneeling lions (one with head separated), and the three-headed elephant. These were brought back from Arakan by King Bodawpaya in 1784. Pilgrims constantly visit the open-sided pavilion to pray and touch the images in the search for cures for ailments and good fortune. These objects were re-displayed with assistance from Daw Nu Mra Zan. On 22 April 2018 four newly refurbished showrooms were opened including one titled: 'Bronze Statues Museum'.<sup>764</sup></p>	




<sup>763</sup> Pamela Gutman, "Ancient Arakan: With Special Reference to Its Cultural History between the 5th and 11th Centuries." (Ph.D, Australian National University, 1976), 190, 201, <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/47122>.




<sup>764</sup> Daw Nu Mra Zan, personal communication, 25 April 2018.






	<p>ii. Maha Buddhavamsa Museum of World Buddhism. Built in the early 1990s.</p>	<p>Cosmological diorama surrounded by a mezzanine floor that overlooks this scene. Displays on this upper floor comprise mainly photographs of Buddhist sites around the world. Downstairs plaster reproductions of famous Buddha images are displayed in showcases with integrated donation boxes for cash to be inserted.</p>	
	<p>iii. Bronze Bell Showroom.</p>	<p>A monumental flat gong is held up by two gilded figures. The date 1969 is modelled in relief on the jacket of one of the figures. Framed paintings document the scenes of the casting in the years running up to this. An iron fence surrounds the figures, but where their feet protrude beneath, the toes have been worn smooth by constant touching.</p>	
	<p>iv. Untitled room, newly renovated in 2015.</p>	<p>New showroom with a large wall case that displays old teak and glass showcases. These appear to have been gathered from other areas of the pagoda, intact with the gifts that were originally displayed within them, including a large quantity of silver reliquaries, alms bowls and model stupas.</p>	




	<p>v. Damasekya Da-hma (2) Museum.</p>	<p>Displays are arranged either side of a dioramic presentation of seated Buddha wrapped in gold robes surrounded by disciples against a painted backdrop of mountains. The displays include: gilded Buddha images and clay tablets, large quantities of lacquer offering vessels and betel boxes arranged on a four-tiered plinth wrapped with red velvet. They are effectively on open display protected by bright blue-painted iron grills. An old hti-daw set to one side is surrounded by donations of money. A separate showcase houses a single Buddha image which pilgrims kneel in front of to pay homage.</p> <p>These displays were renovated with assistance from Daw Nu Mra Zan. On 22 April 2018 four newly refurbished showrooms were opened. The neatly arranged objects within custom-made showcases, are similar to those at the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum, and now contrast starkly with the displays first viewed in 2015.</p>	
	<p>vi. Dhammathala established 1970.</p>	<p>This monumental hall with high ceiling houses a large collection of oil paintings of historical and religious scenes. The heavy gilt frames and height at which they are hung (well above eye level) requires a lengthy circumambulation around the gallery, guided by a pathway demarcated by lines painted onto the concrete floor.</p>	
<p>A.9. Maygawady Sayadaw Memorial Museum, Yangon, visited 4 February 2016</p>	<p>Maygawady Sayadaw's house was built in the 1980s. It was converted into a museum after he passed away around 2013.</p> <p>The displays of gifts and personal possessions were arranged by Daw Nu Mra Zan.</p>	<p>The front room displays photos of Sayadaw with gifts laid out below and a mat for paying respects. Displays in small glass showcases in the front room and bedroom include jade bangles and stones that the sayadaw would bless and give to his visitors and gifts that were given to him including electric toothbrush sets, clocks, and telephones, medicines and biscuit tins containing tobacco. A large clock stopped working when he died. Also walking sticks, an electric standing fan, and crockery for daily meals. A long case displays a lacquer headrest, silver ritual pouring vessels, Thai 'gold-washed' porcelain possibly given by Thai worshippers. A tin trunk contains new monk's robes still in plastic wrappers. His bed, robes and reclining chair also remain in the bed room.</p>	

<p>A.10. Phaung Daw Oo Pagoda, Namhu Village, Inle Lake, Southern Shan State. Visited 12 January, 14 August 2016</p>	<p>i. Yadana San Kyaung Mawgun Kyauk-sa Daik or Treasure Staging Place and Stone Inscription Building. Donated by Aw-wada-sariya Pāṭimokkha Dhammazedī Association, Yangon. Established: 2016.</p> <p>ii. Main hall of temple has a group of showcases.</p>	<p>i. Houses a four-faced marble inscription, eventually surrounded by open storage display of old objects from existing storage room including gilded shrines, money chest, palanquins and gilded wooden 'palin' or thrones for the Phaung Daw Oo Buddha images to reside in temporarily during cleaning rituals prior to the festival.</p> <p>ii. Main hall displays include donations of cash, watches, jewellery, etc. Historical photographs, paintings.</p>	
<p>A.11. Sakya Man Aung Pagoda, Mrauk-U, visited 9 January 2016</p>	<p>Modern site inscription dates the stone stupa to A.D.1629. The monastery building is signposted: 'Maha Pounya Wuduna Pe Kyaungdaw' or Great Meritorious Manuscript Monastery.</p>	<p>To one side of the compound is a modern 2-storey building with a display on the upper floor of a collection of bronze Buddha images, ancient coins, glazed ceramics of Chinese and Myanmar origins and newer objects such as the gem-encrusted stupa seen at the Inner Museum at Yadana Man Aung Pagoda. A large bronze Buddha image in a teak shrine was donated in October 2000, while printed captions and donor credits dated to 2009 suggest the displays were updated more recently.</p>	
<p>A.12. Shwebonpwint Pagoda Library and Museum, Pyay. Visited 16 August, 2015</p>	<p>Set up after 1948 the museum is now run by by Sri Ksetra Heritage Trust set up in 2014. It was renovated in October 2013 with assistance from DOA's Fieldschool staff in Pyay.</p>	<p>i. Several cabinets with Pyu period Buddha images, earthenware bricks, clay sealings, beads, earplugs, and deposits made by G.H.Luce, palm leaf manuscripts, lacquerware, clay pipes, colonial period utensils. Open display of canon, wood carvings.</p> <p>ii. Cabinets and palm leaf manuscript collection in storage.</p>	




<p>A.13. Shwedagon Pagoda, Yangon. Visited 14, 29, 30 August, 2 September, 31 December 2015; 2, 5, 8–10, 15 February, 6, 18–19 August 2016; 22–23 September 2017</p>	<p>i. Shwedagon Pagoda Museum, opened 1992 as Shwedagon Pagoda Museum, Scripture Library and Archive. Renamed 'Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum' in 2016 with assistance from Daw Nu Mra Zan.</p>	<p>The Advanced Renovation Work Plan identified a total of 2,590 objects in the collection. The displays were re-curated in 2016 and exhibited across all three floors of the building according to themes and object types as follows: 2<sup>nd</sup> floor – sacred objects from the stupa including gold robe plaques, diamond bud and vane, bells; Buddha images and model stupas in various materials; 1<sup>st</sup> floor – Buddha footprints; titles and medals, devotional objects related to relics of use, foreign gifts, historical and architectural objects from the Shwedagon Pagoda; Ground floor – Myanmar traditional handicrafts.</p>	
	<p>ii. Maha Buddhavamsa Showroom, opened 1991.</p>	<p>Dioramas set into small rooms depicting scenes from Buddha's life; large murals and text panels illustrate Buddhist cosmology. Teak pillars from the southern stairway built by King Tharawaddy are kept on open display in the grounds of the hall.</p>	
	<p>iii. Photo Gallery, established 2013.</p>	<p>Photographs of the hti-daw raising ceremony of 1999 and old black and white photos by Philippe Adolphe Klier (1845–1911) and others are displayed permanently. Two large gilded Buddha images at the end of the hall dominate the view from the entrance.</p>	




<p>A.14. Shwemawdaw Pagoda, Bago. Visited 29 August, 3 September 2015.</p>	<p>Shwe Maw Daw Pagoda Museum, established 1980.  Assistance is being given by Daw Nu Mra Zan.</p>	<p>The museum is currently closed for renovation. On display within the balcony outside are wood carvings and colonial period cast-iron safe deposit boxes. Around the side is a surviving trolley on a section of track, with sign that explains this was used to transport building materials during a reconstruction in 1951-54.</p>	
<p>A.15. Shwesandaw Pagoda, Pyay. Visited 15 August, 2015.</p>	<p>Shwesandaw Pagoda Museum. The building is inscribed as a museum built in 1956. A signboard says: 'Built 1900 Colonial Era prayer hall and museum'.</p>	<p>The collection includes Buddha images, clay sealings, historical photos of floods of 1974, past trustees' portraits, and architectural wood carvings. Curious things such as a stump of sandalwood and a tree trunk in the form of a hand attract donations of kyat notes inserted through slots in the glass showcases.</p>	
<p>A.16. Shwe Taung Sar Pagoda, also known as Hpayaygi Pagoda, Dawei. Visited 16 –18 January 2016.</p>	<p>Hpayaygi Pagoda Museum, dated 2013, is situated near to the main entrance and was built during the time of the hti-daw replacement ceremony and gilding of the stupa in 2013 patronised by the Chief of Defence Services, General Min Aung Hlaing. This followed the renewal of the trustee committee in 2011 ostensibly as part of democratic reforms.</p>	<p>The stupa had been built in 1761 and the main Buddha image, later named Lawka Mun Ra Zein, had been donated by King Mindon following a request by trustees in 1874.<sup>765</sup></p> <p>The two-storey building has a large room with open displays on the ground floor. These include stone sculptures, wood carvings, and showcases with lacquerware, <i>longgyis</i> and embroidered costumes. Upstairs is another open display of Buddha images, framed photographs of local history and showcases with palm leaf manuscripts, clay sealings, amber ear plugs, old coins and currency from around the world.</p>	

<sup>765</sup> "Welcome to Dawei Payaygi" (Shwe Taung Sa Pagoda Board of Trustees, Undated).

<p>A.17. Sule Pagoda, Yangon. Visited 11–12, 29 August 2015.</p>	<p>A room in the south-west corner and adjacent showroom were opened in 1989.<sup>766</sup></p>	<p>Five large Buddha images in showcases include a bronze image of Alodapwyi Buddha donated in 2004. Photographs of Buddha images and temples from around Asia and paintings of the Sule Pagoda dated 1975 and 1989 line the walls. According to a trustee, these spaces are also used for hospitality by visiting monks but are otherwise kept locked ostensibly to prevent large numbers of devotees from resting in them.</p>	
<p>A.18. Thein Daw Gyi Pagoda, Myeik. Visited 16–18 January 2016.</p>	<p>A two-storey wooden building signposted: 'Bouda Yinje-mu Pya-daik' or Buddhist Culture Museum, sits on the south-western edge of the platform near to the trustees' office. The museum occupies the upper floor that is level with the main platform. The trustee in charge works at a desk in one corner.</p>	<p>The room is tightly packed with old teak and glass showcases filled with Buddha images, clay sealings, Thai amulets, lacquer offering vessels, Pashu-style beaded slippers, swords and weapons, model boats and ancient lead coins. A framed embroidered court costume hangs on a wall, while a set of inlaid Mother-of-Pearl shrine furnishings is in the process of being re-housed in a separate room. The library opened in 1966 on the north-eastern side of the platform and has a large collection that includes English publications on Buddhist texts and its own shrine with wish fulfilling Buddha.</p>	
<p>A.19. Thihoshin Pagoda, Pakkoku. Visited 21 August, 2015.</p>	<p>Building signposted: 'Thihoshin Pagoda Museum and Shehaung Pya-daik' or Antiquities Museum.</p>	<p>Many showcases and open displays of wood cabinets with Buddha images, bells on stands; enclosure at centre with lacquer offering vessels, drums, kerosene lamps, paintings by Maung Saw Maung of Mandalay, to the left of the entrance balcony a showcase shrine with painted plaster image of the monk U Kyi (1842–1926), opposite a shrine to the female nat Meh Sein Yo and several others. A large termite nest is allowed to grow on the porch.</p> <p>At an altar off the main hall of the temple, a medium-sized reproduction Alodawpyi Buddha has been donated by Daw Khin Swe Win and family.</p>	



<sup>766</sup> Khin Maung Nyunt, *Sule Pagoda. The Heart of Yangon* (Yangon: Sule Pagoda Trustees, 2000), 169–72.

<p>A.20. Uppatasanti Pagoda, Nay Pyi Taw. Visited 26 August, 2015</p>	<p>Uppatasanti Pagoda Museum opened in 2009. Showrooms are on the upper level of a two-storey building. Daw Nu Mra Zan arranged the displays and wrote the captions. Daw Khin Khin Than is in charge.</p>	<p>Main hall with photo-documentation of the opening of the pagoda and adjacent showcases with diplomatic gifts e.g. model Borobudur stupa from Indonesian Ambassador. Two side rooms off the hall include a Shrine Room and Sacred Relics and Buddha Images Showroom.</p>	
<p>A.21. Yadana Man Aung Temple, Nyaung Shwe, Southern Shan State. Visited 11–12 January; 25–26 February 2016, 14–16, Aug 2016; 25–30 September 2017</p>	<p>i. Signposted: 'Museum. Pya-daik'. Otherwise known as 'Apyin Pya-daik' or Outer Museum within the cloisters along the south-eastern perimeter wall. Established 1947.</p>	<p>Colonial period canon, carved and gilded standing Buddha image, painted wood sculptures including the abbot seated in his chair, figures from the biography of the buddha and local folklore, painting by Kan Lwun.</p>	
	<p>ii. Known as the Inner museum or Atwin Pya-daik, with 48 wall cabinets within the walls of the main temple. Established: 1958.</p>	<p>King MIndon's manuscripts, silver and lacquer offering vessels, relics, wood carvings, clay pipes and currency of different countries, marble elephant figurines, glass and porcelain crockery, clocks, kerosene lamps, model ethnic group figures, bamboo Intha house model, bronze bells, plastic anatomy dolls, seashells and coral, sawfish beaks, etc.</p> <p>Buddha images are kept within cabinets on the opposite wall that demarcates the innermost core of the temple.</p> <p>Historical objects within the temple include two stone reliefs from India in eastern prayer hall and royal carriage kept in the western entryway. A silver carriage for the Phaung Daw Oo Buddhas' annual procession is kept in a separate storage shed.</p>	

B. Sites with collections of 'ancient things' and replicas kept in situ, collected, stored and/or informally displayed (50)			
Place and date visited	Details of Building/s	Notes on collection and other information	Photo
B.1. Abeyadana Temple, Bagan. Visited 1 January 2016.	A cave-temple that dates to the late 11 <sup>th</sup> or early 12 <sup>th</sup> centuries. Later ink inscriptions in the entrance hall associate Kyanzittha with the temple, but there is no evidence dating to his time. Legendary origins derive from the Glass Palace Chronicle (GPC). 70 niches around the corridor once housed stone images but the few that survived were removed to the Bagan Archaeological Museum. <sup>767</sup>	A modern inscription stone describes the temple built by King Kyanzittha for his wife Abeyadana. It has a Singhalese style stupa and perforated windows which are features of the early Bagan period. It has some of the finest murals which the panel notes were cleaned with assistance from UNDP/UNESCO. Both Theravada and Mahayana subject matter can be found in the murals, while Brahmanical deities appear around the walls of the inner shrine.  Stadtner notes that the juxtaposition of Theravada jataka stories and Pali inscriptions with Mahayana imagery indicates that early Bagan received diverse influences and that such distinctions were probably not made at that time.	
B.2. Adithan Monastery, Sittwe, Rakhine State. Visited 10 January 2016.	A modern two-storey building with main hall on the first floor and a Chinese style Guanyin Temple to one side of the courtyard outside.	A small shrine to one side of the main hall is gated as a group of objects displayed along one wall is said to include an image that is around 600 years old and must be kept secured. The shrine is foregrounded by a bronze effigy of the sayadaw who is famous for his powers, which include a prayer that is to be said five times daily. His portrait and the Pali stanza hangs on the wall, whilst devotees bow and touch his feet as they receive blessings. The adjacent temple houses the image of Guanyin, Goddess of Mercy or Avalokiteśvara the bodhisattva of compassion. The Chinese Three Star Gods are displayed in a case with cash donations and written messages of wishes to be fulfilled.	
B.3. Alodawpyi Pagoda, Bagan. Visited 19 August 2015, 3 January, 21 February, 8, 11 August 2016	An early Bagan cave temple dating to the late 11 <sup>th</sup> century. A Mon ink inscription refers to 'Alopyi' or fulfilment and a renovation that was undertaken in 1194BCE. It is said to have been built by King Kyanzittha (r.1084–1113) and was the place of prayer before going to war.	As the original images had been missing for many years, 13 replicas of Buddha images from other sites were made by the DOA and installed in 1992 – nine in the outer wall niches and four around the core. The sandstone image of the Buddha seated in dharmacakra mudrā at the Bagan Archaeological Museum, has become associated with the temple through its replica which was installed in the eastern niche at this time. It has come to be known as Alodawpyi Buddha and is believed to have wish fulfilling powers. The museum is therefore part of the pilgrimage circuit around Bagan. 15 out of 19 visitors surveyed at the museum, said that the temple was on their itinerary.	




<sup>767</sup> Donald Martin Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan. Buddhist Plain of Merit*, First published 2005 (Bangkok: River Books, 2013), 186–91. The other five temples to have replica plaster images were the Kubyaukgyi and Kubyaukge at Minkaba, Kyaukgu Umin, Nagayon and Pahtothamya.



<p>B.4. Ananda Ok Kyaung, Bagan. Visited 8, 10 August 2016.</p>	<p>Also known as Ananda Temple Monastery, this site to the north of Ananda Temple, demonstrates the continuity of brick architecture and mural painting at Bagan during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. According to inscriptions in Pali and Burmese, the monastery was built during the period 1775–1785.</p>	<p>The extensive murals within were painted 1785–86 and are thought to be some of the finest of this period with a bold spontaneous painting style that includes depictions of the Buddhist cosmology within the inner sanctum, Jataka scenes around the outer walls of the sanctum and corridors, and scenes of daily life including the donor and his family.<sup>768</sup> The striking details of these scenes includes life in palaces, towns and villages; foreign traders arrive on a boat, a woman weaves cloth seated at a frame-loom. Although visible, the area surrounding the sanctum is fairly dark and the murals are challenging to photograph.</p>	
<p>B.5. Ananda Temple, Bagan. Visited 6 September 2015.</p>	<p>One of the most venerated together with the Shwezigon Pagoda at Bagan. The Ananda Temple probably dates to the late 11<sup>th</sup> or early 12<sup>th</sup> century. The equally-sized entrance halls emphasise the cruciform layout of the temple and give each of the monumental directional Buddha images within equal weight. Stadtner notes that these probably date to the 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century as Bagan period images around the main tower are normally made of brick (these are wood) and are seated.</p>	<p>At the time of visiting, the exterior was in the process of being cleaned by a team from the Archaeological Survey of India, as part of a six-year bilateral agreement.<sup>769</sup> The tower was about to be re-gilded, and many of the more than 1,500 glazed Jataka tiles around the lower section had been cleaned. The cleaned areas were pale pink in the late afternoon sun, in contrast with the old white-washed areas that had yet to be cleaned. Most of the Buddha images inside had been re-gilded and the wood and wire-mesh gates over the lower register of niches around the corridor walls had been re-painted. Lighting had also been added to the outer corridors which reduced the dramatic effect of natural light that used to stream in from the small windows above. Sections of wall murals were revealed as layers of lime wash were removed.</p>	

<sup>768</sup> Stadtner, 118–23.

<sup>769</sup> Cherry Thein, “Hidden Murals Revealed at Ananda,” *The Myanmar Times*, January 16, 2015, <https://www.mmtimes.com/national-news/12806-ananda-restoration-reveals-hidden-murals-at-bagan.html>.



<p>B.6. Atulamarazein or Pylon Chan Tha Pagoda, Sittwe, visited 10 January 2016.</p>	<p>A signboard dates the temple to 17 May 1899, one of the oldest in Sittwe.</p>	<p>The large Buddha image is a replica of one that was cast in Shwedaung near to Pyay in 1893 and shipped to Sandoway (today Thandwe) via Akyab (today Sittwe) in Rakhine State. Before it left Sittwe for its final destination in 1899, a replica was made and installed in a temple in 1910.<sup>770</sup></p> <p>Renovation work was in progress including fundraising for gold plates and a new headpiece for the main Buddha image. The old one still encrusted with semi-precious stones and glass is displayed inside the donation box at the entrance. A group of men sat polishing brass images and offering vessels with Brasso. Remnants of carved and painted wood reliefs of Buddha's life stories are mounted on the pillars.</p>	
<p>B.7. Aung Zabu Toiya Dhamma Yeiktha Kyaung (Japan Pagoda), Hmawbi Township Visited 17 Aug. 2015.</p>	<p>A large monastery and meditation retreat was founded with donations from wealthy supporters notably the Japanese businessman Mr. Katsuyuki Kumano, donor of the collection of 301 Buddha images which he gifted in 2012.<sup>771</sup></p>	<p>Displayed in a two-storey pavilion, visitors queued to enter the main prayer hall where donations of 5,000 kyats enabled them to place a gilded Buddha image on the altar. They were then ushered in groups to the upper floor where they filed around a large hall filled with gilded images in many new styles. Specific rituals are advocated for prayers to all 301 images.</p>	 <p><a href="http://englishnews.thaipbs.or.th/devotees-flock-japan-pagoda-yangon/">http://englishnews.thaipbs.or.th/devotees-flock-japan-pagoda-yangon/</a></p>
<p>B.8. Hni-tha hsin-du or Temple No. 1612.<sup>772</sup> Also known colloquially as Nayi Hpaya or 'Clock Pagoda', Bagan. Visited 19 August 2015, 17 February 2016.</p>	<p>Thought to date to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the single storey temple is situated next to Mimalaung Kyaung along the main road opposite the Bagan Archaeological Museum. Pichard noted that the site was regularly maintained in the mid-1990s.</p>	<p>As the name suggests this small temple is known for two Buddha images which are encased one within the other.</p> <p>The name 'Clock Pagoda' used by museum staff is due to the large quantities of clocks it attracts. U Wai Lwin Oo the security guard who keeps the key to the temple confirmed that they often transfer the clocks to monasteries. He estimates around 10 to 15 clocks are received per month especially during the season of robe offerings between October and November. People believe the power of the Buddha is like the endless 'tick tock' of a clock and is a symbol of hope for good things to come.<sup>773</sup></p>	

<sup>770</sup> Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 330–31.

<sup>771</sup> Thai PBS, "Devotees Flock to 'Japan Pagoda' in Yangon," October 24, 2014, <http://englishnews.thaipbs.or.th/devotees-flock-japan-pagoda-yangon/>.

<sup>772</sup> Pierre Pichard, *Inventory of Monuments at Pagan. Volume VI* (Paris: Gartmore: UNESCO; Kiscadale (Ltd.), 1996), 257.




<sup>773</sup> Daw Baby, U Wai Lwin Oo, personal communication, 18 February 2016.

<p>B.9. Dagondaing Pagoda, Twante, Delta Region. Visited 13 August 2015.</p>	<p>A new pagoda designed by Tampawaddy U Win Maung, with support from Thidagu Sayadaw, had been under construction since 2006.</p>	<p>The temple houses three unusual bronze Buddha images, that were found in May 2005 by farmer U Hla Ohn as he was digging in the ground next to his house. As other villagers nearby also found images, the site became well known and the farmer decided to retire and wear the dark brown clothing of serious lay practitioners. That he chose to keep the images at the site demonstrates the power that ancient images can have for local communities.<sup>774</sup> The ancient images with worn green patinas were placed in niches around the central tower, while shiny new bronze images in a similar style were placed around the outer walls. In the upper registers individual carved relief images had been installed. Unusual green-glazed ceramic Buddha images were placed in niches within four small stupas outside.</p>	
<p>B.10. Dhammayazika Pagoda, Bagan, 20 August 2015, 16 February 2016.</p>	<p>The solid stupa is set on an unusual pentagonal base with five shrines on each side. The form is unique to Bagan and is thought to represent the Five Buddhas of this era. An inscription housed at the eastern shrine records the site being founded by King Narapatisithu in 1196 to house relics obtained from Sri Lanka.<sup>775</sup></p>	<p>The damage from graffiti and water is noticeable, yet the proliferation of posters (hung on nails in the walls) calling for donations and of freshly donated robes, flower offerings and small images of Alodawpyi and other Buddhas demonstrates an active temple. Local informants mention that the re-gilding of the stupa was done by U Khin Nyunt after his return to civilian life from his prison sentence, while an official from the DOA bemoans the challenges of working with gaw-paka who care only about gilding and not about the conservation of the site.<sup>776</sup></p>	

<sup>774</sup> Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 16.


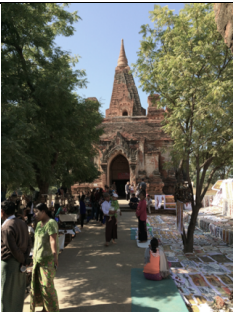
<sup>775</sup> Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 262–63.

<sup>776</sup> Anonymous informants, 16 February 2016.

<p>B.11. Ham Si Monastery, Ham Si Village, Kakku, Southern Shan State. Visited 27 February 2016.</p>	<p>The main hall appears to be recently built with a store room upstairs for two bronze figures.</p>	<p>The figures are said to have been brought back with the Khmer bronzes that reside in the Mahamuni Pagoda in Mandalay. The male and female standing figures are crudely modelled and do not have the same patina or wear as the Mahamuni bronzes. It is doubtful that they are contemporary with those. A young couple with a baby accompanied the sayadaw and us upstairs to the store room. They prayed and touched various parts of the figures as the monk explained that there are local beliefs in their power to cure illness.</p>	
<p>B.12. Htuk Kan Thein Temple, Mrauk-U, visited 9 January 2016.</p>	<p>A modern stone inscription in Myanmar: “Htuk Kan Thein Pahtodawgyi”. English: “Htuk Kan Thein Temple, King Min Phaloun A.D.1571”. The distinction pahto is made here and translated as ‘temple’.</p> <p>The name means ‘Cross-beam Ordination Hall’ makes reference to the lintel over the main doorway.</p>	<p>An unusual apsidal plan temple with extensive vaulted corridors constructed of sandstone. Lined with 179 Buddha images set into multiple arches, these are flanked by deeply carved reliefs of figures thought to be nobility who donated to build the shrine. Dress and hairstyles of the time are finely carved on these figures. Conical hats worn by male figures probably originate from the Persian <i>kulah</i> and <i>qaba</i> of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Forchhammer visited in 1885 and suggested the site may have been used as a refuge for monks during times of war.<sup>777</sup></p>	
<p>B.13. Ko Thaung Pagoda, Mrauk-U, visited 9 January 2016.</p>	<p>A modern stone sign dates Ko Thaung Pahtodawgyi as Kawza 915 and includes in English ‘Koe Thaung, King Min Taik Kha. A.D.1553’.</p> <p>The name refers to ‘90,000 images’. The shrine is the largest in Mrauk-U, built of brick with dark sandstone facing.</p>	<p>Extensive vaulted corridors have now mostly been exposed after the roof collapsed. This reveals an impressively deep network of corridors now flooded with light in what would have been a dark interior like Htuk Kan Thein and the other Mrauk-U stone temples. Multiple Buddha images seated in bhūmisparśa mudrā line the corridors and are carved in relief on the walls in multiples of 9. The upper platform has a single large stone Buddha image with octagonal brick stupa built originally to enshrine relics.<sup>778</sup></p>	




<sup>777</sup> Pamela Gutman, *Burma's Lost Kingdoms : Splendours of Arakan* (Bangkok : Orchid Press, 2001), 117–24.

<sup>778</sup> Gutman, 106–12.




<p>B.14. Kubyaukge Pagoda, Wetkyi- in, Bagan. Visited 2 January 2016.</p>	<p>Temple number 283 dated to the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>779</sup> Although not one of the original six temples to have cast plaster replicas installed during the 1990s, the site nonetheless has a number of sculpted plaster reproductions.</p>	<p>Sculpted plaster images differ from the replicas that were cast from the sandstone originals discussed in Chapter Three. They range in scale and style from images of the Buddha with bright red robes and white skin to images finished in a monochrome tone such as the pair of seated door guardians and a relief that depicts the Birth scene (right). The pair of standing door guardians flanking the entrance to the inner shrine remain white. The keeper who let me into the temple at 5pm is the spouse of a conservation staff member at the DOA who lives next to the temple. She says not many pilgrims or tourists visit yet the temple remains important to those who made donations for renovations in 2002 and 2005. She offers victory leaves each day at the altar in the main shrine.</p>	
<p>B 15. Kubyaukgyi Pagoda, Wetkyi- in, Bagan. Visited 3 January 2016.</p>	<p>A sign dates the temple to the early 13<sup>th</sup> century. The site is busy with tourists and pilgrims stopping to buy souvenirs and sand paintings. A strict no-photography protocol is adhered to. A text panel explains that the temple was looted in 1899 when Th. H. Thomann removed sections of wall murals, portions of which were bought by the Hamburg Museum in 1906.</p>	<p>The structure of this temple is the gu, with Mahabodhi-like sikara, decorated with stucco remains of dancers and seated Buddha images within horizontal registers. Despite the earlier looting, the remains of murals are still visible – the defeat of Mara provides a backdrop to the restored main image in the east-facing hall, while the side walls have Jataka scenes above which is the lineage of 28 Buddhas seated in dharmacakra mudrā; 14 on each side wall. The right (north) wall depicts the Seven Weeks following the enlightenment including the final week when he sat beneath the Rajayatana Tree.<sup>780</sup> There are four restored and freshly painted Buddha images around the inner section.</p>	

<sup>779</sup> Pierre Pichard, *Inventory of Monuments at Pagan. Volume II.* (Paris: Gartmore: UNESCO; Kiscadale (Ltd.), 1992), 40–43.

<sup>780</sup> Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 212–17.

<p>B.16. Kyaikhtiyo (Golden Rock), Mon State. Visited 3 September 2015.</p>	<p>One of three national sacred sites together with the Shwedagon Pagoda and Mahamuni Pagoda. A Mon origin myth is probably the earliest knowledge of the site and dates to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. A hti-daw was hoisted in 1823 and the popularity of the site grew in the 1870s – an image of the Golden Rock is seen in the murals at Shwe Yan Pyay Monastery in Nyaung Shwe (1880s and 90s) and at the Mahamuni Pagoda (c.1892).<sup>781</sup></p>	<p>The essence of the Mon legend speaks of the Buddha's visit to Thaton when he gave six hair relics to three hermits. Eventually three of the relics came to be interred in a rock at the request of the King of Thaton. The granite boulder sourced by Thagyamin is said to resemble the head of Tissa the hermit from Kyaikhtiyo mountain who relinquished the relics. Beliefs held today that the rock levitates may have emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. So too the astrological connections made between the site and the Shwedagon Pagoda. Variant accounts developed including local legends that remain unofficially acknowledged. A Karen account of the female nat Shwe Nan Kyin is embodied in an effigy of her corpse that is propitiated by pilgrims in its own shrine to one side of the platform. Daw Pwint's pavilion at the Shwedagon Pagoda (c.1930s) has relief murals illustrating the Karen story.</p>	
<p>B.17. Kyaikhtihsaung Pagoda and Monastery, Bilin, Mon State. Visited 4 September 2015.</p>	<p>An open-sided storage shed houses a large quantity of carved laterite architectural elements, pedestals and the remains of seated images. The pagoda and surrounding shrines are built from large laterite blocks that were mined locally.</p>	<p>A funerary event was taking place as the renowned Kyaikhtihsaung Sayadaw had passed away at the age of 87 years on 25 July 2015 (9<sup>th</sup> waxing day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> wazo, BE 1377). Having spent 43 years in the sangha, he was conferred the highest religious title in the country before he died. He had provided guidance to General Khin Nyunt when he was in power and was the main patron of Kyaikhtiyo at that time. His body was embalmed and lying in state in an air-conditioned glass viewing room situated in a large prayer hall. According to local devotees, the vigil will be kept whilst a new pavilion is built. A video documentary of Sayadaw's life in 1992, plays at one corner of the funerary display.</p>	
<p>B.18. Kyauktawgyi Monastery, Pakkoku. Visited 21 August 2015.</p>	<p>A signboard reads: 'Pakhangyi Town, Ancient area, Kyauktawgyi. Kyawza 1230, A.D.1868'.</p>	<p>This teak monastery was heavily restored with the assistance of the DOA as at Salay. Objects have been sent to the museum leaving behind only architectural carvings and well-worn duyin-gauk roof finials which sit propped up against a wall. A shrine room with a number of gilded Buddha images but few offerings appears to be seldom visited. Existing donor inscriptions dating to 1967 have been renovated with fresh cement, perhaps to encourage more interest from potential donors.</p>	




<sup>781</sup> Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 156–67.

<p>B.19. Kyundaw Zedi and Monastery, Twante, Delta Region. Visited 13 August 2015</p>	<p>A small shed with a single brick plinth is said to have been built in 2014. A signboard refers to the glazed tiles on display and warns against illicit digging.</p>	<p>Small group of earthenware tiles with little visible remains of glazing are set into a concrete plinth. Access to the tiles is limited by wire mesh and the shed itself is surrounded by tall grass.</p>	
<p>B.20. La Kaung Zee Monastery, Mrauk-U. Visited 7 January 2016.</p>	<p>A monastery building with adjacent shrine for an ancient Buddha image. They are currently raising funds for a museum to house a collection.</p>	<p>Teak cabinets line the main hall with displays of 'ancient' bronze Buddha images. The oldest is believed to be 700 years old. According to Sayadaw Baddhanta Dhammapiya, the collection was started around 1947. 'Treasure hunters' were subsequently asked to donate objects in the 1960s.</p> <p>Pamela Gutman identified two bronze Buddha images at the monastery, originally from the site of Vesali that relate stylistically to Gupta art and suggest influence from Nalanda during the 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>782</sup> They relate also to a series of stone reliefs now kept at the Kyauktaw Mahamuni Pagoda Museum.</p>	
<p>B.21. Lawkananda Pagoda, Bagan. Visited 19 August 2015, 16 February 2016.</p>	<p>Pagoda no.1023 is a bulbous stupa built on an octagonal base overlooking the Ayeyarwaddy River south-west of Thiripyitsaya Village dates to c.11<sup>th</sup> century. It is the third of the four relic stupas where King Anwrahta's white elephant deposited a tooth relic.<sup>783</sup> Children wait at the bottom of the hill to guide visitors by telling them the legend.</p>	<p>The stupa was possibly constructed in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, although two inscription stones housed under a shelter date to 1230 and 1247. A stone Buddha footprint was transferred from here to the museum by the mid-1990s.<sup>784</sup></p> <p>In February 2016, the production of Buddha images, the image of Alodwapyi Buddha in particular, was found to be taking place in the carpark at the foot of the hill. These include U Thein Zaw Lin's work, which had been documented in August 2015. Up above at the pagoda, a large stall on the platform stocked several different types of Buddha images and is a main outlet for his work.</p>	

<sup>782</sup> Gutman, *Burma's Lost Kingdoms*, Pl. 39-40.

<sup>783</sup> Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 222.

<sup>784</sup> Pierre Pichard, *Inventory of Monuments at Pagan. Volume IV* (Paris: Gartmore: UNESCO, Kiscadale (Ltd.), 1994), 253.

<p>B.22. Laung Bwun Byauk Zedi, Mrauk-U, visited 9 January 2016.</p>	<p>A stone sign uses the Burmese transcription of the Rakhine name and dates the site to Kawza 887, A.D.1525. The name means 'Coloured Tile' Pagoda. It was probably built by Min Saw Oo in 1525 and restored by Thirithudamma in 1625.<sup>785</sup></p>	<p>An octagonal sandstone stupa with perimeter wall is decorated with lead-glazed ceramic tiles applied as floral motifs. The technology that was imported from Middle Eastern traditions via India. This emerged after King Min Bin's victory in east Bengal. The glazed wares as seen at this site, included monochrome blue, green, red, white and yellow tiles made at kilns in Mrauk-U.<sup>786</sup> The Archaeological Museum displays a number of large tiles and other wares.</p>	
<p>B.23. Lawka Myintzu Hpaya Kyaungdaw, Mrauk-U, visited 9 January 2016.</p>	<p>Laterite temple and monastery with prayer hall built in 2000.</p>	<p>The main hall with showcases displays a collection said to have been started during the late 1990s. This includes Buddha images, lacquered manuscripts, international currency, old silver coins, jewellery, earthenware sherds, a Chinese Swatow dish, brassware. A plaster figure of the seated abbot flanks the entrance to the main shrine. The shrine comprises a large seated bronze Buddha inspired by ancient bronzes known as the Singhalese-type, surrounded by numerous small bronze images on an elaborately carved stone plinth.<sup>787</sup></p>	
<p>B.24. Lawka Man Aung Pagoda, Mrauk-U, visited 7 January 2016.</p>	<p>A bilingual signboard dated 2012 says: 'Long Live Buddhism. Great Image of Lawkamaung. Built and worshipped in A.D.1658. By King Sandathudammaraza and Queen Radana Piya Dewi, Mrauk-U'.</p>	<p>A sandstone stupa with directional shrines with pya-that and main prayer hall. Pamela Gutman suggests they reflect growing wealth during the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century and some influence perhaps from Mon architecture of Pegu (Bago) and Dagon (Yangon) at this time.<sup>788</sup></p>	





<sup>785</sup> Gutman, *Burma's Lost Kingdoms*, 129–30.

<sup>786</sup> Gutman, 162.




<sup>787</sup> Many small bronzes were observed in monastery collections that appeared to be more recent reproductions inspired by these earlier Singhalese-type images, thought to date to the 13<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Catherine Raymond, "Religious and Scholarly Exchanges between the Singhalese Sangha and the Arakanese and Burmese Theravadin Communities: Historical Documentation and Physical Evidence.," in *Commerce and Culture in the Bay of Bengal, 1500 - 1800*. (New Delhi: Manohar, Indian Council of Historical Research, 1999), 87–114.

<sup>788</sup> Gutman, *Burma's Lost Kingdoms*, 133.




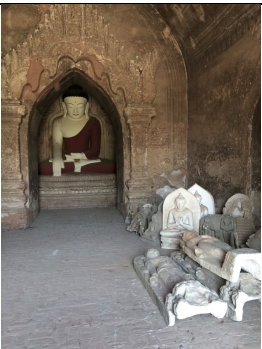
<p>B.25. Lo-ya Pyezou Yan-myo-lo Hpaya, Strand Road, Mandalay. Visited 24 August 2015.</p>	<p>This new concrete and glass pagoda opened in 2008.</p>	<p>A display of photographs documents the recent emergence of the pagoda which was built to house a group of five Buddha images that ‘appeared’ from the river. Two large and three small marble images in Mandalay style were retrieved from the river on 27 May 2008 and are known as pawdaw-mu (‘appeared’) Buddhas.</p>	
<p>B.26. Mahakyan Monastery, Mrauk-U, visited 7 January 2016.</p>	<p>Monastery building with signboard that dates the main Buddha image to A.D.1592.</p>	<p>Shrine within the main building houses the Mahakyan Buddha, believed to have been cast from the same alloy as the Mahamuni Buddha. Posters hung around the shrine illustrate the other Mahakyan Buddha images elsewhere in the country. An image at the Mrauk-U Archaeological Museum is also said to be a Mahakyan Buddha (C.6).</p>	
<p>B.27. Maha Wizaya Pagoda, Yangon. Visited 7 February 2016.</p>	<p>A hollow type of stupa built in 1980 by General Ne Win to house the Buddha’s relics that were gifted by the King of Nepal.</p>	<p>Large showcases within the outer walls display many styles of Buddha images set within dioramic landscapes that represent different regions of the country. The images do not necessarily reflect regional styles but emphasise a homogeneity that can be found across the country. Renowned images such as the Alodwapyi Buddha from Bagan appear simultaneously in different sections of the displays, in the same way that they travel in real life as gifts carried by pilgrims between one region and another.</p>	
<p>B.28. Manuha Pagoda, Bagan. Visited 19 February 2016.</p>	<p>A cement inscription stone in English assigns the pagoda to the Mon King Manuha and dates the temple to A.D. 1059.</p>	<p>In addition to three monumental seated Buddha images and a reclining image, the main hall houses a large gilded offering bowl said to be able to contain 40 baskets of rice. Sacks of rice are still stacked up around it today. The GPC assigns the largest seated image to Manuha who had been captured by King Anawrahta (r.1044–1077). Stadtner suggests this was probably incorporated later into ‘national mythology’ and that the temple may date to the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>789</sup></p>	

<sup>789</sup> Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 174.

<p>B.29. Maung Di Pagoda, Kaw Mu, Twante, Delta Region. Visited 13 August 2015.</p>	<p>A half-timber storage shed that is similar in style to the Pagan Museum of 1904 is situated to one side of the main path to the stupa. It has been in use 80 to 100 years according to a resident monk.</p>	<p>The shed houses several low brick plinths on which are placed earthenware tablets and larger plaques, as well as carved stone Buddha images at least one of which is reminiscent of Bagan-style images. The DOA stepped in to assist with renovations after damage was suffered by the Nargis storm of 2008.</p>	
<p>B.30. Minkaba Kubyaukgyi Pagoda, Bagan. Visited 1 January 2016.</p>	<p>Two stone inscriptions were found in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, one near to the Myazedi stupa nearby is now in the museum, the other is now installed at the Myazedi Pagoda. Both are inscribed in four languages (Pyu, Pali, Mon and Burmese). They mention the donation of Kubyaukgyi in AD 1112. The site has extensive stucco work and the earliest murals.</p>	<p>One of six temples that had plaster replicas of their original sandstone images installed around 1992 by the DOA. The others were the Nagayon, Abeyadana, Myinkaba Kubyaukngye, Pahtothamya and Kyaukgu Umin. There are 28 niches situated around the sanctum and corridor walls for the pantheon of 28 Buddhas above which were painted the trees associated with each. Their arrangement clockwise around the sanctum was probably similar to that of the Nagayon Temple. The images are seated in bhūmisparśa mudrā, a couple in dharmacakra mudrā and all highly painted. Two are missing and two do not appear to fit neatly into the niches.<sup>790</sup></p>	
<p>B.31. Mwaydaw, Kakku, Taunggyi district, Visited 27 February 2016.</p>	<p>A complex of over 2,000 stupas east of Inle Lake and important ritual centre for the Pa-O community. The lively stucco modelling of figures of devas and nats on the stupas appear to date perhaps to the Nyaung Yan period, c.17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century, although many are restored and local beliefs are that the site is more ancient.</p>	<p>Renovations were undertaken in the early 2000s under Khin Nyunt's patronage, while Venerable Shifa Zao or Shwe Kyaung Sayadaw as he is also known, also made donations for a major renovation in 2000. This included the installation of a replica of the Kandy tooth relic. According to a local writer, the presence of three large beehives in one of the old banyan trees on the site before this time was interpreted as a prediction that many pilgrims would soon arrive at the site.<sup>791</sup></p>	




<sup>790</sup> Stadtner, 162–73.

<sup>791</sup> U Taw Aung Myat, personal communication, 27 February 2016.

<p>B.32. Nagayon Temple, Bagan. Visited 2 January, 22 February 2016.</p>	<p>Situated south of Minkaba Village, near to the Abeyadana Temple, the Nagayon Temple is thought to date to the 11<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> century. The GPC speaks of the site as the place where King Kyanzittha slept while protected by a naga, although its name and the large standing Buddha in the main shrine protected by the naga, are probably later attributions.<sup>792</sup></p>	<p>Thick brick walls and glazed sandstone and brick floors keep the interior dark and cool. Plaster replicas of the original sandstone images were installed by the DOA sometime in the early 1990s. These reside in the entrance hall with the group known as the ‘28 Buddhas’ placed in corridor niches in biographical sequence that unfolds clockwise. There are gaps in the sequence where Buddha images are apparently missing and additional images placed in niches that do not have a clear connection to the rest of the group.<sup>793</sup> At least two groups of numbering (in black and white paint) are visible below the niches, although neither of these appeared to run consistently through the whole programme of niches. The complexity of the iconographic programme becomes fully apparent at the site where the encounter with the replicas is revealed one at a time by torchlight and bears little resemblance to the simplified layout of the display at the Bagan Archaeological Museum.</p>	
<p>B.33. Nwa-pya-gu Pagoda, Bagan. Visited 2 January 2016.</p>	<p>A modern inscription stone dates the site to 13<sup>th</sup> century and identifies it as the work of Nwa Mya Thinkhaya.</p>	<p>The temple entryway was closed off with an iron gate probably due to the fact that it was being used to store additional replica images including lokapala door guardians and the seated Buddha from the museum. The former were notably present at the entrances to the shrines at the Dhammayazika Temple, finished with a coat of brown paint and somewhat obscured by donation boxes.</p>	




<sup>792</sup> Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 180.

<sup>793</sup> Stadtner, 182–83.

<p>B.34. Pahtotamya Pagoda, Bagan. Visited 4 January 2016.</p>	<p>Temple number 1605 is thought to date to late 11<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>794</sup></p>	<p>The main brick and plaster image unusually flanked by two smaller images, appears to have been restored and freshly painted while a small stone image of Buddha seated in bhūmisparśa mudrā sits in a niche opposite the main altar. Remains of gilding are visible on the chest and some shiny touch-spots. This is one of the few original images that remained in situ while others were transferred to the Bagan Archaeological Museum.<sup>795</sup></p>	
<p>B.35. Shan State Buddhist University, Taunggyi, Southern Shan State. Visited 13 August 2016.</p>	<p>The university complex opened in 2016.</p>	<p>The first Buddhist University in Shan State. Founded by Venerable Dr. Dhammasami also known as Oxford Sayadaw, after receiving his Ph.D at Oxford University in 2004. Building works are still in progress with a growing collection of palm leaf manuscripts and a library of publications from Myanmar and around the world. A new pavilion was underway with a woven bamboo image (hman hpaya) in the early stages of being constructed.</p>	
<p>B.36. Shinpin Sarjouxhla Pagoda, Salay. Visited 20 August 2015.</p>	<p>A signboard dates the pagoda to AD 1191, although this probably refers to the shrines at the rear of the temple. The temple itself has many old wooden roof structures and colonnaded walkways.</p>	<p>Extensive wall murals and modelled stucco dioramas along main entryway appear to be late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The entrance corridor has impressive paintings on tin sheets probably dating to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and in need of conservation. Shrines to the rear of the temple are kept locked due to their being much older, perhaps dating to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Inside are extensive wall murals. Stone inscriptions and pair of large lacquered wood figures of crowned bodhisattvas are kept in the main temple.</p> <p>Met a large family camping in a pavilion outside the main entrance who were displaced from their riverbank home due to recent floods.</p>	

<sup>794</sup> Pichard, *Inventory of Monuments at Pagan. Volume VI*, 244–48.




<sup>795</sup> U Aung Kyaing, personal communication, 31 January 2016. Stadtnr, *Ancient Pagan*, 135–36.

<p>B.37. Shitthaung Temple, Mrauk-U, visited 9 January 2016.</p>	<p>The stone sign reads: 'Shitthaung Temple, King Min Ba Gyi, A.D.1535'. The name refers to '80,000 images'. The site commemorates King Min Bin's conquest of Bengal and has features similar to 16<sup>th</sup> century mosque architecture at its capital at Gaur.<sup>796</sup></p>	<p>One of the largest of the dark sandstone temples in Mrauk-U. A vaulted passage around the main image hall has stone images of the 28 Buddhas. The famous 6<sup>th</sup> century Anandachandra Inscription housed separately within the grounds, records the lineage of 22 kings from the late 4<sup>th</sup> century onwards when the Dhanyawadi kingdom was founded.<sup>797</sup></p>	
<p>B.38. Shwe Gyi Myin Pagoda, Mandalay. Visited 24 August, 2015.</p>	<p>The pagoda was revived in 1889 following the destruction of the palace in 1885. A stone inscription at the site records that the British instructed the removal of over 40 images from the palace, which the Kinwun Mingyi and Taungdaw Sayadaw undertook.<sup>798</sup></p>	<p>The Youksoun Dhammayon is an ornate shrine on the eastern side of the pagoda where the large number of images are housed behind glass. The walls are covered in gilded wood carvings and the atmosphere is quietly reverential as men and women sit in meditation on either side of a barrier.</p> <p>In contrast, a pavilion in the grounds of the pagoda houses colourful dioramas and a carriage said to have been used to convey the images from Mandalay Palace. Paintings by Maung Saw Maung line the walls of the eastern entryway.</p>	
<p>B.39. Shwe Indein Pagoda, western area of Inle Lake, visited 12 January 2016.</p>	<p>A large sign board informs visitors that this complex of stupas was inventorised in 1999 and that there are 1054 stupas at this site that date from the 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century. It states that the DOA works with local authorities and pagoda trustees to look after the site.</p>	<p>Stupas continued to be built in recent times with the old being eclipsed by the new. According to a site information panel the main stupa was originally much smaller and is encased within the present stupa, which was donated by King Siri Dhamma Sawka (273–232 BC). However, in 2012 the DOA instituted regulations against building any new stupas. A sign at stupa no. 863 records that renovation was undertaken in 2011–2012 by Daw Nang Lao Ngin, Director of the National Museum together with her staff.</p>	

<sup>796</sup> Gutman, *Burma's Lost Kingdoms*, 95.




<sup>797</sup> Gutman, 5, 8.

<sup>798</sup> Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma*, 290–91.

<p>B.40. Shwe Kyaung Oo Pagoda, Bagan. Visited 10 August 2016.</p>	<p>Temple number 2007, is situated in the north-east of Bagan in a walled monastery west of Taungbi. It dates to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>799</sup></p>	<p>The main entrance and front porch of the temple are taken up by villagers who have escaped from flooded riverside areas. The interior has extensive late 18<sup>th</sup> century murals depicting Jataka stories. Although there are significant losses the dominant colours of red, green, blue, black and brown are still visible. The use of varied background colours for the different scenes of a story – the ‘extended narrative mode’ – is an innovation of this time discussed by Alexandra Green.<sup>800</sup></p>	
<p>B.41. Shwe Myat Hman or Golden Spectacles Pagoda, Shwedaung, south of Pyay.. Visited 17 August, 2015.</p>	<p>Built by King Duttabaung, 16<sup>th</sup> century. The original stupa is set unusually into the eastern wall of the temple.</p>	<p>Two showcases display the prototype gilded spectacles for the enlarged version made for the main seated Buddha image; also Buddha images and spectacles donated in more recent times. Murals document the story of the pagoda and various donors of gold spectacles, the first being King Duttabaung who was blinded by supernatural lights but regained his sight after donating the first pair. A subsequent pair were enshrined at the temple for security. A third donor of spectacles was the colonial governor of Shwedaung Mr. Hartman and his wife.</p>	
<p>B.42. Shwe Yan Pyay Pagoda and Monastery, Nyaung Shwe, Southern Shan State. 11 January, 26 February 2016.</p>	<p>The pagoda was built by sawbwa Sao On in 1888. The teak monastery was built in 1890 on the northern approach to Nyaung Shwe where the sawbwa first met the British in 1887.</p>	<p>The pagoda is described as ‘fortified’ as it is surrounded by walls within which are installed 700 alabaster Buddha images within niches and extensive glass mosaic murals depicting Jataka stories and figures of British soldiers. Wood cabinets and shrines, Buddha images, lacquer offering vessels, palm leaf manuscripts. Architectural wood carvings from the temple are also housed at the Inner Museum at Yadana Man Aung Temple.</p>	

<sup>799</sup> Pierre Pichard, *Inventory of Monuments at Pagan. Volume VII* (Paris: Gartmore: UNESCO, Kiscadale (Ltd.), 1999), 339.




<sup>800</sup> Alexandra Green, “Narrative Modes in Late Seventeenth to Early Nineteenth-Century Wall Paintings,” in *Burma: Art and Archaeology* (London: British Burma Press, 2002), 71–72. See also Khine Pyay Sone and Heidi Tan, “Cultural Landscapes of Later Myanmar,” in *Cities and Kings. Ancient Treasures from Myanmar* (Singapore: Asian Civilisations Museum, 2016), 64–65.

<p>B.43. Shwezigon Pagoda, Bagan. Visited 21 August 2015.</p>	<p>Pagoda number 1 is situated in Nyaung U. It dates possibly to the last quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>801</sup> The first of the four relic stupas where pilgrims begin their journey of the sacred landscape of Bagan. The GPC also attributes the stupa's first three terraces to Anawrahta (1044–1077) and its dome to Kyanzittha (1084–1112).<sup>802</sup></p>	<p>A display area in the south-eastern section exhibits a rare carved doorway from the northern entrance retrieved in 1922, life-sized figures of Thagyamin and other nats, and historical photographs of earthquake damage in 1975. There are many 'ancient things' at this site including a bell donated by King Bayinnaung (1551–1581) in 1557 inscribed with Mon, Pali and Burmese. An inscription by King Hsinbyushin (r.1736–1776) dated 1768 records Kyanzittha's donation of a hti.</p>	
<p>B.44. Sithushin Pagoda, Pakhangyi, 21 August 2015.</p>	<p>A highly restored temple with freshly painted green walls. A carved sandstone base with zoomorphic supports around the inner sanctum is an indication of ancient foundations. According to caretakers, the stupa was originally encased and only discovered about 10 years ago.</p>	<p>Three powerful Buddha images are taken out of safes each day for display. The eldest known as Naungdawgyi Buddha was found upriver on an island known as Nyathi-natdaw. The tiny image is carved from sandalwood, crowned and dressed in gold-sheet clothing studded with jewels. It is mounted on a stand adorned with rings and placed within a glass shrine behind a magnified pane. The keeper regularly takes the image out to bless pilgrims by placing it on the crown of their heads.</p>	
<p>B.45. Than Moke Shwegugyi Pagoda, Kaukse, Sagaing. Visited 22–24 August 2015.</p>	<p>An archaeological and restoration project that began in 1993, with permission from the DOA in 2008 to further excavate the site. The site is one of the 11 <i>khayaing</i> or rice granaries related to the tradition of Shwe-gu or 'golden caves' established by King Anawrahta (1044–1077) to supply Bagan.</p>	<p>The two-storey temple was encased within a stupa during the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century. Many objects have been retrieved during the project and collected together for display in an adjacent pavilion. These include stone carvings, ceramic water vessels, clay sealings or votive tablets, relics and Buddha images, a large stone head and smaller precious objects kept safely such as a small stela of the Andagu type that was taken out of a Tupperware box to show us. A laminated photograph of this piece was on sale with books and souvenirs. A display of photographs documents the discovery of the site.<sup>803</sup></p>	

<sup>801</sup> Pierre Pichard, *Inventory of Monuments at Pagan. Volume I.* (Paris: Garmore: UNESCO, Kiscadale (Ltd), 1992), 66.



<sup>802</sup> Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 218.

<sup>803</sup> Elizabeth Howard Moore, (Tampawaddy) Win Maung, and Win Htwe Htwe, "Ta Mok Shwe-Gu-Gyi Temple: Local Art in Upper Myanmar 11–17th Century AD," in *Connecting Empires and States: Selected Papers from the 13th International Conference of the European Association of Southeast Asian Archaeologists, Volume 2*, ed. Domink Bönatz et al., vol. 2 (National University of Singapore Press, 2012), 144–60, <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/14639/>.

<p>B.46. Thaung Hmu Kan Kyaung, Kyaing Tong, Eastern Shan State. Visited 15 January 2016.</p>	<p>A sign notes that the monastery was built in 1968. The site seemed busy in the early evening as people gathered to take tea and snack at a stall selling roti around the entrance gate to the compound.</p>	<p>This was one of the few places where a photograph was found of the saopha's palace that had been demolished in 1991 to make way for the New Kyaing Tong Hotel. The prominent display of the photograph on a pillar in front of the main altar, is reminiscent of the inclusion of images of the sawbwa Sao Maung at Yadana Man Aung Temple in Nyaung Shwe.</p>	
<p>B.47. Thudamma Kyaung, Mandalay. Visited 23 August, 2015.</p>	<p>A restored teak monastery building in the area around the base of Mandalay Hill.</p>	<p>A separate room houses life-like plaster images of famous abbots displayed behind large cases that line the walls. The figures sit cross-legged on large thrones surmounted by umbrellas. A small dark room further along the platform has a display of contemporary watercolours and oil paintings mounted on stands. English and Myanmar captions indicate that a number depict moments in the life of Maung Thant who became Shwegyin Sayadaw e.g. reading from palm-leaf manuscripts, living in retreat in quiet places, paying homage at the Buddha's Tooth Relic Temple in Sri Lanka etc. Along the balcony en route from the main hall is a display of photographs which document the daily life of young monks.</p>	
<p>B.48. Wat In, Kyaing Tong, Eastern Shan State. Visited 14 January 2016.</p>	<p>Although signs point to renovations undertaken in 2000, there is no information available about the site.</p>	<p>The main hall or <i>kyawng</i> at Wat In is extensively decorated with gold stencilled patterns against a dark red ground, whilst the main shrine is dominated by a single large Buddha image, behind which are clusters of smaller images arranged in stacked rows. Kyaing Tong was part of the Lan Na kingdom by the 13<sup>th</sup> century and subject to exchanges of cultural influence with Chiang Mai. Tai Yuan Buddhist traditions distinguished this region from other Shan communities who were more easily influenced by Burmese Theravada Buddhism. Jataka stories in the form of commercial prints and a cloth painting observed in this hall, reflect the historical importance of ritual recitations that were undertaken at these temples in Kyaing Tong.<sup>804</sup></p>	




<sup>804</sup> Conan Cheong, "The Art of Shan State" (Singapore: Asian Civilisations Museum, 2016), 74–86.






<p>B.49. Wat Jong Kam, Kyaing Tong, Eastern Shan State. Visited 14 January 2016.</p>	<p>A modern inscription stone in Shan and English in the adjacent Nagamry Garden tells the origin myth of the site of Wat Zom Kham (Sh). It is believed that it was built after the Buddha visited and gave hair relics to two dragon sisters. These were later given to a hermit who built the pagoda in 157 BC overlooking Damila Lake and enshrined them there.</p>	<p>This seven-tiered stupa with multiple Buddha images in niches sits at the top of the hill north-east of Naung Tung Lake. The main hall has a single shrine with multiple gilded Buddha images surmounted by elaborately carved panels and gold stencil work along the walls and across the high ceiling with inscriptions dated to 1978. The tall mirror-work pillars bring added reflected light into the cavernous hall, much like at Yadana Man Aung Temple in Nyaung Shwe. A framed photograph of the temple's diamond bud is dated to 1989. Framed photographs of the visit of the Thai Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn are dated 3 March 1994.</p>	
<p>B.50. Webu Monastery, Ingyinbin, near Kaukse. Visited 23 August 2015.</p>	<p>San Kyaung Building. According to the Third Webu Sayadaw, the building is a living quarter for monks.</p>	<p>An elaborate shrine to the rear of the main hall includes life-sized plaster portrait images enshrined in teak cases surrounded by framed photographs of the First and Second Webu Sayadaws whose fame attracts foreign Buddhist practitioners for meditation retreats.</p> <p>See: <a href="http://burmadhamma.blogspot.com/2014/06/a-visit-to-webu-monastery-in-kyaukse.html">http://burmadhamma.blogspot.com/2014/06/a-visit-to-webu-monastery-in-kyaukse.html</a></p>	

C. State museums run by the DOA and supported by the Ministry of Culture (13).

Photographs: Heidi Tan courtesy of Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, unless otherwise credited.


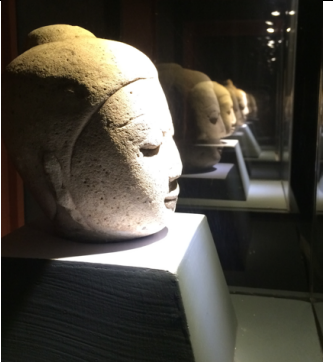
<p>C.1. Bagan Archaeological Museum. Visited 19–20 August 2015, 19–20, 23 January 2016; 11 August 2016.</p>	<p>Opened in 1998, as successor to the Pagan Museum of 1904.</p>	<p>The two-storey building has permanent displays in 10 showrooms. On the ground floor around the main hall are five showrooms which display the following themes: Bagan Palace City, Bagan Period Arts and Crafts, Architecture, Social Life, and Literature. Four showrooms on the first floor include two titled 'art gallery' dedicated to Ancient Monuments and Wall-paintings. Two remaining showrooms display Buddhist Arts and Buddha Images.</p>	
<p>C.2. Bago Archaeological Museum. Visited 3 September 2015.</p>	<p>Octagonal building established by the DOA in 1993 to house artefacts of the Hanthawaddy Bago period (1369–1537) and Toungoo period (1486–1599).</p>	<p>Notably includes limestone Buddha images, lead coins and glazed tiles excavated in 1990 from the 16<sup>th</sup> century Kambawzathardi Palace site; glazed plaques from the 16<sup>th</sup> century Shwegugyi Pagoda; glazed ceramics, bronze weights and wood carvings.</p>	
<p>C.3. Buddha and Cultural Museum, Sagaing. Visited 24 August 2015.</p>	<p>Purpose-built in 1995 with ornate relief work around entrance hall and spacious central courtyard. Showrooms have teak ceilings and ornate ventilation wall panels of traditional floral designs. The museum was built by the DOA on land donated by Sittagu Sayadaw with assistance from Tampawaddy U Win Maung.</p>	<p>The collection includes many Buddha images, relics, ceramics, furniture, lacquer vessels, carved sandstone water pipes in the form of crocodiles from the Mingun pagoda, photos, votive tablets, colonial glassware, a weaving loom, ox carts. A dry lacquer Buddha image dated to the 18<sup>th</sup> century is venerated for power to bestow longevity. A five-metals Buddha image in Mandalay style from Inntaw, Bamouk Township in Sagaing, is also considered powerful. The Buddha images and lacquer offering vessels are displayed on maroon-coloured velvet-wrapped plinths.</p>	

<p>C.4. Cultural Museum, Nyaung Shwe, Southern Shan State. Visited 26 February 2016.</p>	<p>The museum occupies the sawbwas' palace constructed between 1913 and 1923 by Sawbwa Sao Maung (1848–1926) and was the home of the last sawbwa Sao Shwe Thaike (1896–1962).<sup>805</sup> It first opened in 1964 as the Nyaung Shwe Haw Nang Museum; it was successively renamed: 'Museum of the Shan Chiefs' (2000); Nyaung Shwe Cultural Museum (2005); Buddha Museum (2007) and Cultural Museum (2013) (Undated museum handout).</p>	<p>Shoes are removed on entering. There is also a strict no-photography rule. The large wooden building appears quite empty. In the first room painted portraits by Kan Lwun hang on the walls with a text panel on the genealogy of the Shan sawbwas' reigns going back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Displays of documents include a copy of the Pang Long Agreement of February 1947 which was signed at the palace, and an agreement of April 1959 which transferred Shan authority in the eastern area of Mongshu to the Shan State Government. A large photo of the palace at Kyaing Tong hangs near a raised altar plinth inlaid with glass mosaic now in bad condition. The altars in the main halls have a woven bamboo Buddha image (un-lacquered) on one and a set of Phaung Daw Oo Buddhas on the other.<sup>806</sup></p>	 <p>Source:Thet Tun Naing, 2017.</p>
<p>C.5. Cultural Museum, Kyaing Tong, Eastern Shan State. Visited 14 January 2016.</p>	<p>Established in 2000, the museum is housed in a modern two-storey building on a hill south-west of Naung Tung Lake.</p>	<p>Many displays of dress, musical instruments, baskets, lacquerware and other objects of daily life of the different ethnic groups in the region. Headdresses of the different communities are vividly displayed on mannequins arranged on a red velvet-wrapped table. A carpeted platform area on the upper level provides a shrine-like display with a crowned Buddha image on large gilded throne flanked by numerous reliquaries with relics, table cases with clay tablets, gold sheet offerings and other enshrined objects.</p>	
<p>C.6. Mrauk-U Archaeological Museum, Rakhine State. Visited 9 January 2016.</p>	<p>Established in 1904 on the site of the ancient palace.<sup>807</sup> In late 2016 renovations began in preparation for UNESCO nomination.</p>	<p>The displays comprise mainly sandstone Buddha images from sites in Mrauk-U and glazed architectural ceramics as seen at Laung Bwun Byauk Zedi (B.23). In the Buddha Images Showroom are several cases of bronze images, including a Mahakyan Buddha image said to date to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, that is venerated at an altar within the room. Shoes are removed to enter this room and only staff may make offerings.</p>	

<sup>805</sup> Department of Cultural Institute, "Shan State Cultural Institute" (Ministry of Culture, Undated). Museum handout (undated).




<sup>806</sup> Thet Tun Naing, "Yawnghwe Haw in Shan State," *The Irrawaddy*, September 14, 2017, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/photo-essay/yawnghwe-haw-shan-state.html>.

<sup>807</sup> Nu Mra Zan, "Museums in Myanmar: Brief History and Actual Perspectives," in *New Horizons for Asian Museums and Museology*, ed. Naoko Sonoda (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2016), 23, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-0886-3>.

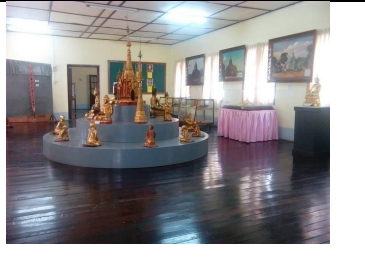

<p>C.7. National Museum, Nay Pyi Taw. Visited 26–27 August 2015.</p>	<p>Phased openings took place in July 2015 and March 2016, with additional galleries still pending completion in 2018.<sup>808</sup></p>	<p>A and B wings were opened in 2015 with exhibition rooms on: 1. President's Gifts, 2. Primates and Fossils, 3. Prehistoric period, 4. Protohistoric period (2nd century B.C–9th Century A.D), 5. Historic period (11<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> century), 6. Myanmar Art Gallery, 7. Myanmar performing arts.</p> <p>C and D wings opened in 2016 with exhibition rooms on: 8. Lion Throne, 9. ASEAN, 10. Childrens' Discovery Room, 11. Myanmar Arts and Crafts, 12. Special Exhibitions.</p> <p>Remaining galleries pending in C and E wings: 13. Myanmar Buddhist Art, 14. Myanmar Historic Period (15th to 19th Century A.D), 15. Myanmar Literature, 16. Great Endeavour of the Government and Our Leaders Exhibition room, 17. Union of Myanmar Nationalities' Cultures.</p>	
<p>C.8. National Museum, Yangon. Visited 1 September 2015, 2–3, 13 February, 5, 21 August 2016.</p>	<p>Opened in June 1952 at the Jubilee Hall on Shwedagon Pagoda Road. Re-opened in February 1970 at 24/26 Pansodan Street. Re-opened in September 1996 at 66/74 Pyay Road. Renovations undertaken 2013 to 2016.</p>	<p>14 showrooms display the following themes: Burmese culture and history including epigraphy and calligraphy, traditional folk art, performing arts, Buddha images, ethnic cultures, prehistory and onwards, royal regalia and lion throne rooms. Renovations included upgrading the Myanmar Epigraphy and Calligraphy exhibition room, renaming the Myanmar Historic Period exhibition room to 'Myanmar Civilization' and introducing Pyu artefacts to those displays.<sup>809</sup> The 'Buddha Images Showroom' was renovated and renamed 'Buddhist Art Gallery', with re-arrangements of the images in purpose-built cases with strong raked lights.</p>	

<sup>808</sup> Cherry Thin, personal communication, 4 February 2018.

<sup>809</sup> Nu Mra Zan, "Museums in Myanmar," 34.

<p>C.9. Pagan Museum, Old Bagan. Visited 18–21 August 2015, 17 Feb 2016.</p>	<p>The main building is a half-timber shed with brick walls and wire mesh sides. A signboard dates its establishment to 1904, although it was initiated a year earlier according to Nu Mra Zan.<sup>810</sup> Two open sided storage sheds are situated opposite, beyond which is the outer wall of the northern entryway to the Ananda Temple.</p>	<p>The objects stored here include a mix of large stone and bronze images of the Buddha from various periods kept within the balcony of the main building, and sandstone footprints and inscriptions placed in the sheds.</p>	
<p>C.10. Pakhangyi Archaeological Museum, 21August 2015.</p>	<p>Similar architectural style as the single-storey Buddha and Cultural Museum in Sagaing, with arched ventilated windows. Built 1992.</p>	<p>The sparse showrooms include a large laminated map of the area including Sithushin Pagoda and the restored teak Kyaungdawgyi Monastery. Several large lacquered manuscript chests are placed along one wall, while, gilded wood umbrellas mounted on stone elephants take up the centre flanked by showcases with small bronze Buddha images.</p>	
<p>C.11. Salay Archaeological Museum, Yoke Soun Kyaungdawgyi monastery. Visited 20 August 2015.</p>	<p>Housed in a teak building constructed in A.D 1882. The museum was renovated in the 1990s.</p>	<p>Early materials include Bagan period (13<sup>th</sup> century) objects e.g. finger-marked clay bricks and stone utensils, architectural elements in wood, a bronze bell and a crowned Buddha. There were also a number of 17<sup>th</sup> century stone carvings and bronze Buddha images in a glass showcase. 19<sup>th</sup> century Buddha images and furnishings such as wood carvings, shrines and manuscript chests remain mostly on open display, arranged around the main hall and adjacent side passages in a layout that is similar to that of the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum. A sepia photo portrait of the monastery's donor U Pho Kyi hangs next to the main entrance. Many more furnishings in poor condition remain within the adjacent rooms including vestiges of a carved wood throne dated to the 13<sup>th</sup> century.</p>	

<sup>810</sup> Nu Mra Zan, 22.

<p>C.12. Shan State Cultural Museum, Taunggyi. Visited 13 August 2016.</p>	<p>The Shan State Cultural Museum opened in 1956 in line with a policy of establishing regional museums and libraries in 1955.<sup>811</sup></p>	<p>The two-storey building houses four showrooms with permanent displays, two with traditional costumes and objects of daily life of the different ethnic groups living in Shan State, a showroom of historical records with a facsimile of the Pang Long Agreement and a 'Buddhist Culture Showroom' with Buddha images dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, relics and manuscripts. The collection includes a series of portraits finely carved in wood by the Mong Nai sculptor U Nyunt in 1974.<sup>812</sup></p>	
<p>C.13. Sri Ksetra Archaeological Museum, Hmawza village, Pyay. Visited 16 August 2015.</p>	<p>Located at the site of Sri Ksetra (1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries CE) the largest of the three ancient Pyu cities was among the earliest centres of urbanisation and Buddhism in Southeast Asia. It was nominated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2014. The site was first excavated by E. Forchhammer in 1882. The museum opened as Thayet Thaw Museum near the ancient palace in 1907 but burned down in 1915. It then opened as Kyauk-ka Thein site museum in 1915 at Kyauk-ka Thein Monastery where stone reliefs had been found and temporarily stored by Taw Sein Ko and General Leon de Beylie. The building was enlarged and moved to its current site which opened in 1962. Further renovations were undertaken in 1982, 1998 and 2002.<sup>813</sup></p>	<p>Improvements had been made to the presentation of displays in preparation for the nomination. Large printed text panels were illustrated with colour photos on themes such as gold and silver smithing, Pyu beads, coins, pot-herd designs, architecture, burial practices. There was also a dedicated panel to the site of Khin Ba Mound which yielded one of the largest collections of Pyu objects in 1926. A line-by-line translation of the gold manuscript leaves found in the relic chamber of the mound was illustrated on a text panel. Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism were also explained on a panel in the showroom for sculpture. The new display emphasised the individual presentation of objects including small precious objects such as gold rings and silver coins, as well as large stone and terracotta sculptures, or small groups of carefully arranged objects which were mounted on fabric wrapped plinths in subdued black or bleached calico tones, each with a separate bilingual caption. Brass-rod mounts were a new method of display that revealed the rarity of certain objects such as the gilded silver dishes that had been donated by a villager. A separate building that is normally kept locked houses large stone sculptures with heavily eroded remains of figurative reliefs.</p>	

<sup>811</sup> Nu Mra Zan, 24–26.

<sup>812</sup> The sculptor was Yin May Thawe's paternal great grandfather whose work included carving Buddha images as observed at her family's home shrine. Fieldwork, 15 August 2016.

<sup>813</sup> Nu Mra Zan, "Museums in Myanmar," 23. Win Kyaing, "Srikshetra Archaeological Museum," Virtual Collection of Asian Masterpieces, 2013, <http://masterpieces.asemus.museum/museum/detail.nhn?museumId=1045>.

## Appendix 1.1

## Survey of Museum Visitors, Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum, 18 August 2016

Name, age, occupation, home town, with friends/family, number of previous visits to museum:	How did you know about the museum?	Have you seen the shrine room? What are your impressions? Did you go inside? What is the feeling of the shrine room?	What impressions do you have of the renovated museum? Are there any displays that you like or don't like? Why?	What can we learn in this museum?	Any other comments?
1. Daw Baby Ohn, 57 years old, a tailor from Dagon Town, Yangon; visiting with a friend; visits about 3 times per month and during birthdays and festivals.	Television and read of the opening in the newspaper.	Yes. When it was an open space she was disturbed during prayers. The new space is better. Monks and nuns who meditate there need to concentrate. She prays and meditates there sometimes 30-45 minutes. Open pavilions are noisy, although she likes the Izzagona Dazaung and Sunday corner which are quiet. She does not rely on the five Buddha images and their material attributes. A true Buddhist at heart needs a quiet place to contemplate the Buddha's teachings and nine special qualities (goundaw). One has more respect for Buddha in a quiet place.	Has noticed the change in the position of the entrance and exit, as well as replacements of some exhibits.  She likes the larger Buddha images as these are more easily admired by non-Buddhists and the younger generation.	The ancient images are small as there was insufficient money to make them in silver and gold in earlier times.  We can see different buddha images of different ages and designs. She tries to learn about and admire ancient architecture. People make donations and we can admire them at the museum.	Today is Wagaung labi or full moon of Wagaung; also known as 'metta day'; a good time to practice compassion (metta). Feels fortunate to have met me on this special day.  She recalls the Buddha Museum in Sittwe when she lived there in 1976.
2. Naing Soe, 29 years old, a librarian from Palaw, Tanintharyi province; visiting with friends; visited once in 2013.	Through friends.	Yes. Every home has a shrine to pay homage to Buddha. When visiting friends one would go to the shrine room to pray [first]. Everywhere else [in the museum] is for learning something. Feels it is not the museum. He would visit the shrine first before visiting the museum, like asking permission to enter.	There are so many donations, so much wealth. The tiles on the pillars can teach us lessons about society and how not to do evil. Recalls treasures that were previously displayed in the first room. Likes the model stupa at the centre. The open display feels more friendly; one can get close.	We can learn about Buddhism. Would like to ask who made the statues and why they are displayed in this way. Three years ago the displays were not like this; many were not for public view. Where were objects stored? Would like age and provenance of objects.	He is more interested in the dazaung outside. The photo exhibition suggests there are more things that are not in the museum. So where are these?

3. Soe Win Naing, 36 years old; glass mosaic artist from Yangon; visiting with friends; visited many times before.	First visit was 1996 with his brother who worked at the pagoda. The museum was like a store.	Yes. Everywhere else is very open. The room blocks entry to the museum. More care should be taken e.g. the room needs a dustbin. It is also dusty in corners. Women usually cannot enter the altar area. The reclining Buddha images at the front are too low and accessible. The space should be open for all to learn. The walls make it feel like it is necessary to worship.	The museum is very different now, with lighting, more space, it is cleaner. The old layout had low lighting and was like a store.  Likes showcase no.2 with enshrined relics (htarpana) in the form of small Buddha images. These are important because we do not normally see such objects when they are buried.	We learn about htarpana, mudrā (gestures), asana (postures) and copper plates for the stupa.	None.
4. Htu Htu Aung Swe, 38 years old; assistant librarian working at the Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum, Yangon.	First heard parents talking about the museum.	The room is for the Five Buddhas who represent the Five Worlds, the last one in particular. He worships in hope of meeting the fifth Buddha (Mettaya). He pays homage every morning. It has changed – before everyone knew it was a shrine and all came to donate. Now some don't enter but worship outside, as they are unsure whether they are allowed in. He likes the glass however.	Work is still in progress e.g. the gold plaques display in the room opposite is still locked.	He has learned so much about the Shwedagon Pagoda and the different styles of Buddha images. Most do not know enough about King Mindon's hti-daw or about the gold plaques which give information about many different donors. The painted murals tell many stories.	He feels excited about the changes as it is now like a museum.
5. Ma Htet Htet Thwe, 45 years old; a trader from Yangon; is visiting with family; has visited many times before.	Encountered the museum unexpectedly.	Yes. Is happy and has prayed there. She felt excited and is interested in the large Buddha images.	Likes the lighting, which is much needed.	She had been working in a different country for 10 years and was excited about the new collection and the changes in Myanmar also.	None.
6. U Htein Lin, 39 years old, a businessman from Yangon; visiting with friends; usually visits once a month.	Saw a signboard during a visit to the pagoda.	Yes. The large Buddha images are in a nice space. Feels comfortable and relaxed. He prays there on arrival at the museum. Would like to show friends two places; the photo exhibition hall and the museum, as these make a good impression.	Paintings are impressive. He especially likes the ivory carvings which he often views. Would like a description and information on their age. Typologies of the carvings are more significant than their condition or colour.	We can learn about Myanmar culture especially Buddhist culture. It shows not only the Shwedagon but also spiritual life and culture.	Recalls reading books in the old days when there was a library in the building. He would like to display a short documentary especially for



<p>Note: He was a monk for 20 years and was experienced at looking at relics. The colours of the Buddhist flag – red, white, blue, brown, yellow – are also found in relics.</p>			<p>The rooms are clean and neat, the light is much clearer. It is easier to compare differences between cultures. He does not like the way relics are displayed. He prefers a room to pay respects e.g. the shrine room. There is no information about origins of the Five Buddha images, whether they are replicas and whether as such they have been put together with real relics.<sup>814</sup> The blue and white tiles are not harmonious and the texts are very lengthy. There is insufficient light to read them.</p>		<p>foreigners to show the Shwedagon as a museum together with its objects. The museum is much more like a museum now. He prefers this to the Bodawin Museum (Maha Buddhavamsa Showroom).</p>
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<sup>814</sup> The ritual juxtaposition of copies with real relics, enables the transfer of power to the copies.

## Appendix 1.2

### Shwedagon Pagoda. Museum, Scripture Library, Archive. Opening Ceremony 1992.

Translation: Su Latt Win, 3 January 2017

[cover]

*Four Relics Shwedagon Pagoda. Museum, Scripture Library, Archive. Opening Ceremony. 1364 year, Waso full moon (14-07-1992).*

[Pg.1]

Museum, Scripture Library, Archive

Aims:

- Images of Buddha and pagodas that were donated long ago, and other objects related to Buddhism can be viewed by the public.
- Historical objects from the pagoda and records of the knowledge about these can be studied.
- The arts and culture of Myanmar can also be studied.
- Monks, donors and other members of the public donated things of great value, jewellery and other inspiring objects.
- To distribute the literature of the Pariyatti Sāsana-daw around the world.
- To make it easy for pilgrims, monks, donors and the public to read this literature.
- To make the history of the Shwedagon Pagoda available through reading documents, books and literature.
- Systematic arrangement of maps, photos, tapes and documents of meritorious works.
- To keep historical records systematically for easy study in the future.

[Pg.2]

Activities

On 26<sup>th</sup> May 1989, trustees and the president of Yangon District, State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and Colonel Nyo Nyunt, head of the Defence Department worked together on the building of the Museum, Scripture Library and Archive. The *aw-wada-sariya sayadaws* were consulted and gave their approval for the construction of the building, then the head of Yangon District and Colonel Nyo Nyunt received support from SLORC. Three main projects were undertaken:

- i) Theinguttara Garden
- ii) Maha Bouda-win Showroom
- iii) Museum, Scripture Library and Archive

2<sup>nd</sup> Commander Brigadier Kat Sein and Colonel Sein Thwa headed these projects. On 14 October 1989, full moon of Thadingyut, the foundations were laid for the museum building. The Ministry of Engineering undertook building works. The Civil Engineering

Department produced the plan and undertook electrical installations. District Building Group (11) constructed the retaining concrete wall.

[Pg.3 caption]

#### Museum

Ancient diamond bud, weather vane.

Donation of Buddha images, stupas (below) a long time ago.

Foreign donations of Buddhist objects.

Public donations of silver, gold, gems and priceless jewellery.

Art objects are displayed for study and to increase respect and faith.<sup>815</sup>

[Pg.4]

#### Building the Museum, Scripture Library, Archive

Starting date	14-10-1989
Finish date	14-07-1992
Expenses:	Kyats:
Civil works	266.54 <i>thein</i> <sup>816</sup>
Electrical works	19.82 <i>thein</i>
Clean water, others	6.86 <i>thein</i>
Total	293.32 <i>thein</i>
Foreign currency (Singapore Dollars)	2.10 <i>thein</i>
Reinforced concrete retaining wall	78.46 <i>thein</i>

[Pg.5]

#### Library

- A study room holds sacred teachings: the suttas, *Vinaya*, *Abhidhamma* and other Buddhist texts.
- Books, articles and journals in local and foreign languages can be read here.
- Historical literature about the history of the Shwedagon Pagoda can be read here.

[Pg.6]

#### Archive

The history of the Shwedagon Pagoda in documents and records of meritorious works [e.g. renovations], photos, maps, tapes are systematically kept here.

[Pg.7 - captions]

#### Donors

Cash donors

Conferring programme,

Museum, Scripture Library, Archive

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<sup>815</sup> With the implication that donations will inspire further donations. Personal communication, Su Latt Win, 4 December 2016.

<sup>816</sup> 1 *thein* = 100,000 kyats.

## Appendix 1.3

### Museum Objects List

Translation: Su Latt Win, Yamin Htay, 3 January 2017

Le-zu dat-poun Shwedagon Zedi-daw<sup>817</sup>

*Museum Objects List*

*Record Book (Part 1)*

*Showroom Number (1)*

1367, 3rd waxing day of Tabaung

1 March 2006

[Pg. 1]<sup>818</sup>

#### Shwedagon Pagoda Museum

In 2005 at the Wednesday corner of the Shwedagon Pagoda platform was the Reception Hall also known as 'Japan Tazaung'. This originally served as the museum.<sup>819</sup>

It was used as a *Paribawga-Daik* [literally 'furniture/utensil' or 'relics of use building']<sup>820</sup>. Among the many objects donated over long periods of time, were antique gold jewellery that was not melted down and Myanmar fine arts. Until 1970 they used this hall in order to maintain these objects. At that time there was no Shwedagon Pagoda Museum. As the objects increased in number a separate building was required.

In 1976 plans were drawn up for the contractor U Aye Group to realise (now called the 'Hall of Ancient Buddha Images'). The objects previously kept at the Paribawga-Daik were then displayed systematically for the public [at the hall]. However, with the Five Buddha images and an increasing number of donations, the displays still had the appearance of a storeroom.

In 1986 the Pagoda Trustee Group started discussions with a group of volunteer experts about developing the museum. However, they could not start any works. In 1989, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) developed the pagoda complex and helped with the trustees' plans.

#### Three main projects

In 1989 SLORC Yangon Military Headquarters Commander led the following projects:

1. Theinguttara garden project
2. Maha Bouda-win Showroom construction project
3. Museum, Scripture Library and Archive construction project

On 14 October 1989 the jewel deposit was laid for the Museum, Scripture Library and Archive. On 14 July 1992 the building was opened.

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<sup>817</sup> Shwedagon Pagoda also referred to as above: 'Four Relic Shwedagon Stupa'.

<sup>818</sup> The Burmese convention of using alphabetical pagination and itemised lists has been romanised in this translation.

<sup>819</sup> Also known as the Eh-kan Dazaung or Reception Hall.

<sup>820</sup> John S. Strong, *Relics of the Buddha* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 21.

The design was drawn up by architect U Maung Maung Gyi from Public Construction Group, No.2 Industry Department which undertook the construction. Electrics and air conditioning were installed by the Public Construction Group's Electrical Department.

The cost of the building was around 293 lakh.<sup>821</sup> In 1976 a landslide occurred so the western slope was strengthened with reinforced concrete. The cost of the reinforcement wall was over 78 lakh. The dimensions of this building are length: 155 feet; height: 35 feet; width: 55 feet. It has three storeys built in reinforced concrete. The top floor houses a museum, the middle floor the library and the lower floor an archive.

[Pg.2]

The *duyin-gauk* ['peacock chest'] roof finials are in Burmese style. In 1999 these were removed and the roof was upgraded in Burmese style.

Within the building, the pillars were decorated with *nibat-taw* glazed paintings.<sup>822</sup> Furthermore in 1993 ten famous painters were commissioned to produce paintings of the Ten Jatakas.

#### Museum Object-Checking Group

Shwedagon Pagoda Trustees' rule (section 77-*la*) relates to museum objects conservation. Rule sub-clause 13 states that there should be a Museum Object-Checking Group.

In 1992 after the new museum was finished, the group's duty was to transfer objects, to check objects and mount systematic displays.<sup>823</sup> These objects included images of the Buddha and stupas that had been properly cleaned.<sup>824</sup> A systematic list of new acquisitions was made during this transfer from the old to the new museum. In 1998 the list was computerised.

By 2003 it had been a long time since the museum objects were cleaned or systematically arranged in their showcases. Moreover, the Museum Object-Checking Group, namely U Aung Pe, President of Thaka-kari Group; U Myat Thin, President of Upper Level Sweeping Group; and U Soe Tin, Secretary of the Upper Level Sweeping Group had all passed away. U Maung Htoo, Museum Officer and pagoda trustee had also passed away. The second person in charge of the museum, U Kyaw Myint, had retired. At a meeting on 13 August 2003 the Museum Object-Checking Group was reformed (normal meeting, 8-1/2003). The new group members were as follows:

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<sup>821</sup> One lakh in Anglo-Indian usage is equivalent to 100,000 rupees or one *thein* kyats. See Glossary.

<sup>822</sup> Ceramic tiles with the last ten stories of Buddha's 550 previous lives.

<sup>823</sup> [Footnote] Within the original museum was an eastern wall where the group of bronze images of the Five Buddhas were displayed. Their plinths were made of concrete and the back slabs of carved wood. Next to the eastern wall was Daw Mya's hall with a small bronze model of the Shwedagon Pagoda. Inside there was a small bronze stupa and a stone inscription of the 'Ovada Patimokkha Desana' [Exhortation Verses of Buddhas]. In 1995 the All Round Perpetual Renovation was started. The eastern wall was removed and the two halls were combined. The name was changed to 'Shwedagon Zedi-daw Khan-ma-gyi' (Shwedagon Pagoda Large Room) or 'Hall of Ancient Buddha Images'. The ornamental backdrops of the thrones which stood behind Five Buddha images were moved to the eastern wall of the Shwedagon Zedi-daw Khan-ma-gyi. Five Buddha images were moved to the new museum. Currently in the Hall of Ancient Buddha Images there are many new stone Buddha images.

<sup>824</sup> A distinction is made between cleaning of ordinary objects and sacred Buddha images, which require fragrant water. For example, *yaung-daw hpwint* refers to this special category of cleansing.

[Pg. 3]

1. U Zaw Myint, Gaw-paka Group (museum), President
2. U Gyi Myint, Gaw-paka Group, Deputy President
3. U Khin Maung Myint, Gaw-paka Group, Deputy President
4. U Win Kyaing, Head of Office, Member
5. U Thun Shwe, Deputy Head of Office, Member
6. U Nyunt Weh, Secretary of the Association, Member
7. U Kyaw Yin, as above, Member
8. U Aung Myint Kyun, as above, Member
9. U Maung Maung Gyi, Upper Level Group Member
10. U Khin Maung Htun, as above, Member
11. U Aung Hein, as above, Member
12. U Myo Lwin Oo, as above, Member
13. U Nya Na, as above, Member
14. U Thein Win, as above, Member
15. Daw Meh Mya, as above, Member
16. U Than Thin, Senior Officer (Museum), Member
17. Daw Than Khin, Junior Officer (Museum), Member
18. U Than Aung, Head of Department (Museum), Member

(Successor: Daw Than Than Htay)

#### Museum object-checking process

The work to be undertaken is wide-ranging, hence there was a detailed discussion on 23 August 2003. A plan of work was drawn up:

1. According to the trustees' rules (77–/a) sub-clause 12, checks were made of the objects and inventory list.
2. Museum objects and Buddha images would be restored and displayed in order to be best appreciated by visitors.
3. The objects that had been transferred were documented before being displayed.
4. According to sub-clause 8/9 the inventory list should be computerised.

These four tasks and 12 projects were undertaken from October 2003 to July 2004. The plan of tasks was submitted on 27 September 2003 at the Shwedagon Pagoda Trustee meeting (9–2/2003 - normal). Trustees gave permission for this to proceed.

#### Checking museum objects that had been temporarily transferred

The donations include those related to the sāsana, jewellery, fine art and memorial objects. All were collected and taken care of by the trustees.

[Pg.4]

In 1999 objects were installed on the hti-daw. Some were taken off for display [at the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum] and some were maintained and displayed at the museum. Moreover, damaged pieces were temporarily taken to the museum. Selection of these objects was made by the Museum Object-Checking Group. This work was led

by the scholar within the Upper Level Group, U Maung Maung Gyi.<sup>825</sup> Also within this working group was the Museum Department Officer U Than Aung. The Museum Object-Checking Group also sought permission to display some of the objects that had been temporarily transferred.

#### Collecting objects not for display from the original museum

The new museum had five rooms and 60 showcases in the past. The total number of objects was 2,979.

The collections were not systematically made but rather comprised donations given by pilgrims of pure intention. The donations included small Buddha images, objects related to the *sāsana* (e.g. monks' possessions, *parabaik*, medals and other memorabilia) and many other kinds of donations, as well as Myanmar fine arts, souvenirs and ancient objects.

There were also duplicates and some were not Myanmar fine art. For example, the gold lotus buds from Thailand were previously displayed like unique objects.<sup>826</sup>

When a donor or family of donors gives something they value highly, the trustees cannot refuse them. They also cannot destroy or transfer these objects. If they keep them in a hall they will not be safe. Silver wishing trees, silver coin Bodhi trees and silver flag-posts are displayed in the museum. Donations also include lacquer offering vessels, green glass bowls or 'Emerald bowls', offering dishes and animal figurines (including elephants, buffalo, and deer). It is due to all these donations that the museum looked more like a store-room.

[Pg. 5]

For this reason, the Museum Object-Checking Group removed objects that should not be displayed, from the list of objects on display. On 20 October 2003, objects were temporarily transferred from the pagoda trustees' Gold Jewellery Department. On 17 and 26 November 2003, a visual check was conducted of each cabinet. After checking a meeting was held to discuss which objects to display and which should not be displayed. Five criteria were drawn up.

#### Five criteria for not displaying objects at the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum

1. Objects that are not art of Myanmar
2. Objects that are not ancient
3. Objects that are not Myanmar fine art
4. Forms that are not aesthetically appealing
5. Objects of the same size and form

#### Activities of the Museum Object-Checking Group

The group did not work on days when the museum was closed (Monday and Friday). On Saturday and Sunday when it was crowded they did not work. They worked on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. They closed each showroom and checked the objects using the objects list. In order to appear clean and shiny ritual cleaning was

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<sup>825</sup> 'Upper Level Group' refers to those trustees and others with access to the upper level of the stupa.

<sup>826</sup> The inference here perhaps is that objects once thought of as unique and accorded value should be reconsidered in light of their foreign origin, contemporary manufacture and use of modern materials.

done. They also cleaned inside the cabinets and around the displays. The group also undertook selections of objects based on the five criteria listed above.

#### Research on museum objects

Many objects were donated a long time ago. They were received by the trustees but were not always systematically recorded. The Museum Object-Checking Group undertook research by checking documents and archival records using inventory lists. Inscriptional evidence of the objects and publication references were noted. Some objects were completely documented.

[Pg. 6]

#### Objects removed from the *Museum Objects List*

The objects which should not be displayed in the museum according to the five basic criteria, were already included in the museum objects list. Therefore, it could be misleading if these objects were to disappear.

Objects removed from the museum objects list were therefore divided into two groups; those which did not need to be stored and those which needed to be maintained.

The objects which did not need to be stored included: gold embroidery flowers, Thai candles, elephant and bull figures which had been donated by Thai devotees. The objects which needed to be maintained included: wooden figures (lions, deer and elephants) recently carved by Myanmar craftsmen, emerald glass monks' bowls, lacquer boxes, containers for offerings, silver flowers and Banyan trees, silver and bronze bowls, and betel boxes.

The trustees and the Gold and Jewellery Department transferred objects to the museum. However, those which did not accord with the five basic criteria were not chosen for display. These included: souvenirs, prize medals, silver wares and temple models which were not in traditional Myanmar style. In addition, objects which could not be placed on the new hti-daw included: strings of jade beads, jade bracelets, bronze Buddha images, silver stupas, Thai Emerald Buddha images and clocks<sup>827</sup>.

#### Objects removed from the museum objects list and put into storage

Objects not chosen for display, had however, been donated to the Shwedagon Pagoda through the generosity of visitors, and it was therefore important that they be systematically maintained. These were stored inside cabinets within the showrooms on the middle floor which displays colonial period art i.e. not authentic Myanmar traditional art. There is a record book for these objects.

State authorities led upgrading projects at the Shwedagon Pagoda. One of the projects was the upgrading of the southern stairway. Old and faded architectural elements were discarded during this project. There was a rumour that the authorities destroyed Myanmar traditional arts and crafts. Evidence that this was not true is seen in the wooden floral motifs which are not in traditional Myanmar style, wood carvings with lion motifs, floral motifs with images of the British King and Queen and wood pavilion decorations in colonial style, have been displayed in the colonial art showroom at the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum. Arts and crafts which are not authentic traditional Myanmar style, which have been removed from religious buildings from various regions in Myanmar are also displayed here.

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<sup>827</sup> Objects donated in 1999 during the ceremony for hoisting the new hti-daw.



[Pg. 7]

#### Museum objects on the pagoda platform outside the museum

The Shwedagon Pagoda and all the religious buildings within the compound can also be called an historic museum. The value of Buddha images within the religious buildings are ancient and do not differ stylistically. It is not easy to steal these images. However, gold, silver, jade and jewellery are easy to steal. In the Shwedagon Pagoda, there are historically valuable religious buildings and financially valuable jewellery that need to be maintained.

Buddha images and stupas on the Shwedagon Pagoda platform include:

- A jade Buddha image
- A gold replica of the Shwedagon Pagoda
- A valuable ancient diamond bud and flag-shaped vane which could be easily stolen

Although not displayed in the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum, these objects are recorded at the trustees' office as valuable objects that need to be looked after carefully. However, one of the departments will take responsibility to keep these objects in accordance with the trustees' office. Following the trustees' meeting, the jade Buddha image, golden replica stupa, ancient diamond bud and flat-shaped vane were recorded in the museum's objects list.

#### Jade Buddha image

In 1999, when the new umbrella was placed on the Shwedagon Pagoda, the State Peace and Development Council donated a jade Buddha image. The image had been carved by Myanmar Jewelry Production, Ministry of Mines. It was placed at the Hall of the Punya Kusala Bahu-kara Association, located at the Wednesday corner. The highly venerated Buddha image is adorned with jewellery. The image and jewellery are recorded in *Museum Object List, Book Number 4*, pages 238–239.

#### Golden replica of Shwedagon Pagoda

There has been a lot of pure gold and jewellery donated by devotees, as well as the 45-inch high gold replica of Shwedagon Pagoda that was cast in memory of the hti-daw ceremony in 1999. This model was placed in the U San Chain Dazaung located at the Wednesday corner; a secure shrine where it can be worshipped by devotees. It is adorned with jewellery and these are recorded in the *Museum Object List Book Number 4*, pages 232–237.

[Pg. 8]

#### Ancient diamond bud and flag-shaped vane

The diamond bud and flag-shaped vane which were donated in 1889 were displayed to the public in showroom number 1, cabinet number 2, in the previous museum.

In 1992 when these two objects were moved from the old museum to the new one, the jewellery that adorned the venerated diamond bud and flag-shaped vane were recorded as museum objects. These objects were placed in U Maung Gyi's Dazaung at the Tuesday corner in order to be worshipped by devotees. This project was managed by the Committee for upgrading and construction [on] 25–3–2003.

An electric carousel was installed below these objects for devotees to donate money after the devotees had prayed. The jewellery and prize medals that decorated the diamond bud and flag-shaped vane were removed from museum's object list but remained on the objects. All were recorded in the *Museum Object List Book Number 4*, pages 218–230.

[Note: the following sections have been omitted due to the sensitive nature of the information: Museum security, Museum daily security, Safeguarding museum keys, Opening of museum cabinets].

[Pg. 9]

#### Temporary suspension of museum object-checking

State authorities led the offerings of golden robe plaques to the Shwedagon Pagoda. The inspection of the strength of the golden umbrella was performed in 2005, by the Working Group for upgrading and construction and the pagoda trustees. The main task was the offering of gold robe plaques. The task of checking the museum objects was temporarily postponed (24–12–2004 to 12–5–2005) as U Maung Maung Gyi, the head expert and others from the Upper Level Group undertook their responsibilities for installing gold and copper plaques.

[Pg. 10]

#### Museum record books

Record books for the museum which opened in 1992 include object type, number, size, weight and a photo of the objects.

The weight of information if recorded in a single book is too much. Therefore, each showroom has its own record book.

1. *Records for Showroom Number 1* – 1 book
2. *Records for Showroom Number 2* – 1 book
3. *Records for Showroom Number 3* – 1 book
4. *Records for Showroom Number 4* – 1 book<sup>828</sup>

The replica of Shwedagon Pagoda is worshipped in the southern gateway area currently known as Hall of Ancient Buddha Images, [the previously] amalgamated Daw Mya's hall and the old museum. This replica stupa was moved to the new museum in 1992 with objects from the old museum.

It was made by U Mya Thaug, a bronze-caster from Mandalay on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the waxing moon, Nayon 1324 ME 12–6–1962 and was officially finished on 17–6–1962. Surrounded by 64 small stupas and four small gateway stupas, it was finished in 1327 ME [1965] after full moon day of Thadingyut. This stupa was divided into lower and upper parts and cast with 600 viss of bronze alloy. The stupa is 37 feet 9 inches in length and 30 feet in width. One inch of the replica of the stupa is equal to four feet of the stupa and thus there can be only one eighth of an inch difference between the original and replica stupa. The total cost was 11,000 kyats; the large stupa was 9000 kyats, the small stupas 2000 kyats.

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<sup>828</sup> [Footnote] Objects in the large middle room are from outside the museum.

The cost of Daw Mya's hall was 42,407 kyats 44 pyas. This was donated in 1326 ME. (25–4–1964) during the full moon of Kason. Donor Daw Mya was born in Karain Myintar village in Dar Pain township in April 1908.<sup>829</sup> Her parents were U Chit Po and Daw Khin. Her uncle and aunt arranged for her to marry Mr. Masani. They lived at 225, Upper 37<sup>th</sup> Street in Yangon. It had been her fervent wish to donate a hall to the Shwedagon Pagoda but she passed away (at 54 years) in September (26<sup>th</sup>) 1962 before being able to do this.

Mr. Masani was born in Brooking Street, Yangon Township as part of the Haraci community.<sup>830</sup> He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Law from Yangon University and worked as High Court Attorney. He and Daw Mya were married in 1930 and lived together for 30 years. Although not Buddhist, he fulfilled his wife's wish to donate the hall and replica stupa. He was 74 years old when he died in 1974.

#### Photo record of museum objects

Each object in the museum is digitally photographed and this record is stored in a computer and backup CDs. Some objects are photographed on four sides. Some objects have significant inscriptions which are also recorded.

#### Summary of Museum Objects List

The following are lists of objects maintained by the Shwedagon Pagoda Museum:

1. Showroom number 1: 7 showcases, types of objects (549)
2. Showroom number 2: 6 showcases, types of objects (677)
3. Showroom number 3: 6 showcases, types of objects (485)
4. Showroom number 4: types of objects (674)

Middle room and objects on the platform outside museum:

- 47 showcases
- 1 shelf
- 7 showboats
- 3 small shrines

[Pg. 11]

#### Confirmation of the Museum Objects List

Museum collection surveyors presented the *Museum Objects List*, books numbered 1 to 4 and a list of the objects in the colonial art showroom, including three original record books. These were confirmed by responsible personnel at the trustees' meeting held on 1–3–2006. Moreover, the list of the keys to open all the showcases in the showrooms was transferred to the trustee group.

Win Kyaing  
Secretary

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<sup>829</sup> According to a new text panel drafted by Daw Nu Mra Zan this is in Bago region. Fieldwork, 23 September 2017.

<sup>830</sup> Haraci refers to the Parsi community. Daw Nu Mra Zan. 23 September 2017. The street is known today as Bo Ga Lay Zay Street.

## Appendix 1.4

### Shwedagon Pagoda Museum, Advanced Renovation Work Plan.

Translation: Su Latt Win, 3 January 2017

*Shwedagon Pagoda Museum. Advanced Renovation Work Plan  
December 2013.*

[Pg. 22]

#### Introduction

1. There are many highly valuable objects that were donated by local and foreign donors. Objects that are venerated and should be studied, have been selected for display in the museum for a long time.
2. The museum was built in reinforced concrete in 1992. It is three storeys high with the museum on the top floor linked to the pagoda platform, the library at middle floor and the archive on the ground level at mid-terrace on the hill. The dimensions of the museum are: length 165 feet, width 65 feet.<sup>831</sup>
3. The museum resides on the top floor, library on the middle floor and archive on the ground floor.
4. The reason for change is that there are many objects, now totaling 2,590. There is insufficient space for systematic displays. Some are also not appropriate and only those selected as important and in good condition are displayed. Careful selection has been made as there are duplicate objects. Previously the displays were like a storeroom because of the large quantity of objects.
5. According to pagoda trustees' museum rule 30 (25), objects donated by local and foreign donors and highly valuable pieces should be shown to the next generation for study and veneration. The following are highly valuable objects:
  - i. Historical objects related to the Shwedagon pagoda and its history<sup>832</sup>
  - ii. Cultural objects that demonstrate Buddhist history
  - iii. Buddhist fine art
  - iv. Fine art
  - v. Rare gold and silver and jewellery
  - vi. Rare objects
  - vii. Objects identified by the trustees as rare and highly valuable

[Pg. 23]

6. The Shwedagon Pagoda Museum is the pride of the country and should be developed according to international museum standards. The President's office gave instructions to aim for this. A committee led by Deputy Minister, Ministry of Religious Affairs was expanded for this project.

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<sup>831</sup> Length: 50.3 m, width:19.8 m, total: 995.94 sq.m. Total area over 3 floors is 2,987.82 sq.m.

<sup>832</sup> The Burmese convention of using alphabetical pagination and itemised lists has been romanised in this translation.

7. In order to have sufficient display space the library was moved to the eastern lower platform to the Daw Hla Sein library building. Next the archive was moved to the eastern lower platform to the Pya-bon Library Building.
8. The Shwedagon Pagoda Museum's displays will be undertaken systematically in order to achieve international museum standards. The Maha Bouda-win Showroom on the western lower platform will also be updated.
9. This showroom is not very popular and therefore is to be promoted, through the landscaping of a path and staircase to the showroom from the museum.

[Pg. 24]

#### Objectives

10. The reason for connecting the two buildings is to help visitors continue from the museum to the showroom.
11. On special days there is crowding at the pagoda, so visiting the museum and the showroom will help to reduce this.
12. The Shwedagon Pagoda Museum Advanced Display Group comprises the following:
  - i. Term Chair, Pagoda trustee, President
  - ii. Dr. Thein Lwin, Pagoda Trustee, Member
  - iii. U Sein Win Aung, Pagoda Trustee, Member
  - iv. U Kyin Aung, Pagoda Trustee, Member
  - v. U San Lin, Pagoda Trustee, Member
  - vi. U Maung Byi, Pagoda Trustee, Member
  - vii. U Myint Ohn, Pagoda Trustee, Member
  - viii. U Soe Myaing, Pagoda Trustee, Member
  - ix. U Moe Chit, Pagoda Trustee, Member
  - x. Thura U Thin Hla, Pagoda Trustee, Member
  - xi. U Aung Naing Myint, Director, Archaeology, Museum and Library Department, Ministry of Culture (MOC)
  - xii. Daw Nu Mra Zan, Director General (retired), Archaeology, Museum and Library Department, Ministry of Culture (MOC)
  - xiii. U Thit Lwin Soe, Professor (teacher), University of Culture, Yangon, MOC
  - xiv. U Maung Maung Gyi, Museum Object-Checking Group, Shwedagon Pagoda Trustee Board, Member
  - xv. U Nyunt Maung San, Central Executive, Myanmar Engineering Society
  - xvi. U Ye Myint, Chief Engineer, Electrical Engineer, Public Building Department
  - xvii. U Aye Win, Chief Engineer (retired), Public Buildings Department
  - xviii. U Kyaw Oo, Rector, University of Culture, MOC
  - xix. U Maung Maung Hla Myint, President, Myanmar Society of Traditional Arts
  - xx. U Win Kyaing, Officer, Pagoda Trustee Board, Secretary
  - xxi. Daw Neu Neu Win, Head of Department, Museums, Co-Secretary

[Pg. 25]

13. Shwedagon Pagoda Advanced Display Group's tasks:

- i. Museum building roof, floor and walls will be renovated and painted.
- ii. Objects will be collected together and displayed systematically with written captions.
- iii. Objects with information on the Shwedagon Pagoda's history and Buddhism and will be displayed.
- iv. Display rooms will be painted until shining [new].
- v. The Maha Bouda-win Showroom's northern section previously had a map (dimensions height 70ft, width 22 ft) which will be replaced with Buddhist general knowledge.
- vi. At the Maha Bouda-win Showroom, air-conditioning, lighting and sound systems will be updated, to include both new and renovated fixtures in the galleries.
- vii. Audio-visual presentations will be included in both the museum and showroom.
- viii. Landscaping will be undertaken at the front of the Maha Bouda-win Showroom.
- ix. Landscaping to include a connecting path and staircase [to the museum] will be undertaken.
- x. CCTV cameras will be installed.
- xi. Fire protection systems will be installed.

[Pg. 26]

Museum Advanced Display Programme

14. The following categories of objects will be created:

- i. The Shwedagon Pagoda
- ii. Pagoda display (miniature stupas)
- iii. Images displayed at the pagoda; unadorned Buddha images
- iv. Adorned images e.g. crowned and jeweled Buddha images
- v. Excellent religious donations e.g. silver trees, bowls, fans, flag-posts, floral sprays
- vi. Colonial art
- vii. Foreign donations
- viii. Buddha footprints
- ix. Burmese art and customary objects e.g. flower vases
- x. Jewellery and currency e.g. old Burmese coins

15. Museum frontage

The existing fence looks the same as others at the pagoda platform. A more attractive design is to be constructed to include entrances. The frontage has unused space where facilities could include a small souvenir shop, donation office and shoe repository.

[Pg. 27]

#### 16. Showrooms

Walls will be taken down and the following showrooms will not be divided anymore (see figs. 1, 2, 3).

#### 17. Visitors' pathway

Visitors from the pagoda platform will follow blue arrows that lead to the Maha Bouda-win Showroom. Visitors travelling in the opposite direction from the ground (showroom) to the top floor (of the museum) will follow red arrows.

18. Estimated costs – Shwedagon Pagoda Museum		<i>Lakh (Kyats)</i>
i.	Cleaning of selected objects	35
ii.	Cabinets: unbreakable glass	(6x200) 1,200
	multi-sized cabinets	(35x20) 700
iii.	Plinths	(25x5) 125
iv.	Wall cabinets	(20x15) 300
v.	Textiles for wrapping plinths	20
vi.	Lighting system	400
vii.	CCTV cameras	500
viii.	Fire protection	400
ix.	AV systems	50
x.	Air-conditioning	250
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,880</b>

#### 19. Estimated costs – Maha Bouda-win Showroom

Painting and sculpture:		
i.	Repaint 28 showrooms	168
ii.	Repaint scenes of Buddhist Councils & 28 Buddha images	64
iii.	Lighting and sound systems	140
iv.	Renovated map on northern side	50
v.	Air-conditioning	120
vi.	CCTV cameras	200
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,442</b>

#### 20. Estimated costs – landscaping

i.	Maha Bouda-win Showroom surroundings	100
ii.	Connecting path and steps	350
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>450</b>

21. Expansion of the group to undertake the following areas of work:

- i. Small buildings group, under U Maung Byi
- ii. Display group
- iii. Lighting, aircon and electronics group
- iv. Security and fire protection group
- v. Landscaping and stairway-building group
- vi. Finance group

22. Period of the project

The project will begin 15 January 2014 and run until 31 November 2014.

[Pg.28]

Conclusion

23. Existing cabinets will be recycled for use as far as possible.

24. Funds from donations must be used systematically. Estimated costs outlined above will be confirmed when works start.

Secretary  
Buddha Museum Advanced Display Group



## Appendix 1.5

### Shwedagon Pagoda Buddha Museum Commemorative Flyer, 2016.

Translation: Yamin Htay, 16 November 2017.

[Cover]

Shwedagon Pagoda. Opening of Renovated Buddha Museum and Maha Bouda-win Showroom.

1377 ME, 10<sup>th</sup> day of waxing moon, Tabaung. Friday, 18–7–2016.

[Pg.1]

Shwedagon Pagoda was not only the culmination of the Buddha's era but is also the pride of Myanmar. Devotees donate not only money but also jewellery inherited from their ancestors, antiques, and other valuable and exquisite objects to the Shwedagon Pagoda. In order to display these items to the public, the old pavilion situated on the southern side of the Shwedagon Pagoda was opened as the 'Shwedagon Zedi Buddha Museum' in 1961.

[Pg.2]

In order to share knowledge of the life of Buddha with visitors, the Maha Bouda-win Showroom was opened at the lower terrace on the western side in 1991. The increasing number of donations over many years included documents related to the Buddha's dhamma which needed to be maintained. Therefore in 1992, the three-storey building was constructed by the government, with the second floor used as a museum, the first floor as library for Buddhist scriptures and the ground floor as an archive.

[Pg.3]

Currently there are too many objects to be displayed and therefore the library and archive were moved to the eastern side of the lower terrace. According to the government authorities it was decided on March 21, 2014, that the whole building would be renovated in order to become a museum of international standards and thus the following took up their responsibilities:

- i. Head Committee with members of trustee and experts:
- ii. Sub-Committee for building renovation led by trustee member U Maung Pe and U Win Te
- iii. Sub-Committee for advanced renovation of the Buddha Museum led by trustee member U Sein Win Aung and U Tin Thein Lwin
- iv. Sub-Committee for advanced renovation of Buddha's Life Gallery led by trustee member U Kyin Aung and U Nyo Win
- v. Sub-Committee for installation of air-conditioning and electronics led by trustee member Thura U Tin Hla and U Soe Myaing
- vi. Sub-Committee for landscaping and infrastructure led by trustee member U Myint Oun and U Maung Pe
- vii. Sub-Committee for security and fire safety led by trustee member U Aung Soe Min and U Moe Chit

- viii. Sub-Committee for financing led by trustee member U San Lin and U Win Te

[Pg.4]

The estimated amount for renovation of the Buddha Museum and Maha Bouda-win Showroom was 1,001,570,000 kyats and currently 605,780,242 kyats has been spent on the project. Trustee members carefully administered the funds which had been donated by devotees. They also had regular monthly meetings in order to check the accounts. This project was started on 21 March 2014 and was projected to be completed on 26 March 2016.

After refurbishment as a museum of international standards, with renovations undertaken in traditional style, the following objects were displayed on the second floor of the museum.<sup>833</sup>

Historical evidence of the Shwedagon Pagoda including the diamond bud and vane which were donated by King Mindon 120 years ago, valuable ancient gold and silver stupas, gold and silver Buddha images, artistic ivory carvings and sacred objects embellished with jade, are displayed on the second floor.<sup>834</sup>

[Pg.5]

On the first floor of the museum, Buddha's footprints can be studied in detail. In addition, gems and jewellery, prize medals and sacred objects donated by devotees are displayed in order to impress visitors.

On the ground floor, the exhibition includes Myanmar traditional arts and crafts that were used in ancient times. Similarly, the Maha Bouda-win Showroom was specially renovated to display interesting paintings, woodcarvings and statues.

When the Buddha Museum and Maha Bouda-win Showroom were renovated it was important not to destroy original works of art and traditional crafts. The purpose of the exhibitions should [also] be clearly understood by visitors and devotees. The modernisation of the museums using international standards was completed by groups of experts led by Daw Nu Mra Zan and U Maung Maung Gyi and staff, who should be commemorated for their goodwill in this project.

Shwedagon Zedi-daw Buddha Museum and Maha Bouda-win Showroom  
Head of Committee for Renovation  
18 March 2016

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<sup>833</sup> This study cites Daw Nu Mra Zan's plan which designates the first and second floors referred to above as Middle and Upper Floor respectively.

<sup>834</sup> King Mindon's donation is recorded in trustees' notes as arriving in October 1871 or 147 years ago. See Elizabeth Moore, "Ritual Continuity and Stylistic Change in Pagoda Consecration and Renovation," in *Proceedings of the Myanmar Two Millenia Conference, December 15-17, 1999. Part 3* (Yangon: Universities Historical Research Centre, 2000), 23, <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/482/>.

Buddha Museum and Maha Bouda-win Showroom  
Opening hours: 9 am to 12pm and 1pm to 4pm  
Closed Every Monday and Tuesday

Restrictions in the Buddha Museum and Maha Bouda-win Showroom

- No photography (including phone camera), no video recording
- No smoking, no alcohol-drinking and no betel-chewing
- Keep silent (in order to study peacefully)
- No sitting, eating and sleeping within the museum
- Please accept security checks
- Weapons are not allowed
- Keep your belongings safe; any losses are not the responsibility of pagoda trustees.

## Appendix 2.

### What we can learn about Yadana Man Aung Pagoda.

*What we can learn about Yadana Man Aung Pagoda.* U Tun Yee, 19<sup>th</sup> November 1969

Translation: Yin May Thawe, 29 September 2017.

Greetings:

To all Outstanding Workers, ladies and gentlemen who have come to the pagoda.

Our gaw-paka group is proud and glad to meet and welcome Outstanding Workers who have come to visit and pray at this temple today. We would now like to explain things that you should know about the temple. While we will make this presentation in three parts: firstly, as second secretary of the gaw-paka group, I, U Tun Yee, will explain the biography of the pagoda; secondly, second chairman will explain the history of the pagoda and to conclude a member of the gaw-paka group will wish all Outstanding Workers – may you all receive merit.

To start we will visit the four prayer halls. You are now in the Eastern prayer hall.

[Pg.1]

Outstanding Workers of the Socialist Government of the Union of Myanmar. Our treasury team of Yadana Man Aung Pagoda is very glad to give you a brief history of Yadana Man Aung Pagoda. Before we tell you about this we would like to tell you about the biography of the pagoda. You can see many arts related to traditional culture both inside and outside. Firstly, I would like to explain the names and forms of the Buddha statues in the four prayer halls.

The name of the Buddha image in the eastern prayer hall is 'Yadana Man Aung'. It is a simple image in *bhūmipatta muddā* (P). It is made of *pyinsa lawha* (M) and it is a copy of the Mandalay Mahamuni Buddha. It was made of *lin-lon* wood from the tree known in Pali as the Rajayatana tree. It was later covered with the five metals alloy. The eyes, lips and hair were made separately with many viss of real gold. The height is nine *taung* and width six *taung*.<sup>835</sup> The relics inside will be explained later when we tell you the history of the pagoda.

The name of the Buddha image in the southern prayer hall is 'Yadana Htut Kaung'. It is a simple form as well. The name of the Buddha image in the western hall is 'Yadana Tan Hsaung'. The gesture of the statue differs from the others. The hands are clasped in *jhāna muddā* (P). The name of the Buddha image in the northern prayer hall is 'Yadana U Shaung'. One hand is open on top of crossed legs, the other hand is held up and open in *abhaya muddā* and *vara muddā* (P) respectively. It is the attitude of dispelling fear and of giving wishes. If you look carefully at the arches in front of the four Buddha images you will see very fine *tha-yo* floral decoration, an ancient inheritance from the Bagan era.<sup>836</sup>

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<sup>835</sup> Two *taung* is equivalent to three feet or one yard.

<sup>836</sup> 'Thayo' refers to lacquer putty which is modelled on wire-work to form fine reliefs that are mounted on the walls.

[Pg. 2]

At the eastern prayer hall on the left of the Yadana Man Aung Buddha, you can see the praying figure on the left is Chief Disciple Shin Moggalana known for his miraculous powers. And on the right, you can see the figure of Chief Disciple Shin Sariputta known for his wisdom. At the southern prayer hall to the left of Yadana Htut Khaung Buddha, you can see the image of Ashin Kodannya who attained the first noble stage of the Aryan Path [of the *arhat* or *yahanda*] after Buddha's First Sermon. And on the right you can see the image of Ashin Yewada who attained recognition for his powers of purification. At the western prayer hall to the left of Yadana Tan Hsaung Buddha, you can see the image of Shin Upali who was recognised for obeying all the precepts. On the right is the image of Ananta Matitay Ashin Thu Myat who was recognised for receiving all the donations and for his physical beauty and sweet voice bestowed by the Buddha. At the northern prayer hall to the left of Yadana U Shaung Buddha, you can see the image of Ashin Gawun Pati who was very strong minded. On the right you can see the image Ashin Yahula, the son of Buddha who is both powerful and glorious. Unlike other pagodas, Yadana Man Aung Temple is surrounded by these eight yahanda of the mundane and supra-mundane worlds.

After this look at the upper part of the pagoda. The shape is not bell-shaped. It is octagonal and has eight facets. It is the shape of the crown of ancient kings. Each of the eight sides has seven terraces with 28 Buddha images in niches. [Below] there are eight bronze standing images of the Buddha each with a different posture within niches. There are four hexagonal corner stupas each with six niches and images of arhats including Shin Than Kesa, with miraculous powers. There are also ten niches at the front of each prayer hall each with an image.

That is why in this pagoda there are:

1. 336 niches,
2. 1,000 umbrellas in total. The stands of the umbrellas are the barrels of rifles. According to the chronicle, those rifles were taken from the Intha who came to fight Nyaung Shwe. We will tell you more about this when we present the history of the pagoda.
3. There are eight yahanda starting with the disciples Shin Maha Moggalana and Shin Sariputta.
4. There are 48 cabinets within the old museum which displays many kinds of things. They display Nyaung Shwe pipes and Moe Nae pipes as there is the saying: 'Nyaung Shwe seh-ou, Moe Nae seh-tan'. Other things displayed include the kammawa donated by King Mindon to Nyaung Shwe Sāsanabaing Sayadaw during his coronation year. In the cabinets there are many old things including palm leaf manuscripts.

If I tell you about everything in the museum it will take time, so I will stop here. On the walls of the vestibules there are old mural paintings. These are getting old and the colours are fading. We spoke with well-known painters who were students of Mandalay Alinka kyaw-zwa Bagyi Sayagyi U Saw Maung. They painted over his original works without destroying them. That is almost everything you should know. We will now continue with the history of the pagoda.

## Appendix 2.1

### Nyaung Shwe Yadana Man Aung Temple. A Brief History.

Nyaung Shwe Yadana Man Aung Temple  
Brief History<sup>837</sup>  
U San Ya

Translation: Yin May Thawe, 29 September 2017

[pg.1]

Before I talk about history of Yadana Man Aung Temple, I would like to let you Outstanding Workers know that the pagoda you see now is not original. The original is inside the current stupa. The upper terraces of the original stupa had a hemispherical dome, conical spire and banana bud. After renovation it became octagonal as you can see. I will now tell you the history of the building of the original pagoda.

Nyaung Shwe was built by Sawbwa Si Saing Pa in 721 ME [1359]. Sao Maung was one of the adopted sons of the King Mindon of Mandalay, who ruled after 23 [prior] reigns. In 1227 ME [1865] Mindon gave Nyaung Shwe to Sao Maung to rule.

In 1228 ME [1866] on Friday full moon day of Tabaung, they undertook the *panet-yaik* ceremony.<sup>838</sup>

In 1229 ME [1867] full moon day of Dagu, the *lin-lun* wood image was made for the pagoda. 20 *taun* in height, it arrived from the western mountains through a dream. To enshrine the relics inside the image is a cylindrical form 12 *taun* and five *htwa* in length with five connected containers.<sup>839</sup> Each has a casket in gold, silver and *mou-jou*.<sup>840</sup> In total there are 15 caskets. They enshrine 36 real Buddha relics from India given by King Mindon, gold, silver, and ruby jewellery. The height is 64 *taun*,<sup>841</sup> the plinth is 36 *taun*, the surrounding wall is 150 *taun*. It took nine years to build. The water-pouring [sharing merit] ceremony and the *hti-daw* ceremony were done on the full moon day of Dagu in 1238 ME [1876].

This is the brief history of the original stupa which you see now from the inside.

After the *hti-daw* ceremony for the original stupa in 1238 ME [1876], the *lin-lun* wood Buddha statue did not last long. So, a cover of five metals (*pyinsa-lawha*)<sup>842</sup> like the Mahamuni Buddha, was made in Mandalay by metalsmiths. After casting, at the centre

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<sup>837</sup> This compilation of notes was made by U San Ya on the occasion of the visit by a government workers' group, 19 November 1969. It is undated but referred to by U Tun Yee in his opening address on the same day (see Appendix 2).

<sup>838</sup> Literally 'stake-driving' or groundbreaking. See Glossary.

<sup>839</sup> Traditional units of measurement are used here. One *htwa* is the span between finger and thumb (approximately six inches), three *htwa* = one *taun* (approximately 18 inches). See Glossary. Yin May Thawe, 29 September 2017. The image is 30 feet in height; the inner enshrinement space is 19 feet in length.

<sup>840</sup> Mineral brought down by lightning. Thunderbolt or weapon associated with Thagyamin, see Glossary.

<sup>841</sup> Probably refers to the height of the original pagoda before the earthquake of 1912 and subsequent renovation. See page 2.

<sup>842</sup> Alloy of gold, silver, bronze, iron and lead.

of the lin-lun wood Buddha image, the five containers each of two htwa were bolted together.

[pg.2]

The first relic was decorated with rubies, the second with diamonds, the third with emeralds, the fourth with sapphires and fifth with *pyeh oo*<sup>843</sup>. Within these caskets given by King Mindon there are a total of 15 caskets joined in five places. They are two htwa wide and 12 taun in height. They are wrapped in gold plate inscribed with the verses of the First Sermon, the Doctrine of Cause and Effect, the 24 Causal Relations and Doctrine of Impermanence. Another plate of silver was used to cover the caskets. The caskets with relics were put in the relic chamber. The Yadana Man Aung Buddha image is like the Mahamuni Buddha. According to history this Buddha image was made of 20,000 viss of bronze and many viss of gold. This Buddha image was consecrated in 1263 ME [1899] on Friday, a full moon in the month of Kason.

In 1262 ME [1900] the outer wall of the pagoda was renovated as you can now see. According to the history of the pagoda, in 1276 ME [1914] an earthquake caused the umbrella and conical spire to fall. Remark: according to the Nyaung Shwe Chronicle, the earthquake was in 1274 ME [1912] in the month of Nayon.

In 1276 ME [1914] after the earthquake and renovation, the original dome was octagonal in shape. With knowledge of the earthquake, a base of 300 viss of bronze was made for the umbrella spire above the banana bud. This is like a bronze cover for the pagoda. Rain would not leak into the inner section of the pagoda. Without such leaks, the pagoda would withstand a normal earthquake.

The renovated pagoda had a plinth of length 40 taun (60 feet). The height was 70 taun (105 feet). After renovation the conical spire was octagonal in shape, with corner niches each containing 28 Buddhas. The dome of the pagoda was also octagonal with 8 niches containing standing Buddha figures. In summary there were 366 niches, 304 Buddha images, 32 figures of *yahanda*.<sup>844</sup>

[pg.3]

The 32 yahanda include 24 figures within the side stupas and eight within the four main prayer halls. These were installed within niches with umbrellas and covered with glass mosaic and gilding. In 1315 ME [1953] after the gaw-paka group was introduced, these were not inspiring any more so bronze plaques and gilding were applied.

In conclusion the height of the pagoda is 105 feet and the length is 60 feet. The weight of the eastern image is 20,000 viss and there are 336 niches with 304 images, 32 yahanda and the length of the outer walls is 150 taun (225 feet). The total number of umbrella spires is 1000.<sup>845</sup>

In 1224 ME [1862] during the reign of pagoda donor Sao Maung, the chief of Indein Sao On together with the Intha and Inthu fought against the town. They reached Nanthae village upon which King Mindon of Mandalay sent 1000 soldiers led by U Latt. The stems of the umbrella spires were the barrels of the rifles they took from the Intha.

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<sup>843</sup> A multicoloured stone that comes from the mountain from within other stones, like sandstone, can be found in river beds.

<sup>844</sup> Also known as arhats (S) or arahants (P).

<sup>845</sup> A handwritten note adds that the height of the hti-daw is 20 taun and width is 9 taun.

Now you know about the history of the pagoda, let me conclude. Next the treasury group of the pagoda would like to share *metta* with you [Pali invocations follow].



## Appendix 3.

### Narrative One: A Relic Stupa with No Images

Translation: Sithu Htun Soe, Su Latt Win

Alodawpyi zedi / Alodawpyi.  
Explanation about the pagoda.  
How it came into existence.

There are four kinds of zedi: dhatu zedi, dhamma zedi, *ouddeittha* zedi, and paribawga zedi.<sup>846</sup>

Now Alodawpyi zedi is an historic dhatu zedi. According to its architectural style, it was built by Kyanzitttha in the 11<sup>th</sup> century AD. Inside there is an ink inscription. The name Alodawpyi refers to the dhatu zedi and nothing else.

In 1354 ME (Waso) it became famous across the country.<sup>847</sup> But there was no Buddha image inside.

Alodawpyi Sayadaw wanted lay devotees and monks to make offerings of alms,<sup>848</sup> flowers, water, fruit, and lights. Therefore, he applied for permission to the Department of Archaeology to make four seated Buddha images to put inside.

Sculptor U Win from New Bagan made the image in dharmacakra mudrā according to the order from Sayadaw. This image was copied from the one in the Bagan Archaeological Museum.

He made four seated Buddha images and an extra nine images (total 13).

Alodawpyi Pagoda only had images made in 1354 ME. This in truth is the Alodawpyi Pagoda, the great dhatu zedi-daw.

By Gopaka Pagoda Trustee Group  
Alodawpyi Hpaya  
Bagan-Nyaung U

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<sup>846</sup> The different types of relics are listed in the Glossary.

<sup>847</sup> 1354 ME (Waso) or July 1992.

<sup>848</sup> Alms refers to hsun or food for the monks, usually curry and rice.

## Appendix 3.1

### Narrative Two: Consecration of the Image

Translation: Su Latt Win

“Alodawpyi”

Present Short History of a Wish fulfilling Pagoda.

1. This honourable Alodawpyi Pagoda at Kyaukpadaung township, Nyaung U District, was founded by the Badhana Nayaka Pyidaw Mudaw [highest religious authority], Mahagama Wasaka Bhandita Kamata Nasariya dhamma missionary, [named] Bhaddanta Ariyawuntha Mettaymya. He discovered this ancient pagoda which had been previously well known yet had disappeared. He cleared the land and renovated the pagoda in 1349 [1987] on the full moon day of Tabaung.<sup>849</sup>

2. The pagoda renovation was finished in 1354 [1992] on the full moon of Nadaw.<sup>850</sup> So that all beings may equally share in the merits of this wish fulfilling pagoda, a ceremony was held. This included offerings of fruits (5,000), flowers (5,000), candles (5,000), alms food (5,000), water cups (5,000) and fragrant water as well as white umbrellas. The ceremony was attended by lay devotees from near and far including Bagan, Nyaung U, Kyaukpadaung, Meikthila, Yenangyaung, Kyauk, Pakkoku, Yezekyo, Yangon and Mandalay. So that all together could have their wishes fulfilled, all fervently prayed and made wishes during the Buddha consecration ceremony.

3. At this pagoda, extraordinary things have happened. The following are noted:

- a) In 1354 the full moon of Nadaw when the opening ceremony was held, lay devotees were amazed by lights in different colours including white, red, gold, and blue, radiating about 10 *pe*<sup>851</sup> from the reliquary in the upper part of the stupa.
- b) Devotees experienced a clear mind and strong sense of wishing to make offerings.
- c) The devotees took the five precepts and recited the Buddha's *goundaw*<sup>852</sup> for one special wish to be obtained within a period of seven days to three or four months.

Note: Those that follow Sayadaw's guidelines will fulfil their wishes.

Alodawpyi Pagoda  
Gopaka committee  
Nyaung U Township, Bagan

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<sup>849</sup> Around February.

<sup>850</sup> Around November.

<sup>851</sup> Unit of measurement, feet.

<sup>852</sup> Nine attributes of the Buddha; see Glossary.

## Appendix 3.2

## Survey of Museum Visitors, Buddha Images Showroom, Bagan Archaeological Museum, 19–21, 23 February 2016.<sup>853</sup>

Name, age, occupation, home town, number in group, reason for visit to Bagan, number of previous visits to museum:	What did you learn at the museum today?	Which objects do you like here? Why?	Do you know about this mudrā (dharmacakra mudrā) / do you know about the 28 Buddhas?	What do you think about this display (seated Buddha or 28 Buddha display)?	Additional comments
1. Kyaw Zaw Myint, 17 years old; a student in computer studies from Monywa; 11 in group; general visit to Bagan; 2 previous trips to the museum. 19/2	Learned more about ancient art this time.	Architectural models in the other showroom. Described the seated Buddha as 'very attractive' and 'good looking'. Felt drawn to this Buddha; its simplicity and posture.	Hasn't studied mudrā before. But he knows about dharmacakra mudrā.	The Buddha faces the front of the museum. He prefers to look at the Buddha rather than read the text.	Includes Alodawpyi Pagoda in his itinerary.
2. Dr. Wa Wa Aye, 42 years old; lecturer, Central Institute of Civil Service and director of private company, from Yangon; 4 in group; made 2 previous trips to the museum. 19/2	Learned that the gold Buddha (other side of showroom) is 900 years old.	The carved wood Buddha image is very rare and precious. Is looking for a powerful image that his wife prayed to when she was last here.	It is the First Sermon. He was ordained once and learned from a monk. His grandmother also taught him. Schools are now teaching this.	Interesting. Would like more information on the text panel. The caption is not perfect; one can only see that it is made of sandstone. A bilingual caption would be better.	Is proud of Bagan; conveyed the saying : 'If we are Myanmar, we should go to Bagan'. Included Alodawpyi Pagoda in his itinerary. His wife lectures to government staff.
3. Shin Thuriya, 38 years old; monk, from Theyat, Magwe region; 22 in group, on his first religious visit to Bagan and first visit to the museum. 19/2	Has learned about old images which he has never seen before.	Displays of social life. Much is new to him so he cannot identify anything in particular.	It is the First Sermon which he learned about from his sayadaw.	It is good but it is also his first visit. He's not senior enough (to comment) and we should consult someone more senior.	Includes Alodawpyi Pagoda in itinerary.

<sup>853</sup> Interviews were conducted near to the seated Buddha and/or the 28 Buddhas display depending on the visitor's focus of interest.

<p>4. Tin Tin Twe, 29 years old; bank worker from Kale in North Sagaing; 19 in group; looking for peacefulness and wish-fulfilment in Bagan; made 4 previous trips to the museum. 20/2</p>	<p>Wandering around Bagan, we can see a few things. Here at the museum I can see everything – social life and ancient times.</p>	<p>Ancient things, utility objects like smoking pipes.</p>	<p>Demonstrates the gestures but says she does not really know about mudrās. Has not read about them.</p>	<p>A nice display, easy to learn from it. Better than overcrowding at the temples and cave sites. At the temple I pray but here it is just observing. I know there's a difference between them – they are original [refers to the 28 Buddha display].</p>	<p>Includes Alodawpyi Pagoda in her itinerary.</p>
<p>5. U Maung Maung Kyaw, 43 years old; assistant engineer, water resources utilisation; from Mingyan Township; 9 in his group, brought 5 children to visit Bagan. 20/2.</p>	<p>Has learned about iconography during the Bagan period. Can now compare Buddha images from other periods.</p>	<p>Displays about the palaces.</p>	<p>Still learning about mudrās as it's difficult to obtain knowledge. Difficult for children to learn. Read about mudrās. This is the First Sermon. Often heard about it since childhood.</p>	<p>Important for our nation and religion. Should have a panel about Theravāda Buddhism in Bagan so that we can know more about the first empire and Buddhism.</p>	<p>None.</p>
<p>6. Ma Khin Wai, 30 years old; mother of two; from Pauk Township in Magwe Region; 10 in group; first visit to the museum. 20/2.</p>	<p>Learned many new things.</p>	<p>Ancient objects. Buddha images on plinths are interesting.</p>	<p>Has never heard about mudrā before but has some idea of them now.</p>	<p>N/a</p>	<p>Reason for visiting Bagan: we are Myanmar, therefore we must go to Bagan. Includes Alodawpyi Pagoda in the itinerary.</p>
<p>7. U Ye Leh, 32 years old; occupation not given; from Nyaung U Township in Bagan; 6 in group, visits often. 20/2.</p>	<p>General knowledge gained.</p>	<p>Likes everything.</p>	<p>They learn from talking with each other about mudrās.</p>	<p>The display is all right. The museum is too large to cover all the showrooms.</p>	<p>Alodawpyi Pagoda is on the itinerary.</p>

<p>8. Daw Kyi Win, 54 years old; shop owner; from Kale in Sagaing region; visiting relics of Buddha and because of Bagan's heritage value; first visit to the museum. 20/2</p>	<p>Learned about Buddhist heritage, gained knowledge of ancient artefacts. 'Amazing'.</p>	<p>Likes the social life section. Learned about hair knots.</p>	<p>Recognises the mudrās (makes gestures with her hands).</p>	<p>The text panel can be understood. It is peaceful in here.</p>	<p>Reason for visiting Bagan: we are Myanmar, therefore we must to go Bagan. Alodawpyi Pagoda is on the itinerary.</p>
<p>9. Daw Meh Khin Kyaw, 37 years old; assistant lecturer in business management; from Monywa; 111 in her group; bringing students but is also a Buddhist who believes there are powerful Buddhas in Bagan; visited the museum 3 times before. 20/2.</p>	<p>Feel peaceful and proud by observing the displays.</p>	<p>Hair styles display. As teachers by law they have to wear their hair in particular styles, so it is interesting. Every Myanmar woman thinks that hair is valuable.</p>	<p>First Sermon is usually known by Buddhists. She first learned about this when she was 6 years old. Some learn at dharma school, others from paintings.</p>	<p>The display is easy to understand for Buddhists, but difficult for foreigners. Suggests the museum needs skilful curators to present.</p>	<p>May visit Alodawpyi Pagoda depending on whether they have time.</p>
<p>10. Daw Mya Sein, 78 years old; retired; from Yangon; 5 in group; visiting her son in Kyauk U, Sagaing region. 20/2.</p>	<p>General knowledge.</p>	<p>Not sure, they just arrived.</p>	<p>Does not know about mudrās.</p>	<p>Mudrās are not easy to learn about.</p>	<p>Alodawpyi Pagoda is on the itinerary.</p>
<p>11. U Thein Thun, 62 years old; from Kyaukpadaung Township in Nyaung U District; lay specialist in Nine Offerings ritual; 6 in group; brought his children to learn; visited museum 3 times. 21/2.</p>	<p>Too rushed with the kids to look after to say what they learned.</p>	<p>Nothing specific, likes everything.</p>	<p>It is the Buddha teaching.</p>	<p>The text panel makes it easier to learn. The children go to dharma school so are now learning.</p>	<p>Alodawpyi Pagoda is on the itinerary.</p>

12. U Neh Myo, 22 years old; driver; from Yangon; 20 in group; visited many times before. 21/2.	Learned about Nagayon Pagoda.	Likes the display of 28 Buddhas from Nagayon Pagoda.	Already knows about the 28 Buddhas.	The captions are easy to understand. One can learn a lot from the display; it's a combination of art and ancient Buddha images.	None.
13. Bai Min Kan, 14 years old; student; from Yezekyo, near Pakhangyi; 40 in group; on school tour to Bagan to learn about cultural heritage; first visit to the museum. 21/2.	Learned about Kings Kyanzitha and Alaungpaya.	Nothing specific, likes all.	Doesn't know about mudrā but knows about the First Sermon.	Doesn't understand the text panel.	None.
14. U Kyaw Linh Te, 34 years old; bank manager in Nyaung U Township in Bagan; originally from Mandalay; 3 in his group; making a local visit; visited the museum once before. 21/2.	Learned about this Buddha image (seated Buddha). It seems to have no robes and the hair is interesting.	The seated Buddha, the gold Buddha image in this showroom.	Doesn't know much about mudrā but knows about the First Sermon.	Each mudrā should be perfectly described. Would like more information about history, mudrās and provenance in the caption. Every age group should be able to get information. The wide showroom is good if more objects come into the museum. This position in front of the Buddha is where he stayed the longest. He has seen it before in the Alodawpyi Temple.	Had heard about the seated Buddha before coming. Praying to replica images is not quite the same as the original.
15. U Myint Thein, 66 years old; engineer from Yangon; 35 in group; first visit to the museum. 21/2.	Early society and its development.	28 Buddha image display.	Didn't know about the 28 Buddhas from Nagayon Pagoda.	Both captions and text panel were informative. Insufficient light to read the captions. Suggests lighting them up with lightboxes.	Alodawpyi Pagoda on itinerary.
16. U Thein Nyo, 67 years old; farmer from Wakema; 12 in group on pilgrimage; visited the museum once before. 23/2.	Learned about weapons used in ancient times and about Buddha images.	Nothing specific.	N/a	The 28 Buddhas display feels very complete and easy to understand. Likes the museum but saying prayers is better at the temple.	Alodawpyi Pagoda and Nagayon Pagoda are on the itinerary.

<p>17. U Thein Htaik, 67 years old; retired dentist; from Magwe; 4 in group; meeting relatives with his brother from abroad; making a general visit; made many visits to the museum before. 23/2.</p>	<p>About the Nagayon Pagoda, although have not had time to read the text panel.</p>	<p>Alodawpyi Buddha. His family prays a lot to this Buddha.</p>	<p>Large panel on mudrā should use Pali terms as we are Theravada Buddhists [Sanskrit is used here]. Buddha said it should be used as it was the language of Maghada.</p>	<p>The showroom is a sacred space because of the Buddha images. It is better to remove shoes but they should be put on racks.</p>	<p>Alodawpyi Pagoda, Nagayon Pagoda.</p>
<p>18. Shin Zaw Thika, 12 years old; novice monk, from Hsipaw in Shan State; 25 monks in group; on pilgrimage; first visit to the museum. 23/2.</p>	<p>Learned about the seated Buddha and dharmacakra mudrā.</p>	<p>Nothing specific</p>	<p>Feels he is too young to know about mudrā.</p>	<p>More explanation rather than illustrations could be included in future.</p>	<p>Alodawpyi Pagoda is on the itinerary.</p>
<p>19. Sai Nyi Nyi, 14 years old; student; from Bago; 3 in group on pilgrimage; first visit to the museum. 23/2.</p>	<p>Buddha seated with legs pendant.</p>	<p>Alodawpyi Buddha. It is wish fulfilling ('sutaungpyi'). Prays to be educated well. He knows about the replica at the temple from his father.</p>	<p>Still learning and can understand.</p>	<p>Would like more text panels and photos in future.</p>	<p>Alodawpyi Pagoda is on the itinerary. His father added that the seated Buddha was better for wish fulfilment than the replica at the temple.</p>

## Appendix 3.3 Survey of Pilgrims, Alodawpyi Pagoda, Bagan, 11 August 2016

Name, age, occupation, home-town, who came with them, number of visits:	Were wishes fulfilled? Example of wishes	How did you know about Alodawpyi Pagoda?	Do you have an image of Alodawpyi Buddha?	Do you still have it?	If no what did you do with it, e.g. donated to another pagoda?	Do you know about that text panel (main entrance) and the history of this pagoda?	Have you seen Alodawpyi Buddha at the museum?	Other comments:
1. Phone Myint Thu, 32 years old; unemployed from Bago; came with friends and family; made 4 visits.	Yes, slowly. N/a.	Friends.	Yes, at home.	No.	n/a	Yes. But not aware of text panel.	Yes.	We just stand at the museum. This one (at the temple) is more powerful.
2. U Soe Lwin, 39 years old; a merchant from Daik Oo (Bago region); came with colleagues; made 6 visits.	Yes. Getting wealthier.	Heard it was famous.	Yes, acquires them at the stall on site.	Yes, with the family.	Often gives images to friends.	Knows about the text panel. It's built by a king, renovated by a monk.	Yes. Will go today.	It is unusual to pray at the museum.
3. Dr. Myint Thein, 55 years old; a vet from Yangon; came with colleagues; more than 10 visits.	See note <sup>854</sup>	It is one of many famous places in Bagan <sup>855</sup>	No.	n/a	n/a	Has some knowledge.	Has not been to the museum.	That this is a copy does not matter.
4. Saung Win (not Buddhist), 24 years old; NGO worker from Myitkyina; came with friends and family; made 2 visits.	N/a.	From friends	n/a	n/a	n/a	Has read some history.	Yes.	Knows of the copies. Cannot recognise originals.
5. U Htun Aung, 42 years old; works for Ministry of Forestry; is from Kale, Sagaing region; came with family; made more than 3 visits.	Doesn't wish for profit.	Heard from his landlord.	No	n/a	n/a	Knows of murals by Kyanzitha inside the temple.	No. Didn't know about the copies.	Likes the peace of the temple.
6. Dweh Ma Soe, 39 years old; a ministry auditor from Seik Phyu, Magwe region; came with friends; more than ten visits.	Yes. To bring the family. Has returned many times.	Heard about Alodawpyi Sayadaw from a friend.	Yes, at home.	Yes	Gave one to parents.	Has not read the panel.	Has not visited. But has heard about the original.	Will pray at the museum if she visits.
7. Anonymous, 57 years old; electrical engineer from Bagan; is alone; visits daily.	Yes. Won the lottery once.	Recalls the abbot's work, another monk restored the stupa behind.	Yes, at home.	Yes	No need to put the image in another pagoda.	Has read the panel.	Yes	The Buddha at the entrance is famous; it follows Buddhas of each era.

<sup>854</sup> According to the Buddha there is no giving and taking; just prayers with soul and mind i.e. strong belief. The importance of concentration and the right conditions for prayer means for example that the Shwedagon Pagoda is better than Botahtaung Pagoda as it is more peaceful.

<sup>855</sup> They go to many famous places; it is not right to pray at only one temple.



## Appendix 4 Participant Consent Form

### Introduction

The purpose of this form is to provide you with information so you can decide whether to participate in this study. Any questions you may have will be answered by the researcher or by the other contact persons provided below. Once you are familiar with the information on the form and have asked any questions you may have, you can decide whether or not to participate. If you agree, please either sign this form or else provide verbal consent

<b>Research title:</b>	[Include an alternative title if the official title of your thesis or project would be difficult for research participants to understand.]
<b>Type of Project</b>	[e.g. PhD Research, Funded Research Project]
<b>Project funders:</b>	[Include the funders of the project, and any interest which they may have in the research or control over use of the research.]
<b>Project partners:</b>	[Include any other organisations (e.g. other HE institutions) which are involved with SOAS in delivering the project, and what involvement they may have in the data.]
<b>Research coordinator:</b>	[Give the name and work contact details of the person (usually the researcher) who is responsible for the project.]
<b>Purpose of Research:</b>	[Describe background, aims and duration of the project in as clear a language as possible and simple enough to be understood by research participants]
<b>Reasons for data collection:</b>	[Describe why you have chosen the research participant for your data collection and who how many other participants you will collect data from]
<b>Nature of Participation</b>	[Describe the procedures involved with the data collection e.g. duration of interviews; recording method; technology; who will collect the data; whether personal data will be anonymized; use of audio recordings]
<b>Risks and Benefits of participation</b>	[Explain any benefits for the participant in being involved in the research and also any risks, inconvenience or distress that could be caused by participation]
<b>Data Sharing:</b>	[Indicate any individuals or organisations outside SOAS who will receive or be given access to non-anonymised personal data gathered in the project.]
<b>Countries to which the data may be transferred:</b>	[Researcher to complete. Indicate any specific countries to which the data may be transferred, including the UK if the data is gathered outside the UK. The form also should include the following text:

Data about you gathered in the course of your participation in this project may be transferred to countries or territories outside the European Economic Area for purposes connected with this project and similar future projects, subject to appropriate safeguards to protect the security and confidentiality of your data.

- Security measures:** [Describe in a general way any special security measures which will be put in place to protect research participants' data during the life of the project e.g. encryption, secure storage, password protection]
- Methods of anonymisation:** [If you plan or need to anonymise the research data then describe the steps which will be taken to remove identifying information from your data set and publications]
- Methods of publication:** [Describe how the data and the research results will be published, including whether research participants will be anonymized in the published information or PhD theses and where this published information will be available e.g. Open Access via the internet]

### **Withdrawal of Consent**

Please note your participation is voluntary and you may decide to leave the study at any time. You may also refuse to answer specific questions you are uncomfortable with. You may withdraw permission for your data to be used, at any time up to [Researcher to enter date or point in project when it is no longer possible to withdraw consent for use of personal data e.g. when data has been anonymized] in which case notes, transcriptions and recordings will be destroyed. Withdrawal or refusal to participate will not affect your relationship with [Insert name of organization to which research participant belongs if you are doing research in an organization. Remove this statement if not appropriate].

### **Data Protection Statement**

Information about you which is gathered in the course of this research project, once held in the United Kingdom, will be protected by the UK Data Protection Act and will be subject to SOAS's Data Protection Policy. You have the right to request access under the Data Protection Act to the information which SOAS holds about you. Further information about your rights under the Act and how SOAS handles personal data is available on the Data Protection pages of the SOAS website (<http://www.soas.ac.uk/infocomp/dpa/index.html>), and by contacting the Information Compliance Manager at the following address: Information Compliance Manager, SOAS, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG, United Kingdom (e-mail to: [dataprotection@soas.ac.uk](mailto:dataprotection@soas.ac.uk)).

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**Contact Information**

Telephone No: [Include both your UK mobile number and the local phone number you will use or set up]

Email Address:

Postal Address:

Alternative contact: [Include your supervisor’s name and contact details or other colleagues on your research project]

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**Research Participant Declaration**

I confirm that I have read the above information relating to the research project. I freely consent to my information being used in the manner and for the purposes described, and I waive my copyright and other intellectual property rights as indicated. I understand that I may withdraw my consent to participate in the project, and that I should contact the project coordinator if I wish to do so.

**Participant Name:**

**Signature:** **Date:**

**Researcher Name:**

**Signature:** **Date:**

PLEASE KEEP THIS FORM FOR FUTURE REFERENCE