



DEMYSTIFYING MISTS : THE CASE FOR THE MON

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Introduction

Evidence from Lower Burma suggests that Mon civilization arose during the first millennium. Large walled enclosures, brick monasteries, laterite stupa bases, terracotta panels, votive tablets, a distinctive coin series, Hindu and Buddhist stone sculptures, Buddhist bronzes, and Mon inscriptions are among the important solid building blocks for establishing an early Mon presence in Lower Burma, centered in Thaton and its environs. By way of confirming the sophisticated nature of Mon civilization in early Burma is the unequivocal role the Mon played in the formation of Pagan culture. To substantiate a Mon presence in Lower Burma it is unnecessary to resort to (or even debunk) later chronicles compiled centuries later with their well-known biases ; these chronicles are by their very nature of little use in assessing the question of Mon civilization in Lower Burma in the first millennium. In fact, the abundant tangible evidence on the ground provides a refreshing tonic for all that the later chronicles so sadly lack.

A recent thought-provoking thesis has argued that early Lower Burma was not in the hands of the Mon but rather the Pyu (Michael Aung-Thwin, *Mists of Ramanna : The Legend that was Lower Burma*, Hawaii : 2005). That a chapter of the book is entitled “The Pyu Millennium” conveys the degree to which the Mon have been shunted into the shadows.

Indeed, this new thesis requires us to exchange a discredited 'Mon Paradigm' for a fresh 'Pyu Paradigm', as one reviewer, Pierre Pichard, poignantly phrased his objections (*Aseanie*, no. 18).

This new Pyu Paradigm is appealing at first glance, since historians have interpreted the chronicles far too literally and perhaps overstated the role of the Mon in the formation of Pagan. Moreover, these former interpretations were promoted by a generation of hopelessly ethno-centric colonial gentlemen whose misguided worldview reflected the foggy and backward thinking that plagued their dark, bygone era. Indeed, the Mon Paradigm provides the forward looking historian of today with an irresistible punching-bag, a cornucopia of 'Orientalism' ripe for debunking.

The new Pyu Paradigm then comes attractively packaged for most modern readers unfamiliar with the hard evidence in Lower Burma and therefore unable to evaluate properly the merits of Pyu Paradigm. But a careful examination of the physical evidence in Lower Burma reveals an altogether different picture. To purge the Mon from the early Burmese landscape may serve the interests of some, but the new Pyu Paradigm does little justice to the history of the Burma.

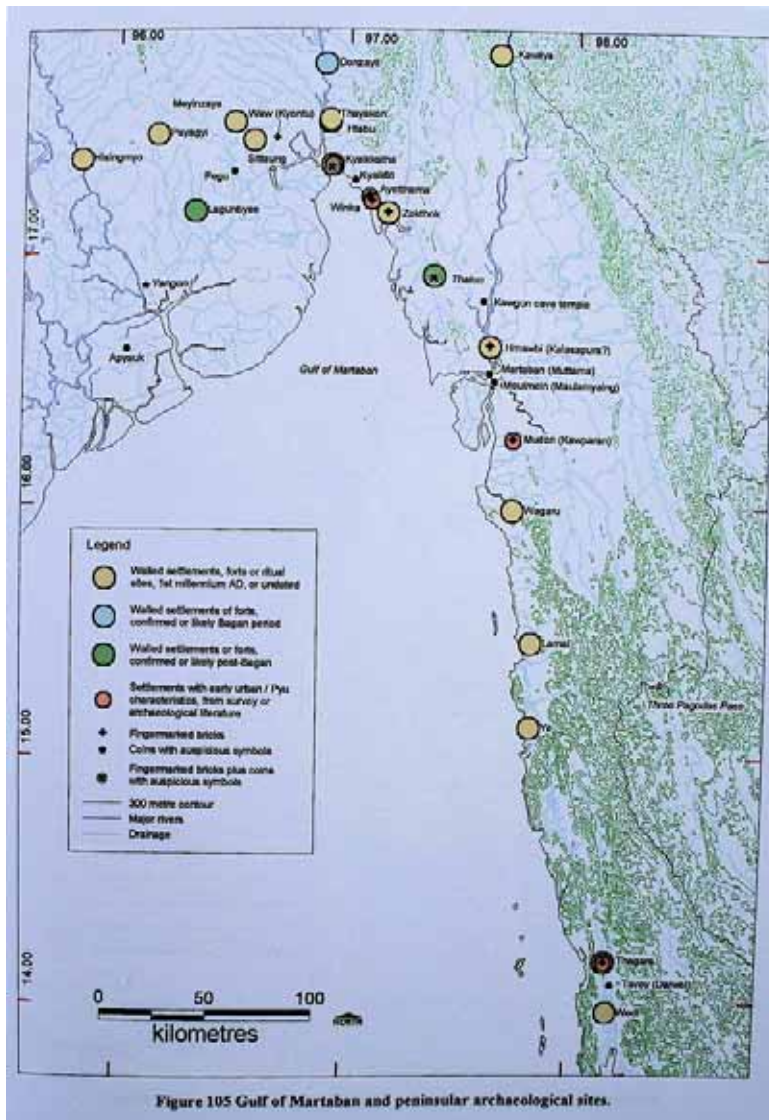
SCOPE

This paper has two dimensions : (1) to reveal the rich range and depth of civilization in Lower Burma during the first millennium and somewhat beyond, to ca. 1200, and (2) to connect this activity to the Mon.

The first task requires a simple review of well-published material, an evaluation that immediately reveals that the Lower Burma was on a par with Upper Burma during the first millennium and pre-Pagan period. This task is straightforward, in as much as the evidence is accessible and virtually self-evident.

The second goal, to attribute this activity to the Mon, is far more challenging, since the epigraphic record in Lower Burma is meager and ambiguous, as *Mists* wisely reminds us. On the other hand, that no Pyu inscriptions in Lower Burma have been found in Lower Burma is probative, and this fact must be kept in mind at all times when the Pyu are presumed to have inhabited Lower Burma.

A convincing case for the Mon in Lower Burma must be based therefore upon an analysis that does not rest primarily upon epigraphic data. Some might insist that a case for the Mon in Lower Burma cannot be substantiated without firm epigraphic evidence, but by the same logic we would have to ask the same question of the Pyu : how can we associate the Pyu with Lower Burma, if there are no Pyu inscriptions in Lower Burma ? A reluctance to accept nothing less than dated inscriptions could be likened to a prosecutor who refused to charge a



Map : After Hudson, 2004 : Fig. 105

To this end, among the most salient arguments is the incontrovertible debt that Pagan owes to the Mon, a view propounded long ago by numerous researchers. Here we must think not only of the innumerable ink captions in Mon beneath the city's mural paintings in the early part of Pagan's development but also ask ourselves why 126 Mon officiants played such an important role at the consecration of Kyaukse's palace in ca. 1102 (Blagden : 1923 : 40) Why were extensive passages from the Pali canon put into Mon and placed on Pagan's walls? Even portions from the *Mahavamsa* were translated into Mon and placed beneath painted *Mahavamsa*-scenes, such as inside the Kubyauk-gyi Temple, Myinkaba, ca. 1112 At the same time we search in vain for important Pyu inscriptions, apart from the well-known Myazedi record.

suspected criminal in view of no fingerprints present at the scene of the crime. This approach would be shortsighted and flawed, since it fails to factor in other critical evidence, in some cases evidence that is even more compelling than dated inscriptions. Indeed, we must remember that the greater part of the world's historical record is made up not of 'hard facts' provided by inscriptions but upon suppositions based on a broad range of evidence, only some of which is epigraphic. But the case for the Mon in early Burma is admittedly a challenge, without firm epigraphic evidence.

Who then made such translations from Pali to Mon and why and when ? Were these translations into Mon made at Pagan for the first time or in Lower Burma or in both places simultaneously ? A group of savants must have done it, at some point and somewhere and for some reason. Whatever the answers to these questions, the fact that it was done at all is the key issue and that the Kubyauk-gyi provides us with a firm date to appreciate the sophisticated nature of this culture in ca. 1112 (which also owed nothing to the Pyu) . From whence did this Mon influence at Pagan derive ? Even if Kyanzittha was an usurper who came from the moon, we would need to ask from where did this Mon culture at Pagan originate and emanate. In this analysis it is of no consequence if Aniruddha did or did not march into Thaton and then launch a Theravada crusade at Pagan with his chests of *tipitaka*. The chronicles have only muddled our understanding of early Burma. Chronicles can often be remarkably accurate for later periods, but their veracity dwindles dramatically by the Pagan period and especially for events prior ca. 1175, as Victor Lieberman reminds us specifically about U Kala's *Mahayazawingyi* (Lieberman, 1986 : 236) Too much of *Mists* is quibbling with Luce and others about the 20th-century interpretations of the chronicle traditions, which are nearly always virtually useless in reconstructing the first millennium and Pagan.

Mists has cast the Mon, or Rmen, as “a small group of people arriving in Upper Burma in the twelfth century, and mentioned only in Kyanzittha's Old Mon language inscriptions.” (*Mists*, 244). In the same vein, “the role of the Mon in Upper Burma's history, especially during the Pagan and even Ava periods, is negligible and has been much exaggerated.” (*Mists*, 244) The tone in *Mists* makes it appear that the short-lived Mon at Pagan were like moles that burrowed beneath Pagan's walls while Burmese defenses were down but which were quickly exorcised by the dominant Burmese culture, on the departure of their patron, Kyanzittha. Even if this scenario were true, Kyanzittha's adoption of Mon epigraphs says little about the full richness of Mon culture per se. We must explain from where did this body of culture derive, especially in light of the virtual eclipse of the Pyu by the end of the first millennium. The Pyu were of course accorded a side on the four-sided Myazedi inscriptions, but had it truly been the Pyu Millennium then we would surely expect more Pyu influence at Pagan and throughout Burma in the 11th and 12th centuries. The alleged architectural input from the Pyu at Pagan, explored in Chapter 9, has been successfully rebutted by Pichard. (*Aseanie*, no. 18)

It also does little service to reality to contrast Kyanzittha's “esoteric redundant” inscriptions with the later Burmese inscriptions which “are anything but elite or esoteric, containing information about the ultimate desire for *nibbana*, or a better rebirth on the path to it, of elite or commoner.” (*Mists* , 243) Here, *Mists* engages in the same ethnic typecasting for which Luce is condemned, although in *Mists* the ‘bad guys’ are Kyanzittha and Mon and the ‘good guys’ are the Burmese (“anything but elite or esoteric”, *Mists*, 243). We all would like to think of Pagan as a *nibbanic*, elite-free paradise under the Burmese, but a quick glance at the many Burmese inscriptions reveal long lists of slaves, an unpleasant reminder of elite social ranking. But the slaves were probably as contented as their elite masters, since pursuing

nibbana is a great equalizer, if not harmonizer, as we are reminded daily in *The New Light of Myanmar*.

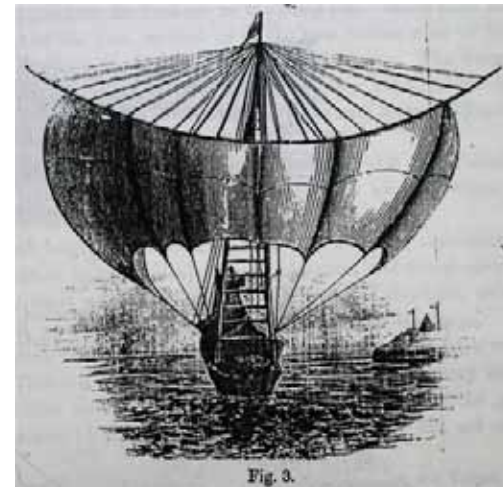
In the end, *Mists* cannot explain the use of Mon by Kyanzittha :

“The short answer is that we do not know for certain [why Kyanzittha’s inscriptions are in Mon]. But that should not be construed to imply that the period therefore deserves the label ‘Mon.’ I do not expect to resolve the problem, but it should still be addressed as far as the evidence will allow.” (*Mists*, 245)

Finally, still stabbing to cope with the answer to the presence of Mon inscriptions, *Mists* formulates a “a simple, practical reason for him [Kyanzittha] to have used Old Mon. I think it had to do with the political realities of his reign, which emerged in consequence of his predecessor’s accomplishments and policies.” (*Mists*, 245). Here *Mists* is referring to Aniruddha’s conquest of Lower Burma which had recently been inhabited by an “influx of Mon speakers, perhaps fleeing the so-called cholera epidemic or the advance of Khmers into the Lower Burma region.”³⁹ (*Mists*, 246)

So to understand Kyanzittha’s Mon inscriptions, we look to Lower Burma and Aniruddha’s triumphs over a newly arrived Mon population, either pushed out of Thailand by cholera or by the Khmer. Alarming, endnote 39, the source for this contention, takes us only to a line or two in the late chronicle, U Kala’s *Mahayazawingyi* (I : 196-197), which speaks neither about cholera nor the Khmer but Aniruddha’s legendary quest for the tooth relic in China and his return with an emerald Buddha. (This must surely be an oversight in *Mists*). However, even if this improbable suggestion (cholera and/or Khmer) explained the use of Mon ink captions and stone inscriptions at Pagan, the Mon from Lower Burma must have scooted up to Pagan pretty quickly in time for Kyanzittha’s reign when Mon came into use. These gyrations make even the best Burmese fables look plausible.

Also, it does little good to turn to those hapless residents of Haripunjaya, stricken by cholera, to cross mountains to Lower Burma and then filter up to Pagan to relish their Mon culture, which are the implication of the aforementioned quotation. (*Mists*, 436) Such a scenario is no more likely than Aniruddha inaugurating Theravada Buddhism in Pagan with his chest of *tipitakas* seized from Thaton. And in any case, the Mon returned to Haripunjaya, as the 16th – century northern Thai chronicle, the *Jinakamalipakaranam*, reminds us (Jayawickrama, 1968 : 104). Perhaps the Mon went back to Haripunjaya because Kyanzittha’s reign ended, and the Mon felt remiss that their tongue was no longer used ? This is poking fun of course but it underscores the absurdity of invoking much later chronicles to help us unravel events that occurred so much earlier. It is also a cautionary tale about extrapolating too much from too little reliable evidence. And in any case, D. Swearer and S. Premchit have suggested that “it seems prudent to withhold judgment on this historicity of the cholera epidemic episode...”, suggesting that the exodus from cholera fits in the etiological



nature of the text, the story of Queen Cama. (Swearer & Premchit, 1998 : 20). Also, if *Mists* mistrusts the chronicles, why then are we asked to accept them in the next breath (U Kala's and very late Thai examples that talk about cholera).

Reviews of Mists and the Mon Paradigm

The observations here are based entirely on archaeological and art historical evidence from the first millennium and somewhat later, to ca. 1200. Information gleaned from chronicles is of no concern here, since reconstructing events during the first millennium on the basis of such late written evidence is useless, if not naïve. But other critics have touched on A-T's interpretation of the chronicle-tradition. (Charney, 2006 ; Leider, 2006 ; Lieberman, 2007). The ways in which the chronicles were formed and later interpreted by scholars are of course worthy and important fields for research, but they have little to do with what really took place during the first millennium and during the Pagan period.

Before leaving the chronicles, one more aside : A-T has failed to credit a long list of scholars who decades ago challenged the chronicles with respect to the Thaton-Pagan nexus. Even the stalwart, G. H. Luce, claimed that the Pali canon could not have come from Thaton with Aniruddha and recognized that the Ari-nonsense was nothing but nonsense (Luce, 1969-70, I : 26 , 43). Than Tun, in his London dissertation a half-century ago challenged the notion of Aniruddha's conquest of Thaton for the religious reasons expressed in the Kalyani record and the chronicles. He accepted the conquest of Lower Burma at the time of Aniruddha, but quoting C.O. Blagden , remarked that possibly the “ ‘sack of Thaton was an after-thought’ ” and the real purpose was political and not religious, as Blagden opined as early as 1919. Than Tun freely admitted, “Unfortunately, no contemporary record is found relating to this memorable episode [Aniruddha's conquest of Thaton] ”, although he firmly subscribed to the notion that the Mon contributed to Pagan's civilization, expressed in the same paragraph. (Than Tun, 1978 : 6, reprinted from his 1956-dissertation)

In sum, the Mon Paradigm was scarcely the repressive, monolithic, intellectual juggernaut, or the boogiemane-of-paradigms, that has been painted in *Mists* , at least in intellectual circles, both in Burma and abroad. Indeed, elephants parading through Pagan's Tharaba Gate laden with lacquer chests of *tipitakas* is a spectacle that even Hollywood would find hard to stage. The fabled-conquest of Thaton in 1057 A.D. and its repercussions may have been swallowed in some quarters, expressed in the pages of *The New Light of Myanmar* or the *Lonely Planet* guide for Burma , but it was never accepted literally in the quarter that this new book is intended to appeal.

I believe only Pierre Pichard has yet commented on the physical evidence, restricting his critique solely to Chapter 9 which is dedicated to establishing the Pyu origins of Pagan temples. Pichard is no stranger to Burmese architecture, especially to Pagan, so his strong and

devastating challenge of this pivotal point in *Mists* is noteworthy and must be taken seriously and each point carefully and fully rebutted. (Pichard, 2006)

A review of *Mists* under preparation by Robert Brown casts a wider net than Pichard's and speaks in general terms about the methodological, archaeological and art historical pitfalls that the 'Pyu Paradigm' raises. Elizabeth Moore's excellent new book, *Early Landscapes of Myanmar* (2007), focuses on the first millennium but has demurred from strongly rebutting or supporting the Pyu or the Mon Paradigm. At the same time *Early Landscapes* reveals for the first time under the covers of a single book the wealth of material in Lower Burma belonging to the first millennium, with an extensive text, bibliography and numerous newly illustrated objects.

Perhaps History Does Repeat Itself

Also, it is not without significance that A-T's earlier work, *Pagan : The Origins of Modern Burma* (1985), sank on similar shoals. Launched with a stimulating thesis about Pagan's decline due to the rising wealth and power of the *sangha*, this attractive new thesis about Pagan appeared tight and logical at first glance, one conclusion drawing upon the next. Unfortunately, the 'Devil is in the Details', as always, and a more sophisticated reading and interpretation of the same inscriptions and other evidence turned the thesis on its head by a German researcher (Frasch). But readers are invited to consult both studies to form an independent opinion. *Pagan : The Origins of Modern Burma* is an instructive example of how one or two poorly based assumptions at the beginning of a scholarly argument can produce misleading results.

In some ways, *Mists* operates on a similar level as A-T's *Pagan* but the new book is more deceptive, since it first hooks readers by trashing and debunking a long list of scholars whose focus was the chronicles. If the old interpretations of the Mon based on the chronicles could be shown to be baseless, then the obvious conclusion is that the Mon had no place in early Burma. That more than half the pages are devoted to belittling former theories suggests the game plan. The debunking is made all the more seductive, since it comes enveloped in the moral crusade leveled at 'Orientalism', a well-meaning and earnest movement but one which too often sacrifices academic rigor for self-righteous carping.

But the chronicles, by their very nature, have scant relevance for reconstructing events during the first millennium, as Than Tun and Luce so often - but not always - recognized (see above). This is no less true for the later Mon epigraphs from the 15th century. What Dhammacedi felt about Thaton, Ramannadesa, and Sona and Uttara certainly was important in his day and influenced the future, but 15th-century mythology sheds little light on the eleventh century, or if Aniruddha really came bursting into Thaton to capture his scriptures. More importantly, the success or failure of *Mists*, like *Pagan : Origins of Modern Burma*, rests not on debunking interpretations of the chronicles but upon a careful evaluation of the details -- for *Mists* the details are on the ground in Lower Burma and belong to the first millennium.

LIMITATIONS The archaeology of Burma is in its infancy, as we all recognize, and the full story of Burma's ancient history will be decades in the making, and it must be multi-disciplinary. An entire issue of *Asian Perspectives* (2001) was given over to Burma's archaeology, and this important publication is a small step to filling some of our gaps. To cover a millennium of history and a vast bibliography requires the skills of a team sharing a range of expertise, from epigraphists, Buddhologists, linguists, art historians and archaeologists. Indeed, it smacks of hubris to tackle these broad issues single handedly, since this puzzle has an infinite number of pieces, many of which are still coming to light. In as much as my special training is art history (not archaeology), my queries lean in this direction. Others in different disciplines need to contribute to the discussion. These observations below then are merely pointers to issues that require more research, from others and myself.

The Pyu or Mon Millennium : Is Two A Crowd ?

The "Pyu Millenium" (the title of Chapter 2) hinges on the presence of Pyu-peoples in the Lower Burma. Indeed, without populating this vast area with the Pyu, the Pyu Paradigm goes nowhere, like a cart without a horse. A-T invokes the work of a single archaeologist to bolster the Pyu presence in Lower Burma. This is put forth in the Introduction, on page 4, setting the tone for the narrative -- and setting one of the first traps for the unsuspecting reader unfamiliar with the basic literature.

"The Mon Paradigm continued unabated despite the fact that throughout the same years archaeological data suggested than another culture, an ethnolinguistic group of Tibeto-Burman speakers popularly known as the Pyu had been present earlier and found throughout most of the country for an entire millennium. They had been centered in Upper Burma, *with settlements also in Lower Burma*.¹⁵ (italics mine) But the influence of the Mon Paradigm was so pervasive and dominant that scholars acknowledged the information in the most perfunctory manner and continued as the Pyu evidence had little or no bearing on their concerns." (*Mists*, 4)

Endnote 15 takes us to a single source to support this critical assertion, that is, that the Pyu had "settlements also in Lower Burma." This is a well-known monograph by Janice Stargardt, *The Ancient Pyu of Burma – Vol. 1, Early Pyu Cities in a Man-made Landscape* (1991).

However, one small problem :

There is not a single suggestion in Stargardt's book that Pyu settlements were found south of Sri Ksetra, or in Lower Burma.

In fact, Stargardt characterized the ancient Mon and Arakanese as "urbanized communities" on a par with the contemporaneous Pyu. (Stargardt, 1991 : 147).

This example of misrepresenting a source, whatever the merits or demerits of Stargardt's book, to justify a position may appear trivial to some readers, but such manipulation of key evidence does little to enhance the study's credibility. Unfortunately, this type of bald distortion, whether by accident or design, is emblematic of much of *Mists* and why the book needs to be read with great care, if not caution. Similar examples are cited below, and the knowledgeable reader will certainly uncover more when analyzing *Mists*.

No Pyu Inscriptions in Lower Burma

One of *Mists* most important contributions is to remind us of the importance of dated epigraphic evidence in reconstructing early history. (*Mists*, 83) For example, we can comfortably conclude that the Pyu were in Sri Ksetra mainly from Pyu inscriptions found at the site that are reasonably securely dated. Without adequate inscriptions, some of our basic findings are often, well, inadequate. And *Mists* is also right to note that there are no firmly dated Mon inscriptions in Lower Burma during the period under investigation.

At the same time :

There is not a single Pyu inscription south of Sri Ksetra, either in the delta or in the southeast, raising obvious implications for 'The Pyu Millennium.'

This is a major problem for the Pyu Paradigm which seeks to excise the Mon from Lower Burma and replace the Mon with the Pyu. While we have a number of irrefutably Pyu inscriptions at Sri Ksetra and a scattering in other spots in Upper Burma, including one near Sandoway, none have been found south of Sri Ksetra. This omission of Pyu inscriptions in Lower Burma does not by itself of course prove that the Pyu never populated Lower Burma, but this striking omission is probative and should make us pause and examine the basic thesis of the Pyu Paradigm more carefully. Curiously, the inconvenient absence of Pyu inscriptions south of Sri Ksetra, either in the delta or in the southeast, is not raised in the text.

On the other hand, a handful of Mon inscriptions have been found in Thaton and in its vicinity, some from ca. 500-600, (excavated votive tablets from Winka), and others that are stone inscriptions at Thaton, from ca. 11th century. (see below)

Is the Coast Clear ?

According to *Mists*, before the "... conquest, pacification and settlement of Lower Burma by the kingdom of Pagan, much of it was *probably a swampy, frontier area, sparsely inhabited, with only a few coastal towns and village, remnants of the early Pyu state..... Lower Burma, in other words, did not yet possess the geographic, demographic, economic political and*

cultural wherewithal to have supported any kingdom or polity, much less to have been the source of civilization for another in Upper Burma, the size and scope, and scale of Pagan.” (italics mine) (Mists, 66-67)

The implications of this statement need to be stressed : Civilization was somehow stunted in Lower Burma, despite the fact that a “Pyu state” (*Mists*, 67) controlled Lower Burma. We are not told precisely why Pyu culture never flourished in Lower Burma, but we are left to imagine the culprits as too few Pyu and too many swamps (“probably a swampy, frontier area, sparsely inhabited,” ; *Mists*, 67). But for whatever reasons, Pyu culture failed to flower in this vast region and that by the time of Pagan’s conquest there was in Lower Burma simply the “remnants of the early Pyu state.” (*Mists*, 67)

In this view, very little took place in Lower Burma in the first millennium, both quantitatively and qualitatively, compared to Upper Burma. Indeed, the glaring paucity of material from Lower Burma is a leitmotif running through *Mists*. It is a seductive argument which once again falls flat upon examination. A useful tonic to this thesis is to page through Moore’s new book, *Early Landscapes*, which presents material from both Upper and Lower Burma in nearly equal measure. Much is new material, but the most impressive things were published during the first half of the twentieth century and are therefore well-known. Or skim through an old but reliable classic, *Historical Sites of Burma* , first published in 1972 (Aung Thaw, 1972). These sources will quickly convince the reader that Lower Burma was no backwater. (more below)

Also, we must remind ourselves at this point of a fundamental, if not tedious, truism in the history of Southeast Asia, that is, that civilization developed along the entire coastline of mainland Southeast Asia during the first millennium. The nature and pace of civilization differed from place to place of course and the matter of communication with various part of the Indian sub-continent and among these different regions will be debated in dissertations, books and conferences long after we are gone. But there is general agreement that this entire coastline by the end of the first millennium was altogether different from its beginnings in the first century A.D. In this long epoch even ‘swampy’ old backwoods Arakan managed to create large walled-habitations and even found enough time to fashion impressive bronze and stone sculpture. Indeed, among the top six largest first-millennium walled cities in Burma two are in swampy Arakan (Vesali and Dhanyawadi). (Hudson, 2004 : Fig. 81) In neighboring Thailand and Cambodia similar civilizations arose along the coast, also using Indic scripts, either for Pali and/or Sanskrit, and often to transcribe indigenous languages, as did the Pyu and Mon. Peter Skilling has critically evaluated the evidence for much of Burma and Thailand, with respect to early scripts and the various Pali texts that these first-millennium Buddhist-Hindu communities took up. (Skilling, 1997, 2003) And early developments along the Malay coast have for some years now entered the vast literature on the coastal southeast Asian in the first millennium. (Jacq-Hergoualc’h , 2002).

These same cultural and economic changes of course took place inland also, and indeed groups far from the coast rivaled those to the south, such as the the Pyu culture at Sri Ksetra. So the coast versus inland is not at issue.

The observations above prompt a basic theoretical question that is curiously absent in *Mists* :

If the entire coastline of mainland Southeast Asia engaged in a sophisticated material and Buddhist-Hindu culture during the first millennium, especially after ca. 500, why was Lower Burma so excluded from this broad historical development ?

The implication is that the “Pyu state” (*Mists*, 67) failed in Lower Burma, presumably because of the swamps and the trifling population. This failure resulted therefore in few material remains and artifacts and ones which are in any case unimpressive compared to those in Upper Burma, the fountainhead of Burmese civilization. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth to those familiar with the archaeological and art historical record. The author of *Mists* has chosen to ignore an astonishing amount of widely published material. Once again, this fundamental question about the development of civilization in mainland Southeast Asia in the first millennium may seem trivial or inconsequential to some readers, but it is a compelling question that requires compelling answers, at least for this reviewer. Indeed, it would be unreasonable to conclude that the entire coastline of Burma was excluded from developments that swept up all of the other coastal regions of Southeast Asia.

The issue of ethnicity and language groups is also probative. The Mon in Thailand and Burma were contiguous during and following the first-millennium, despite well-known mountain ranges and modern international borders. This contiguity is another critical theoretical point which is not addressed in *Mists*. My training is neither in linguistics or cultural anthropology, but common sense suggests that speakers of the same language generally (but not always) occupy the same patch of turf. For example, the Shan-Tai speakers of Burma and Thailand are contiguous, despite modern boundaries and frontier ranges. Or the Chin peoples in Mizoram, India, and Chin State, Burma, share a similar culture and language. Or there is the example of Dravidian-based languages spread throughout South India, with Sanskritic-based languages found in North India. In much the same way we can envision Mon on both sides of these modern borders. Indeed, examples abound worldwide.

And it also will not do to invoke unnamed groups or ‘tribal peoples’ to fill this perceived vacuum in Lower Burma. Were such unnamed tribal groups responsible for the monasteries at Winka or did they create and worship the Buddhist bronzes found in Lower Burma ? If the Pyu can be connected to Sri Ksetra and Upper Burma sites, then the Mon can be for Lower Burma. This of course recognizes that ‘tribal’ groups occupied the periphery of major Southeast centers, from time immemorial, but it is unlikely that these groups played major roles in the formation of national cultures, as the Mon succeeded in doing.

These introductory remarks above highlight *Mists'* core thesis, stripped of its trappings and the smoke-screen of debunking the chronicles. The basic issues raised above also juxtapose the core thesis of *Mists* with a few of its core problems.

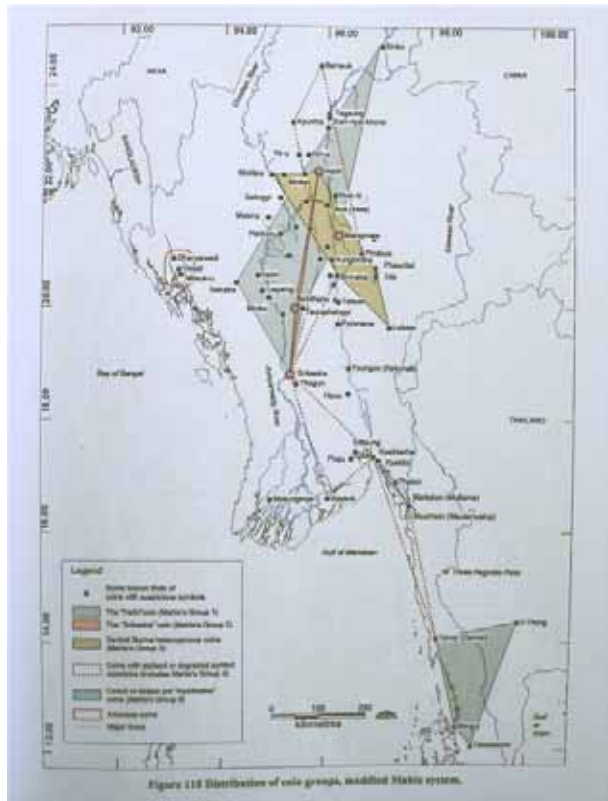
At least two basic questions emerge. What was going on in Lower Burma during the first millennium ? How does Lower Burma compare to Upper Burma ? These questions are open-ended to the degree that these twin topics are vast, indeed endless, and little can be said that is definitive, in part, because new material is coming up annually. My comments below represent a modest stab at these questions.

Coinage : The Gulf of Martaban Type

Coins are notoriously difficult for many obvious reasons, most notably because they are so easily transported over wide areas. Nonetheless, one researcher, Dietrich Mahlo, in 1998, designated five major coin types in the first millennium, each differing by their distribution and their symbols, such as conch, *srivatsa*, *bhadrapitha* and so on. (*Indo-Asiatische Zeitschrift*, 1998)

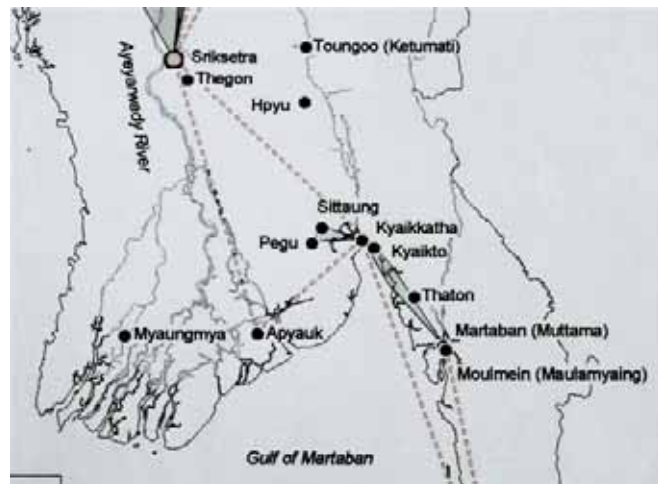
One class of coins Mahlo labeled the “Gulf of Martaban” type, the fifth in his classification, and is comprised of seven different varieties. He believed the coins to date to ca. 9 - 10th century, although some in this series, those specifically excavated at Kyaikkatha (between Pegu and Thaton) were thought by Robert Wicks to belong to the first half of the first millennium (Wicks, 1992 : 111-12).

Bob Hudson has furnished a handy color coded map of Burma, indicating the distribution of Mahlo’s five types (Hudson, 2002 : Fig. 118). Significantly, the Gulf of Martaban type extended from Pegu, around the coast, to end at Martaban, or Mottama, forming a dramatic arc in Hudson’s map. This region is of course the heart of former Ramanna, with Thaton in the center of this long bend around the gulf.



After Hudson, 2004 : Fig. 118 (Mahlo's 'Gulf' series : from Pegu to Mottama)

A clustering of identical (?) coins has also been noted by Moore who labeled a group the Bago-type : "This Bago-type of conch coins is not found at Pyu sites but seen at other sites near Kyontu [near Pegu] and Kyaikkatha [mouth of Sittaung] and *also Dvaravati sites in Thailand.*" (italics mine) (Moore, 2007 : 144) In addition, Pamela Gutman highlighted a series which she called a Mon type, from the same general area, and compared them to examples excavated at Nakhon Pathom. (Gutman, 1978 : 16, Fig. 2) That this series looks to the neighboring Mon in Thailand is scarcely surprising, as we will see.



Hudson summarized Mahlo's major published findings in his dissertation. Talking specifically about Mahlo's Gulf of Martaban type, he noted : "The focused distribution of these coins around the Gulf of Martaban (Figure 118) suggests that they may not be directly related to the Upper Burma Pyu system and its coinage." (Hudson, 2004 : 125) Hudson concludes : "Finally, the concentration of the Group 5 coins around the Gulf of Martaban suggests that whether they were produced early in the first millennium A.D. by small maritime polities in contact by sea with India, or as Mahlo suggests, much later, in the 9th or 10th century, they belong in either case *to a system separate from the Upper Burma Pyu / Early Urban system.*" (italics mine) (Hudson : 126)



After Hudson, 2004 :

Figs. 107-108 (Gulf Series on bottom)

If Gutman, Mahlo, Moore, and Wicks are correct and this special class of coins is largely confined in the southeast, then this is highly suggestive of significant continuity, cultural, if not mercantile, in what is considered the Mon heartland, from Pegu to Mottama. Whether the series belongs to the middle of the millennium (Wicks) or to the end (Mahlo) has little bearing on the status of developments in Lower Burma during the first millennium.

Of course, one could maintain that the Pyu introduced this special coinage into this “frontier area” (*Mists* : 87) solely for distribution among their brethren in the swamps of Lower Burma, or it arose independently among the Pyu of Lower Burma, but the reader can easily appreciate the implications of this distinct coin series in Lower Burma, from Pegu to Mottama.

Coins that were presumably minted in this region indicate local or more likely regional control of resources that imply an overarching state apparatus, even if the states are ‘city-states’ controlling large areas. After all, it makes little sense for one walled-habitation to produce coins only for distribution within its walls and its immediate environs. If the Pyu in Upper Burma minted coins (which they did) – and are thought to constitute a polity (even independent ‘city-states’) – then why should Lower Burma, evidently with its own coin series, be treated differently ?

Lower Burma’s minting of coins and the distribution of such coins over such a wide area certainly conflicts with the notion of a backward Lower Burma without the “demographic, economic, political and cultural wherewithal to have supported any kingdom or polity....” (*Mists* : 67)

Despite this important evidence (the coin series), one searches in vain in *Mists* for a discussion of coinage. Mahlo (1998), Gutman (1978), Wicks (1992) are citations noticeably absent from A-T’s extensive bibliography. Curiously, Hudson’s dissertation, in which Mahlo’s findings are summarized over four pages (Hudson, 2004 : 123-127), with an illustration of some of the ‘Gulf’ coins, is included in the bibliography of *Mists*. Perhaps A-T mistakenly felt that Mahlo’s findings and Hudson’s observations shed no light on Lower Burma.

If Mahlo and others are right or wrong about the coin series in southeastern Burma remains to be seen, but this evidence needs to be addressed head on and not ignored, if *Mists* is to be accorded any credibility. If this coin series cannot be related directly to the Pyu, then an explanation needs to be offered. In this case, key sources (Gutman, Hudson, Mahlo, Wicks)

were ignored. In the case of Stargardt, her research was simply distorted. Once again, these Devilish Details, messy to be sure, but a persuasive argument rises or falls on the basis of such details and facts.

Leider perceptively queried the fact that the coinage of the Pyu was omitted in *Mists*, puzzled, since a discussion of coins would have indeed bolstered the importance of the Pyu Paradigm (which Leider rejects). (Leider, 2006) That Hudson's color coded map of Burma, with a dramatic distinct band indicated from Pegu to Mottama, did not draw the attention of *Mists* is alarming. I suspect that this is another deliberate omission.

Winka , Kyaikkatha, Zothoke

Winka, Kyaikkatha, and Zothoke are three important first-millennium sites in southeastern Burma. For a good survey, see Moore's *Early Landscapes*. Hudson's dissertation only briefly touches on this region, concerned mostly with Upper Burma, but Hudson's overall conclusions



– that these site are first millennium – are in agreement with Moore, although Winka is excluded for unexplained reasons. (Hudson, 2004 : 146-147 ; also in agreement for Kyaikkatha and Zothoke is Gutman & Hudson, 2004 : 163) These major sites and others however do not exist in a vacuum, and *Moore refers to a host of lesser, or satellite sites, in this area and elsewhere in Lower Burma that relate to these major sites and others,* bolstering the view that a great

After Moore, 2007 : 56

deal of activity took place in Lower Burma.

Walled cities per se are important since they imply a degree of social organization, requiring labor brought together and managed by some form of local or regional authority. This is why walled-cities go hand-in-hand so often with monumental architecture which demands a similar sustained channeling of resources.

The largest walled-habitation in Burma is Sri Ksetra, encompassing 1,462 hectares, while a relatively small one is the ‘walled-city’ at Pagan, enclosing a mere 140 hectares. The largest number are in central and Upper Burma and Arakan, but Kyaikkatha (375 hectares) and Thaton (266 hectares) are respectable, especially in light of Pagan’s 140 hectares ; this data is drawn from one of many useful charts in Hudson’s dissertation. (Hudson 2004 : Fig. 8) Kyaikkatha is the largest of these walled habitations in Lower Burma.

No one has doubted that these walled-habitations in Lower Burma belong to the first millennium, and all have been published in bits and pieces, and references are found in Moore’s new book and in other sources. (Gutman & Hudson, 2004 : 163, 165) Even if we were to accept these walled sites were inhabited by Pyu speakers, they collectively would compare favorably to developments in Upper Burma and could even compete with the boondocks of Arakan.

These three sites are important to the narrative, each suggesting in different ways the range of activities in Lower Burma during the first millennium.

Winka

This is a small village located northwest of Thaton and at the foot of the long mountain range containing the sacred peak known as Kelasa. Extensive brick mounds at Winka were excavated in the mid-1970s, and reports were issued in 1977 and more fully in 1999 (U Myint Aung, 1977, 1999). No published reports have ever questioned its first-millennium date, apart from A.T. (in *Mists* the site is called Winga). (Moore, 2007 : 210-212)



Excavated Tablets from Winka, Courtesy : Dept. of Archaeology

Winka yielded over a hundred small votive tablets of various types. One type in particular is identical to those noted in Thailand, such as one found at Chula Pathom Cedi in Nakhon Pathom (compare Moore : 198, to P. Chirapravati, fig. 7). An identical type of tablet was noted long ago in the Kawgun Cave, near Pa’an, which was recently compared to those found in peninsular Thailand and which has been labeled Mon. (Guy, 1999 : 23, Fig. 3.5) [see photo on page 17] That such tablets have strong connections to the Mon Dvaravati in neighboring Thailand is hardly surprising in light of the contiguous Mon populations. Were the plaques imported from Thailand or made from virtually identical moulds ? Future research will tell us, but for our purposes it is enough to



Identical tablets excavated at Winka, without inscriptions. Identical to those in Thailand (Nakhon Pathom) ; referred to in Guy, 1999 : fig. 3 Private Collection (Left)

Inscribed tablets, excavated at Winka W. P. D. (Right)



know that the connections go east to Thailand and not north to the Pyu centers. Indeed, the first-millennium tablets found at Winka has never been in question, apart from *Mists*.

Four of the Winka tablets bear short inscriptions in a language that has been identified as early Mon by Nai Pan Hla whose readings were appended to the report on Winka (U Myint Aung, 1999 : 52-53) :

Mon Text	Translation	Mon Text	Translation
1.	1.	1.
2. pa sarwa	to make model	2.	2.
3. .. we ba kyak	.. two Buddhas	3. . we ba kyak	3. . . two Buddhas
4. ..tha ra we	..this	4. . . tha ra we	4. . . this

Other epigraphists need to examine these tablets and provide readings independent of Nai Pan Hla's, especially since the characters are extremely small.

A-T acknowledges these tablets but remarkably concludes :

“But the tablet [one from Winka that Nai Pan Hla shared with Diffloth] is not dated ; nor has it been shown to have been unearthed in a scientific excavation process that stratigraphically placed it in a pre-Pagan level. So its provenance and chronology are unclear and unknown. In fact, there is some question as to the date of Winga [sic] itself since the most recent thermoluminescence analysis of two Winga shards date to the very late fifteenth and seventeenth

centuries, which were actually not coincidentally, the glory days of the late Mon Kingdom of Pegu.” (*Mists* : 198)

This snap dismissal of Winka and the matter of the of scientific testing appears without an endnote, leaving uninformed readers not only doubting the importance and antiquity of Winka but at a loss to check the evidence. Only those familiar with the secondary literature would know where to locate the report that was concealed so casually in *Mists*. Also, note how *Mists* cleverly dismisses the entire site of Winka as possibly 15 -17th centuries. (*Mists* : 198)

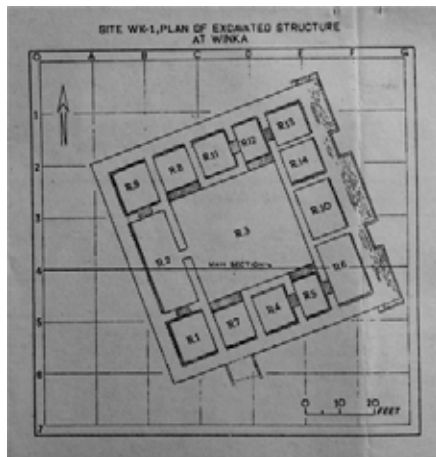
Had A-T provided the source one could read that these plaques and others were in fact found during a scientific excavation and bear an exact provenance -- excavated in WK 6, a brick structure at Winka. (U Myint Aung, 1999 : 52) I can scarcely imagine a more specific provenance. Two of the ceramic finds indeed tested to the medieval period, but the report freely admitted that these fragments were “definitely posterior to the structural complex at Winka village.” (U Myint Aung, 1999 : 53) The archaeologists who have discussed Winka consider the site to be solidly first millennium, ca. 6th century (Moore, 2007 : 209ff ; U Myint Aung, 1999) U Myint Aung’s excavation report is in *Mist*’s bibliography, but unless one is familiar with the literature there is no way of connecting the aforementioned assertions in *Mists* with the archaeological report. No one reading U Myint Aung’s report or the secondary literature cited above would come to the same conclusions. This clever distortion of the evidence reinforces my fear that *Mists* should never be assigned to undergraduates who lack the background to evaluate the critical primary and secondary sources.

Also from Winka are large terracotta plaques. One illustrated in Moore features two rampant lions reminiscent of lions depicted in terracotta roundels from Kyontu, only 30 km northeast of Pegu and widely published for many decades (Luce, 1985, I : 166 - 168 : Guy, 1999 : fig. 15) Their similarity suggest a homogenous culture zone uniting a major swatch of Burma’s coastline, that is, from the Thaton region to Pegu, significantly, covering the same ground as the coins series. For decades the Kyontu terracottas appeared in a vacuum, unrelated to anything, but the old Kyontu finds now can be tied to developments down the coast, to the Thaton area (these terracottas are also discussed in my review of Moore’s *Sacred Landscapes*. (*Journal of the Siam Society*, forthcoming)



**Left : Terracotta, Kyontu, near Waw,
near Pegu (Courtesy : Dept. of Archaeology)**

**Right : Excavated terracotta, Winka, Moulmein Museum (after Moore, 2007 :
1997)**



**After U Myint Aung, 1977 : 52
Plan of excavated monastery at Winka**



**Octagonal stupa base, faced with laterite blocks, Winka (also reproduced in U Myint Aung, 1999).
Courtesy : P. Gutman**

Also, in addition to a number of brick monasteries found at Winka, there was at least one laterite stupa base, octagonal in design. (U Myint Aung, 1999 : 52) (See photo above)

Winka is unequivocally a Buddhist complex belonging to the first millennium. Monasteries, require patronage for their construction and their constant upkeep, implying a high degree of social organization and literacy among the elite, in this case, near Thaton.

Kyaikkatha

Kyaikkatha is the largest walled site in the Lower Burma, located near the mouth of the Sittaung. It was excavated between 1986 and 1998 and has yielded a cache of coins belonging to the Gulf of Martaban type. (Wicks. 1992) This site is also considered to belong to the first millennium. (Moore, 203-205; Gutman & Hudson, 2004 : 163).

In *Mists* , however, this major first-millennium site in Lower Burma finds only a single mention, lumped together with a string of other sites and is considered Pyu (*Mists* : 81) There is no mention of the fact that Kyaikkatha is an enormous walled-habitation, nor is there reference to the site's coins. Again, the critical reader must ask why this evidence is unstated ? It is a site that has been known since the 1990s and was mentioned in Hudson's dissertation. (Hudson, 2004 : 146)

That the largest walled-habitation in Lower Burma appears only once in Mists, bundled together with other "Pyu" sites, makes it hardly surprising that Lower Burma is cast as a poorly populated swamp with few contributions.

Zothoke



Zothoke is close to Winka, also near Thaton. The enormous square stupa base faced with large laterite slabs is universally considered to be first millennium, together with a nearby large laterite wall (2.5 m high, 100 m long) , sculpted with elephants and lions. (Moore, 2007 : 212-214) The site is well-known and amply published, beginning in the 1930s with the Archaeological Survey of India.

Stupa Base, Zothoke, faced with massive laterite blocks

Since Zothoke is considered first-millennium and therefore important evidence for civilization in Lower Burma, why was this well-published site completely excluded from *Mists* ? It certainly represents monumental architecture in Lower Burma from the first millennium, and I

think therefore is one more important document in the cultural and material record, especially in light of its proximity to Thaton. But there is not a trace of this site in *Mists*.

Thaton

The surviving artifacts and inscriptions datable, to ca. 11th - 12th century, suggest that Thaton was the most important center in southeastern Burma at the beginning of the second millennium. The large city walls, the finger-marked brick, and a Buddhist bronze figure also suggest that it was an important place in the first millennium also. Also, two of Kyanzittha's inscriptions are found at Thaton itself (see below).

Thaton's well-known city walls presents *Mists* with a problem, since it is accepted that the walls belong to the first millennium, and its dimensions, while paltry compared to Sri Ksetra, are not to be dismissed (286 hectares, or twice the size of Pagan enclosure). (Moore, 2007 : 215-218)

To wiggle out of this long established archaeological conclusion about the first-millennium date of Thaton's walls, *Mists* proposes a novel solution : that since the city walls are rectangular in design, and not circular or with "more or less rounded corners" (*Mists* : 81), then the "largely rectangular plan [of Thaton] resembles the *cities that arose after Pagan*.¹²" (*italics mine*) In short, rectangular walls belong to "cities that arose after Pagan." Endnote 12 provides an impressive list of ancient cities with rectangular walled habitations, from Sukhothai to Angkor. So far so good.

But unfortunately, this attractive but simplistic theory comes tumbling down when we come upon the well-published *rectangular* plan of Halin in Upper Burma, a major first-millennium Pyu site (Moore, 2007 : 182 ; Gutman and Hudson, 2004: fig. 7.7) If *Mists* went to the trouble to look into city walls in Sukhothai and Angkor to bolster an argument, it is odd that the *rectangular* plan of Halin, a major site belonging to the vaunted Pyu, was omitted.



**After Luce, 1969-1970
I : 25 (Left)**

**Halin, After Moore,
2007 : 182**



Partly bolstered by this incorrect and misleading observation about rectangular plans and the date of Thaton's walls, *Mists* goes one more step :

“No archaeological, epigraphic, or other scientific evidence demonstrates that the excavated site called Thaton is the Thaton of legend, *that it is older than Pagan*, or that it was inhabited by Mon speakers during the first millennium.” (italics mine) (*Mists* : 82)

In sum, *Mists* says : if Thaton's walls came into existence after the Pagan period, then how could Aniruddha come with his elephants for the chests of *tipitakas*. If there is no early Rome, then how could the Visigoths sack it ? This is a tight logical argument, but the rectangular plan of Halin (and other considerations) turns the theory on its head and prompts the reader to ask why so much evidence was overlooked or so baldly misconstrued ?

Pyu Finger-marked Brick

A-T raises the issue of so-called “Pyu fingermarked bricks [at]Thaton and nearby sites as Kyaikkatha, Sanpannoagon, and Tavoy.” (*Mists* : 81) If “Pyu fingermarked bricks are found at Thaton and nearby sites”, then of course these sites must be Pyu. This also sounds good and reasonable. Unfortunately, as archaeologists have maintained for years, finger-marked bricks per se have little predictive value, since they are found over such a wide area, noted in Northeastern India and Central and Northeast Thailand (Moore, 2007 : 134). As Moore observed : “Finger-marking can be used as a rough guide only, but provide valuable evidence of first millennium AD habitation...” (Moore, 2007 : 135-136) Hudson concurs by concluding : “Fingermarked bricks as such are not, therefore , definitive [sic] exclusively of Pyu or early urban sites, and need to be read carefully.” (Hudson, 2004 : 123) The presence of “Pyu” finger-marked bricks in Lower Burma is then meaningless, since so many diverse cultures in the first millennium adopted finger-marking, the reasons for which are still debated. It is also important to remember that these types of bricks are emblematic of first-millennium sites and they are found throughout Lower Burma.

The Thagya Pagoda, Thaton.

This square-based pagoda comprised of three concentric terraces was faced in laterite but is now completely concealed in plaster and whitewash. (For a pre-plastering photo, see O'Connor, 337). Some 60 large terracotta plaques were placed in niches in the middle terrace, illustrating the last ten *jatakas*, or the *Mahanipata*. The precise date of the pagoda is unknown, but it is important since it represents yet one more example of monumental architecture in the southeast probably dating to ca. 11-12th centuries. Since many plaques are still embedded in the deep niches, for this reason and others it is probable that the three terraces are original. The stupa dome, like Zothoke, probably represents many restorations.

Thagya Pagoda, Thaton
Middle terrace, tiles with last ten
jataka in middle terrace (not
visible in photograph)



The ordering of the last ten *jatakas* at Thaton matches precisely the order found at Pagan, in both early and later series. (There are few exceptions at Pagan, which adopt the so-called Sinhalese ordering, such as the Loka-hteikpan temple.) That Pagan adopted the order found in Thaton is another indication that the Mon contributed to Pagan's nascent culture. The order is also repeated in one inscription (the *pandit*) at Thaton (For the order of the *jatakas* at Thaton, see P. Krairiksh). This important point is taken up more fully below.

Jataka tile, Thagya Pagoda, Thaton, site godown. Mahasoda (?) Jataka



Sima Stones in Thaton, ca. 1050

Also, at Thaton, are *sima* stones belonging to an early ordination hall. The stones are sculpted with the last ten *jatakas*. (Luce, 1985, 172-173 ; Krairiksh) A separate stone belonging to this series is inscribed with 21 lines in Mon and speaks about the dedication of the *sima*. These are the earliest surviving sculpted *sima* stones in Burma and differ completely from the few *sima* stones we have at Pagan which are not embellished with *jatakas*.

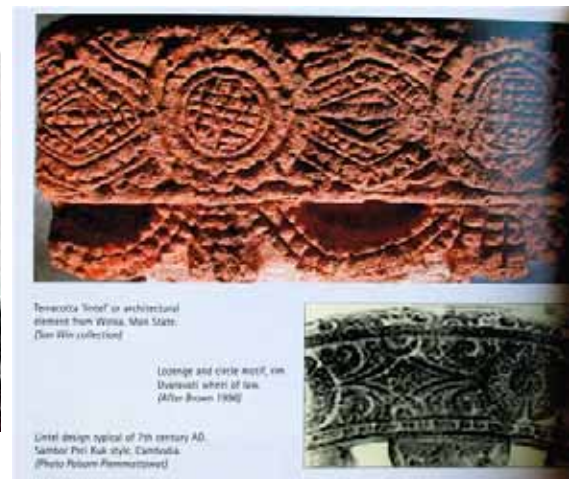
**Inscribed Sima
dedication,
ca. 1050
Kalyani Sima
Thaton**



Kalyani *Sima* stones, ca. 1050 , Thaton

The *sima*-inscription, the *pandit*-inscription (aforementioned), and another inscription at Thaton (the ‘*trap*’) were all dated paleographically by Luce to the ca. 1050. (Luce, 1956 : 295 ; Luce, 1985 : 172) An eleventh-century date is also accepted by Shorto, for “a group from the Lower Burma state of Thaton”, (presumably the same) although he too does not elaborate upon his reasoning. (Shorto 1970 : ix) These also relate paleographically to an inscription on a standing figure in the Kawgun Cave published by Gutman who has accepted the date proposed by Shorto and Luce (Gutman, 2002 : 37)

It is probably not without significance that the *pandit* inscription shares a nearly identical motif , the lozenge -and-circle, with the much earlier terracottas from Winka. This suggests remarkable continuity between the ca. 6th-7th century and the eleventh century. Such continuity also helps to think of the *pandit* inscription as rather early, rather than late, in a relative chronology. The presence or absence of this motif in the art of the Pyu and in early Pagan must be investigated. Motifs have concrete manifestations in time and place and can therefore be helpful tools in reconstructing the past, unlike ideas.



Note nearly identical circle-lozenge motif on *pandit* inscription from Thaton (left) and from a Winka terracotta (right). Detail from Winka, Moore, 2007 : 196. Pandit inscription, ca. 1050. Bottom right : similar motif on dhammacakka, Mon Dvaravati

Regardless of the contents of these inscriptions and one or two others at Thaton, the issue of the approximate date of these epigraphs – based on paleography – is critical. If they can be shown to be of 11th century, then it indicates that Mon were in Thaton then and participated in the type of Buddhist culture that we would anticipate. Luce made a claim (that the inscriptions were ca. 1050), with obvious and important repercussions. Looking for a serious analysis of the paleographical issues, we find instead in *Mists* :

“The stones [*trap* and *pandit* at Thaton] were written partly in Old Mon and partly in Pali, but since the old *Mon language in Burma remained basically unchanged from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries, while its script remained the same for an even longer period of time,*⁹ there is no certainty that the language and script on the stones are necessarily eleventh-century Old Mon rather than, say, *fifteenth-century Old Mon.*”¹⁰ (*italic mine*) (*Mists* : 106)

According to *Mists*, the Thaton inscriptions could be therefore eleventh century (as Luce and Shorto suggested), or as late as the 15th century (as no one has suggested). Fifteenth-century Mon is considered by Shorto to be Middle Mon, but *Mists* has curiously called it Old Mon, I suspect to minimize the difference between the 11th (Old Mon) and 15th centuries (Middle Mon). Puzzling that any script has not changed significantly during four or five centuries (between the 11-15th centuries), I was certain that endnote 9 would enlighten me on this crucial point. Endnote 9 :

“9. Shorto, *Dictionary of Mon Inscriptions*, x. Shorto does not explain this linguistic continuity, but I guess that early written Old Mon was relatively isolated, and that only later in the sixteenth century, when Pegu became the capital of the Upper Burma Toungoo Dynasty, did Old Mon

make the kinds of contact with the dominate language in the country, Burmese , which may have produced the first noticeable changes [in language] ,” (*Mists* : 354)

A-T has inferred that “since the the Mon language remained basically unchanged from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries” (*Mists*, 106) , then (b) there were also no changes in the Mon script during the same long period.

Unfortunately, when we consult Shorto, *Dictionary of Mon Inscriptions*, x, the evidence from Shorto suggests just the opposite. What Shorto says is this : that from 1462 “down to the first quarter of the succeeding [not preceding] century” [1500-1525] the inscriptions “differ very little from Dhammaceti’s in language.” Perhaps A-T skimmed this section too quickly, and confused this short period, 1462-1525, with the much longer one of his own making (11-15th)

Moreover, there is nothing on that cited page from Shorto (or his entire introduction) that suggests that the Mon language “remained basically unchanged from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries.” (*Mists*, 106) In fact, a great deal of change was noted between Old Mon and Middle Mon, in terms of language. Shorto concludes : “Nevertheless, we can now see Middle Mon [c. 15th century] to be a more transitional stage that it seemed when the first six inscriptions were published in *Epigraphia Birmanica* [Old Mon, or Pagan era inscriptions].” (Shorto, 1970 : x). Also, that Shorto’s classic article on Mon epigraphy was not cited in *Mists*, when epigraphy looms so large in this discussion, is nothing less than astonishing. (Shorto, 1965) This grossly unsophisticated and naive approach to epigraphy is revealed again in A-T’s discussion of captions on Pagan tiles (see below).

However, it is easy to understand why A-T wishes the reader to blur any distinctions between an 11th-century epigraphs and those from the 15th century. But it is one poor assumption begging another. Even completely untrained eyes like my own can easily detect the difference between the early Mon script in Thaton (and Pagan) and that on the stones in 15th-century Pegu.

This again is another bait-and-switch, or sleight of hand. Cite a source in an endnote, in this case Shorto, which does not address the point raised in the body of the text, or which in fact contradicts it, and then move on. But it just wont do.

Again, my objections will likely seem pedantic , but to careful readers its details like these that establishes the trustworthiness of the narrative. That *Mists* can so glibly attribute 11th-century inscriptions to possibly the 15th century need more justification than misrepresenting Shorto’s conclusions in an endnote. But I urge readers to check these sources themselves.

Luce, who was no slouch in the world of epigraphy (think of transcribing thousands of Mon painted inscriptions) made a claim, based on paleography, and it must be intelligently refuted, at least for me. Until I see a real epigraphic argument for rejecting Luce’s dating, then Luce’s reading must stand. I am happy to accept an interpretation other than Luce’s, but I must see

concrete evidence, not innuendo and endnotes that when carefully pursued contradict the contention expressed in the text.

More importantly, even if the inscriptions can be shown to be late 11th century, or 12th century, the fact that they are inscribed in Mon underscores the presence of the Mon in this region. A-T is so focused on disproving the existence of the Mon in Lower Burma during the 11th century and to debunking Aniruddha's striding into Thaton in 1057 that he fails to see the larger picture. A-T appears to go to any length in attributing Thaton's rise to after the Pagan period, leading to trivializing the epigraphic evidence and ignoring Thaton's city walls that are universally considered first-millennium.

Kyanzittha's Inscriptions in Thaton and its Environs

While Aniruddha probably did not come to Thaton to collect his *tipitakas*, one royal gentleman from Pagan, Kyanzittha (1084-1113), was in the area, or at least his representatives. We know this from no less than four inscriptions, one of which is dated to 1098. Two of the inscriptions were located in the vicinity of Mt. Kelasa, about 30 miles north of Thaton. Both record repairs, one to a "*ceti*" and the other to a temple ('the *prasada* of the great relic' or "*mahadhat*"). Duplicates of these inscriptions are found in Thaton itself, on the hill overlooking the town and the other "two furlongs" south of the foot of the hill. The Mon inscriptions have been summarized by Luce, with citations to the primary literature (Luce, 1969-1970, I : 56)

These inscriptions suggest the presence of Mon-speakers in the region – otherwise, why else use Mon? If the "remnants of the Pyu state" (*Mists*, 67) were still hanging about, why did Kyanzittha not bring down from Pagan the savant who prepared the Pyu side of the Myazedi inscription or employ the remnants of the Pyu in Lower Burma to incise his inscriptions for the local population speaking Pyu? This is another facetious question, but this issue goes right to the heart of the problem. These four inscriptions were in Mon because Lower Burma was inhabited by Mon speakers, although only a fraction were literate. This is why even if the '*trap*' and '*pandit*' inscriptions were incised in Kyanzittha's reign or later and do not belong to ca. 1050 but to later, it would still suggest that Mon were in evidence in Thaton during the ca. 11th-12th centuries.

Also, the Mon inscriptions refer to repairs of monuments. True, the monuments may have been damaged in the year before the inscription was incised but probably not. In reality, these epigraphs probably refer to structures in existence earlier in the century or the preceding century and were created by the Mon prior to the Pagan-presence in southeastern Burma, beginning at the time of Aniruddha or certainly by the time of Kyanzittha.

Also, why establish two duplicate Kyanzittha-inscriptions in Thaton (both comment on the repairs of stupas about 30 miles distant), if Thaton was not important until after the Pagan

period ? Thaton was probably the key city before the rise of Mottama in the 13th century and the later shift to Pegu in the fourteenth.

Thaton in Later Mon History

Devoted to disproving the early Mon at Thaton, Chapter 4 concludes by claiming that :

“ . . . none of the Burma Mon texts looked east to what many colonial and other modern scholars have considered to be the homeland of the Mon : Dvaravati. Rather, their gaze was west to South Asia : Sri Lanka earlier and later, South India’s empire of Vijayanagara and the Talingas. Thus while modern western officials and scholars were nostalgically looking towards Dvaravati *on behalf of the Burma Mon* ; the Burma Mon themselves were gazing in the opposite direction, towards South Asia. (italics not mine) (*Mists* : 102)

Again, regrettably there are no endnotes to check these multiple assertions, and therefore one must guess what the references are. Here I am assuming *Mists* is referring to the Vijayanagara kingdom found in later Mon works, such as *Lik Smin Asah*, translated by Halliday in 1923. (Halliday, 2000, II) A-T has either completely misunderstood or distorted the references to this Indian kingdom. In fact, the Mon never gazed to South Asia, since the Mon cast themselves as mortal enemies of those from Vijayanagara, or ‘Vijjhanagara’ [sic] as it appears in the text ; this kingdom is clearly designated as Indian (Halliday II :148). Incidentally, the Mon are also pitted against the “Burmese of Ava” in the same bitter struggle over the right to claim Hamsavati. (Halliday II :167, 223) Also, to maintain that the “Thaton tradition” was “once of little importance to the Mon” is also flatly incorrect. A quick glance at the *Lik Smin Asah* reminds us that the founders of Pegu, the two brothers, descended from Thaton.

The-One-Big-Happy-Family Paradigm

This point above touches on another leitmotif in *Mists*, that is, that ethnicity was a minor issue in later Burmese history, a concern largely highlighted by that misguided older generation of colonial historians in order to promote sympathy for the Mon. I would call this : “Burma, the One-Big Happy-Family Paradigm.” Leider and Lieberman remind us in their reviews that ethnicity was indeed an issue in later Burmese history, as anyone familiar with Burmese history can testify. The aforementioned late Mon myth about the founding of Hamsavati is in fact largely devoted to the fierce struggle between ethnic groups, set in a mythic context but with real protagonists (Mon, Indian and Burmese). Lieberman notes that periodically “Mon resentment flared into open revolt. The Burman-led monarch responded with ferocious repression and public humiliation of Mon leaders and cultural symbols.” (Lieberman, 2007 : 382). Reading *Mists*, however, my mind drifts to the happy pages the *The New Light of Myanmar* and Myanmar television that celebrate the great unity that is Myanmar. Or even

more inspiring and heartwarming is the eye-catching feel-good billboard near the entrance to the Mingaldon airport, with smiling peasants, Chin, Karen and Mon, and others, all marching in unison behind the



Myanmar colors. Boarding the plane home, one indeed is infused with the One-Big-Happy-Family Paradigm --- until getting back and browsing through the latest newsletters from Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

**Billboard Near Mingaldon Airport
Marching Together for the National Convention,
May 17, 2004**

The Delta

No Pyu inscriptions have been found in the delta below Sri Ksetra, a fact that merits reiteration. The delta was perhaps as rich in culture as the southeast, but more field work needs to be done. However, at least the region near Yangon and Twante saw significant first-millennium developments that have been known for decades. Also, the distance between Yangon and Kyontu, the site of those large terracotta plaques, is no more than a 120 km, suggesting that the entire area now surrounding the Yangon and Bago rivers participated in this sophisticated coastal culture (as did the interior at Sri Ksetra). In Yangon, for example, is Tadgale, a site that has yielded an inscribed votive in Pali on its reverse and dated paleographically to the 10th century by Luce (Luce, 1985, I : 163-164). Roughly seven hundred objects were recovered from the exposed relic chamber of the Botataung Pagoda, following the war. The relic chamber revealed votive tablets which relate to both Pyu (73e) and Mon types (73a), together with others that are probably of the 14th or 15th century or later (73c). (Luce, 1985 : 162-163) The presence of Pyu votive tablets may indeed suggest an early Pyu presence. Bronze Buddha figures have also been recovered near Twante, some in connection with brick stupas in the vicinity (Moore, 2007 : 201-202; Luce, 1985 : 165). These compare favorably to a standing bronze Buddha from the Thaton area that was published long ago (Luce, 1985 : 173).

Maung Di Stupa, Twante

One enormous stupa near Twante indicates the sophisticated nature of the delta by the end of the first millennium or at least at the beginning of the second. This is the Maung Di Pagoda, seven miles east of Twante. (Luce, 1969-1970, Pl. 79b). The pagoda has a square base and two octagonal terraces, both faced with laterite blocks, all supporting a brick dome-shaped stupa comprised of early brick. Against the outer walls of the terraces were large terracotta plaques, bearing the name of Aniruddha. These are still preserved at the site. (Luce, 1969-70, III, Pl.4 ; Guillon, 1999 : fig. 19) It cannot be determined if the plaques were placed on a pre-existing structure or if the structure was built during the time of Aniruddha. Fragments of



Maung Di Pagoda, between Twante and Yangon River. After Luce : 1969 - 1970, Pl. 79 b. Square base surmounted by two octagonal terraces faced with laterite. Stupa dome comprised of large, ancient bricks. Large Aniruddha's plaques found on two top terraces. Stupa date - from the time of Aniruddha or earlier.

identical plaques were recently found at Pagan (Stadtner, 2005 : 201), perhaps suggesting that the large moulds were taken to the delta in the time of Aniruddha. These plaques are the largest known in Burma , so it would be unlikely that scores of these plaques were brought from Pagan when clay is available locally. The exact date of the Maung Di stupa is unimportant, since it is clearly of Aniruddha's date or earlier.

This enormous pagoda proves the existence of monumental architecture in the eleventh century, or earlier, in this part of the delta. The octagonal terraces may indicate its Mon affiliation, suggesting that it was in place before Pagan forces moved into the delta, but the association of an octagonal plan with the Mon must remain tentative. (The Lokananda stupa at Pagan rests on an octagonal base also). Again, for this valuable piece of evidence suggesting activity in the delta, prior to or at the time of Aniruddha, we look in vain in the index for the Maung Di Pagoda.

Kunzeik Inscription



**Left : Kunzeik Pali
Stone Inscription.
Now in Pegu
Museum godown,
Courtesy :
Dept. of
Archaeology**

A Pali stone inscription from Lower Burma is another significant document in the history of Lower Burma. Kunzeik is found on the east bank of the Sittaung, northeast of Pegu, and close to Kyontu. The inscription has been published but once again this evidence is omitted in *Mists*. (Aung Thaw, 111 ; Skilling, 1997 : 94) The incised Pali text is the *Patikkasamuppada* and is found in different versions among the Pyu and the Dvaravati Mon in the Chao Phraya basin (for an excellent discussion of this epigraph and others, see Skilling, 1997).

In as much as the location of Kunzeik is near Kyaikkatha, the largest walled city of lower Burma, this inscription is further evidence of sophisticated communities in this region, also dovetailing with the evidence of the Buddhist site of Winka further down the coast. The text continues on the obverse of the stone, suggesting that the slab was displayed free-standing.

The Mon at Pagan

The evidence at Pagan for Mon influence is too well known to dwell too much upon. To beg the obvious and join the chorus of critics : If the Mon had nothing to offer from Lower Burma, why do we find so much indisputable Mon influence at Pagan, such as 126 Mon even assisting in the consecration of a Pagan palace ? (Blagden, 1923) If the Pyu were so dominant (the vaunted 'Pyu Millennium') and accorded so much status, why not have the captions accompanying walls paintings executed in Pyu ? The script and language of the Pyu were still alive, witnessed by the Myazedi inscription, and ready to tap.

Pyu Influence at Pagan

The notion that certain simple brick temples of the Pyu at Sri Ksetra gave rise to the leviathans at Pagan is of course an old idea and virtually uncontested in nearly all of the literature on Pagan. (Strachan, 19 ; Aung Thaw, 42) Indeed, this very same idea that *Mists* has promoted was also propounded by the staunch advocate of the Mon, G. H. Luce. (Luce, 1969-1970, I : 301) As a measure of how widely this belief is now part of popular wisdom, we need go no further than the *Lonely Planet* guide for Burma (2005 edition : 297, 299)

Unfortunately, as Pichard and others have pointed out, the very same temples at Sri Ksetra said to be prototypes at Pagan, namely the Bebe and Lemyathna, cannot be proved to be of Pyu date. In fact, these temples at Sri Ksetra are likely of Pagan date or later (Pichard, 2007 ; Stadtner, 1998 : 43 – 47 ; Guy, 1999 : 17) I believe for many reasons that the only major standing structures from the Pyu period is the Bawbawgyi Pagoda, proved by thin silver and gold sheets incised in early characters that were discovered *in situ* within the stupa inside a small earthen vase (Luce, 1985, 128). The original inner cavity of the Bawbawgyi is domed internally, but this represents simple corbeling and is fundamentally different than the complex radial vaults spanning square or rectangular spaces that we find at Pagan (personal communication, Pichard, September, 2007). Pichard voiced a number of other objections in positing Pyu influence at Pagan and readers are invited to examine his comments (*Aseanie*, no. 18).

Also, the 8th - 9th century dates for the Pyu shrines at Sri Ksetra proposed in *Mists* poses a significant, unexplained *time gap* before the rise of Pagan's temple architecture in the eleventh century. Our earliest dated temple at Pagan is the Kubyaug-gyi (Myinkaba), dated to ca. 1112 , but this of course represents an evolution that began in the preceding century, but still too early in my opinion to be in debt to the temples at Sri Ksetra, even if they should be considered ca. 8 – 9th century. At the same time, there was an extensive Pyu presence at Pagan that has been recognized for decades (thousands of finger-marked bricks, for example), but the transition

between the few simple structural remains at Pagan and the temples of the 11th or 12th century cannot be charted. (for the Pyu presence at Pagan see Hudson, et al. , 2001 : 48-74)

The Jatakas at Pagan

The facts at Pagan reveal the following, as Luce and others have recognized decades ago : there were two series of *jatakas* adopted at Pagan. One was comprised of 550 tales, while the second and far more common series numbered 547 and corresponded to the ‘standard’ Pali collection normally associated with Sri Lanka ; this series of 547 is commonly used in Theravadin countries today, such as Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand. However, in this series of 547 there are two major different sequences for the last ten *jatakas*, the *Mahanipata*. In Thailand and Burma, for example, the penultimate *jataka* is the Vidhura and the last is the Vessantara, whereas in Sri Lanka the Vidhura tale is number eight and not number nine. In

Burma this sequence began at Thaton and Pagan at times that cannot be precisely determined but almost certainly by the eleventh century. In as much as this special sequence (of the last ten) appear at the beginning and end of the Pagan period, it is likely that it started among the Mon in Lower Burma (see below). Indeed, that this order is used today in Burma and in Thailand is likely a vestige of this Mon ordering.

Makuta's paṇḍit inscr. (Pl. 359) c. 1050 A. D.	West Petleik plaques c. 1060 A. D.	Ānanda plaques c. 1100 A. D.
.	Temiya 541	Temī 538—574
.	Janaka 542	Janak 575—614
isi Syām	Sāma 543	Syām 615—633
.	Nemi 544	Nemi 636—646
.	Mahosadha 545	Mahos 647—740
.	Candakumāra 546	Candakumār 741—749
Bhūridat	Bhūridatta 547	Bhūridat 750—754 +
Nāradoh 548	risi Nār (no numbers)
Wi(dhura)	Vidhura 549	Widhir (no numbers)
Wesantar 550	Wesantar (no numbers)

Far Left : List of the last ten jatakas incised on *trap* inscription, Thaton, compared to the same lists of *jatakas* found at Pagan, suggesting that this special order derived from the Mon. It is the same order used today in Burma and Thailand and differs from the ‘standard’ order found in the Pali canon and in use in Sri Lanka now. After Luce, 1956 : 295

Mists recognizes the existence of these two series at Pagan but spills much ink debunking Luce’s dichotomy between the orthodox-minded Kyanzitha who Luce thought adopted the 547-set and the preference of his less orthodox predecessor Aniruddha for the set of 550. However, *Mists* is so engaged in a most complex and convoluted argument to refute Luce that the central thesis gets lost, that is, the exploration of Mon influence at Pagan. Moreover,

since none of the relevant temples bear secure dates, as *Mists* rightly points out, so much of this discussion is sheer conjecture.

However, the point that needs to be raised is the order of the last ten *jatakas*, found in virtually all of the *jatakas* at Pagan (the Loka-hteikpan, a notable exception, follows the Sinhalese order) That this same order, by far the most common at Pagan, is found in Thaton, in the large tiles of the Thagya Pagoda, and also is the same in the Mon *pandit* inscription raises fundamental questions that are skirted in *Mists*. Luce has suggested that the *pandit* inscription dates to ca. 1050, making the Thaton set earlier than any Pagan series. *Mists* argued that the Thaton *pandit* inscription could be as easily 11th century as 15th, misunderstanding or distorting Shorto (see above discussion).

Mists argues in the most tangled way that “Luce’s thesis [about Aniruddha versus Kyanzittha] rests on evidence from a single temple [the West Hpetleik] ...” (*Mists*, 252). To weaken Luce’s arguments *Mists* resorts to desperately attempting to show that there were not 550 *jatakas* at the West Hpetleik. *Mists* proposes that the hundreds of identifying inscriptions on the tiles were perhaps incised in the 19th century. Read the statement below carefully.

“.....the legends inscribed on each plaque [at the West Hpetleik] were written on *top* of , not *below* the scene represented, as is the case with the rest of the Jataka series at Pagan. This unique placement [captions at the top] is found in only one other temple, the late nineteenth-century Pathodawgyi,⁷³ which suggest the Hpetleik temple may have been repaired much later and had their legends placed on top at that time.” (italics not mine) We cannot know, therefore, if the Hpetleik Jataka plaques, their total number, or their sequence (if that is even a significant issue) were original to the temple.” (*Mists*, 252)

This statement says : the W. Hpetleik stupa-temple may have been repaired centuries later and furthermore the captions on the Pagan-period *jataka* scenes may be newly placed on, sometime in the 19th century.



West Hpetleik, Pagan, Terracotta jataka, inscribed “Bhuridatta jat // 547” (after Luce, 1969-1970, III : 86). *Mists* suggests that the characters might be incised in during 19th century repairs.

Are we then asked to believe that the paleography and orthography of captions incised on the hundreds of plaques at West Hpetleik stupa may belong to the 19th - century ? This naive and rough-shod view of paleography and orthography throws into even sharper doubt all of the observations made in *Mists* with respect to epigraphy. That decades of scholarship cannot distinguish between 19th-century orthography and characters and inscriptions from the Pagan period is simply fiction. Are there other examples at Pagan of 19th-century ‘copies’ of Pagan-era inscriptions ? However, if such a reckless contention is made, then concrete evidence must be presented. Otherwise, this interpretation looks ridiculous on the face of it, only intended for the gullible ; for the intelligent reader, the contention raises only more alarm bells. Such slippery reasoning also calls to mind *Mist’s* dismissal of the Thaton inscriptions, as possibly 11th century or 15th, from a misreading or misunderstanding of a statement by Shorto (see above).

Moreover, even if the inscriptions were incised in the 19th century, we must remember that Burma no longer used the set of 550 . Also, we in fact do know the exact number of original plaques at the W. Hpetleik, since Luce recorded tiles at this stupa inscribed with the numbers 549 and 550. (Luce, 1969-1970, I. 265)

Also, the Pathodawgyi, in Amarapura, is not late 19th century, as *Mists* incorrectly states, but belongs to the reign of Bagyidaw. Moreover, late 19th-century photographs reveal that the Hpetleik temples, the sections containing the tiles around the base, were completely concealed in earth in the 19th century (O’Connor : 1987 : 295)

But *Mists’* discussion - which series of *jatakas* Kyanzittha or Anurahtha did or did not use -- is jumping right into the mess that earlier scholarship created by trying to pin this or that issue to this or that reign (from the chronicles). Most of these questions are inherently unsolvable, based on our evidence. For example, the so-called Sinhalese order was in use at the Loka-hteikpan, but here Mon captions are beneath the first two rows of *jatakas*, while the captions for the remaining *jatakas* are in Burmese. In the principal focus of the temple, a Mt. Meru scene, there are dual captions, Mon and Burmese, suggesting that for key religious and artistic compositions both languages were employed. (Stadtner, 2005 : 242)

The real issues are : from where did these two collections of *jatakas* (547 and 550) originate and emanate and why and when did the Pagan elite adopt one / and or the other ? Those questions, difficult as they are important, have answers that take us right to the question of Mon influence or no-Mon influence. They have not yet been entirely solved, but that is where the real intellectual challenges are.

Also, it is curious that A-T overlooked the fact that 14 long Mon-language captions were incised in the original plaster placed over the brick separating the two horizontal registers of *jatakas* in the W. Hpetleik. (Luce, 1969 – 1970, I : 266 ; Stadtner, 2005 : 200-201) These Mon inscriptions within the plaster, not on the tiles, are overlooked by most visitors but furnish further evidence that both Hpetleik stupas belonged to the early period of Pagan, when Mon was used, and that the order of the last ten *jatakas* echoed the same order noted above in Thaton.

Outer Corridor, W. Hpetleik, Mon captions incised on plaster placed between rows of *jatakas*. Captions not visible in photograph.



**Terracotta plaque, Sri Ksetra, Museum
After Guy, 1999 : fig. 6**

Finally, desperate to drag the Pyu into the discussion of *jatakas* at Pagan, *Mists* resorts to Sri Ksetra and opens the discussion by : “The Jatakas probably arrived [to Pagan] well before the Pagan period.” (*Mists*, 254) *Mists* cites Duroiselle’s old identification of a terracotta panel at Sri Ksetra featuring a seated male figure flanked by two standing male figures as a scene from the *Mughapakkah Jataka*. (see photograph above) Luce points out, however, that this generalized scene “hardly fits the text [of the *jataka*] ; and no other *Jataka* story has yet been found clearly illustrated in Pyu art.” (Luce, 1985, II : 142) Luce’s appraisal has not been changed in decades of exploration and research, apart from *Mists*. Even if this single example in Pyu art – from the first millennium – could be identified as any *jataka*, then we are asked to imagine that the Pyu enjoyed a full set of *jatakas* which somehow resurfaced from centuries of dormancy to inspire the *jatakas* at Pagan. The likely source is in Thaton, revealed by the *pandit* inscription and the *jatakas* on the tiles and *sima* stones. It is also not in Pala India for obvious reasons.



G.H. Luce at Pagan
After Strachan, 1990 : 6

Reconstructing events of the past is never a straightforward step-by-step exercise. Even with hundreds of dated inscriptions at Pagan, the precise chronology of the kings and their temples is anything but secure. With lapses of evidence – in the case of Lower Burma, inscriptions – the researcher turns to other means to establish events. Indeed, the historian's trade is really filling in the gaps that are sandwiched between more solid sign posts. Even with Burma's thousands of inscriptions, we are struck more by lapses than by a steady unfolding time-line of solid information. For Lower Burma the problem is especially challenging, as we see, and requires more subtle and sophisticated approaches, firstly stripped of the necessity to disprove the former interpretations of the chronicles which focused on Aniruddha's conquest in 1057 (from the Kalyani record) and all the myth-making that followed from it.

In this paper, I have mainly summarized the published reports of art historians and archaeologists. It can now be appreciated that Lower Burma was scarcely 'the swampy frontier area' that was sparsely populated and ruled, at least toward the end, by "the remnants of the Pyu state" (*Mists*, 67). That is just not so.

There was ample scope for the Pyu to make a splash at Pagan, should they have been there in great numbers and / or were accorded high status. Instead, they were only given a single side of the Myazedi inscription, a token offering to a token people at that time. Perhaps since the Pyu failed so badly in Lower Burma (remember the "remnants of the Pyu state" and of course the 'swampy, frontier area'), they forfeited at the beginning of the second millennium any esteem that that might have accrued in the middle of the first millennium from Sri Ksetra and other sites ? This is another facetious observation, but the far fetched contentions in *Mists* beg the questions.

Indeed, let us remember, according to *Mists*, it was the "Pyu Millennium." Whither the Pyu ? If the Pyu dominated the entire first millennium and there were no Mon in early Lower Burma, then we should expect far greater Pyu influence at Pagan and elsewhere. And as Pichard has argued in some detail, there is no evidence that Pyu architecture influenced the temples at Pagan, despite claims to the contrary that go back decades, even to Luce, filtering eventually even into the *Lonely Planet*.

The Mon presence in early Pagan was only one of many diverse forces contributing to this civilization, together with influence from various parts of India, Sri Lanka and other Southeast Asian societies. Pala India was of course extremely important, to judge from the character of the innumerable Pala artistic motifs at Pagan, but Mahayana Buddhism per se, associated with Pala India, was quite limited, if non-existent, despite many Mahayana deities, even those of a Tantric nature, such as at the Abeyadana. “Such Mahayana imagery was borrowed from Pala India but was likely worshipped in a Theravada context where patrons and artists made little distinction between these broad divisions in Buddhism emphasized by 20th-century scholars.” (Stadtner, 2005 : 39). The Mon played a key role in Pagan’s formation but they were one among many strong forces.

THE MYTH THAT WAS MISTS

The publication of *Mists* is welcome, however, since it requires researchers to examine more closely long held assumptions and to sharpen their analytical skills. To understand that Lower Burma was inhabited by the Mon during this early pivotal period requires putting together a complex puzzle, with some sophistication.

Luce and others were indeed caught up with funneling Pagan through the eyes of the chronicles, and this has led to forced explanations for just about everything at Pagan. In this sense, A-T should have divided the book in two distinct halves – one focusing strictly on the evidence from the first millennium and the second half reserved solely for the chronicles and their contorted but fascinating journey in the intellectual history of the 19th- and 20th- century Southeast Asia. Unfortunately, *Mists* fell into the same swamp that has trapped others by attempting to refute so many positions and theories that the chronicles raise, or really which were raised in earlier scholarship. The Ari nonsense and its connections to Tantricism is but one example in this long list of unnecessary issues, together with Aniruddha’s capture of the *tipitaka*, which takes up so much space in *Mists*. To this degree, *Mists* remains embedded in an impossible, if fruitless exercise, either staunchly proving or debunking the countless episodes found in the chronicles and later used to interpret Pagan’s development. This is not where historians should be spending their energies. *Mists* will be remembered as another book on Pagan, yet another walk through the labyrinth clouded by the chronicles and later interpretations.

For readers who have finished *Mists*, I recommend taking up the book up again. Skip the parts debunking the old colonialist characters who got everything wrong and concentrate on the sections treating only the presence or absence of the Mon. Be sure to read the endnotes carefully and pursue the secondary sources for yourself. I have suggested some of the ways the evidence has been manipulated and distorted (Stargardt ; Shorto), dismissed (Luce ; U Myint Aung), or ignored (Mahlo’s ‘Gulf’ coin series and many archaeological sites). These are only a small handful of problems. Make a list yourself. The Devil is in these Details.

In this sense, *Mists* would be positively dangerous in the hands of undergraduates, since beginning students are usually unable to detect the problems that have been so apparent to specialists, revealed in the recent reviews that are cited within the text of this paper. On the other hand, *Mists* would be ideal required reading for graduate seminars, since the book inadvertently illustrates the most hazardous pitfalls that graduate students will face in their careers as publishing scholars.

Another more disturbing problem with *Mists* is that the central thesis - the exclusion of the role of the Mon in early Burmese civilization - has the danger of being taken up in general histories of Burma and Southeast Asia, meriting a long paragraph or two in the weighty and impressive Oxford and Cambridge 'Histories of Southeast Asia' and similar authoritative series. Once endorsed in such respected surveys, the new Pyu Paradigm will be a *fait accompli*, inevitably then filtering into subsequent secondary literature and finally spawning into countless subsidiary research papers, like an unchecked virus. In the course of transmission, the new 'no-more-Mon paradigm' will be further simplified, accompanied perhaps with a fashionable critique of former 'colonial scholarship' that mistakenly triumphed the Mon at the expense of the neglected Pyu. The Pyu Paradigm will become fact, eventually finding a comfortable and secure spot in future editions of *Lonely Planet* and other guides, the editors and readers relieved of having to cope with the complexities of both the Pyu and the Mon simultaneously.

Should we be concerned with this re-writing of history? In this era of unbridled "Burmese" nationalism, coupled with the trivialization and the 'dumbing down' of historical writing in both Asia and the West, the absence of the Mon and the Pyu slipping into their place will go scarcely noticed. In the same way, it would not surprise me if the Etruscans are quietly sliced out of Roman history, or the Minoans from Greek history, or the 'Moors' from Spain. The inexorable simplification of knowledge and political-correctness are a formidable duo, as we see daily around us.

I imagine too that the new paradigm will hasten the Mon's entry into the long list of colorful, quaint but marginalized 'tribal groups' in Burma and Thailand that so enthrall Westerners. In Naypidaw the new 'paradigm shift' will certainly be welcome news, the generals eager to promote the Pyu Paradigm -- in as much as the Pyu can scarcely launch anti-government websites from their burial deposits in Sri Ksetra. Like the unspeakable restorations of Pagan, reality becomes truth over time.

It is with some irony that while reading *Mists* I found myself longing for the meticulous research that marked at least one member of that former, discredited generation of scholars, that is, G.H. Luce. Luce certainly committed his share of errors, as do we all, but his erudition, intellectual and moral integrity, and magnanimous and cosmopolitan character are enduring virtues.

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