

# Rajadhiraj's Rangoon Relics and a Mon Funerary Stupa

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**ABSTRACT**—At the conclusion of the Second Anglo-Burmese War (1852–1853), derelict brick monuments were cleared to construct barracks at the foot of the hill capped by the Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon (Yangon). One stupa disclosed nine objects, the most important of which were three gold reliquaries, a band incised with a fifteen-line record in Pali and a bowl containing twenty-one bone fragments.

The incised band can be attributed to the Mon king, Rajadhiraj (reigned c. 1384 – c. 1420), whose capital was ancient Hamsavati, or modern Pegu (Bago). As the sole inscription associated with this leading Mon ruler, the band marks a significant addition to less than a handful of surviving records from the 14<sup>th</sup> and early 15<sup>th</sup> centuries in Lower Burma (Myanmar).

The Pali inscription recorded religious donations occasioned by the cremation of Rajadhiraj's queen. The bone fragments within the bowl are likely the queen's, suggesting that the stupa was a funerary monument.

The three gold reliquaries were probably produced in Lower Burma but share affinities with Sri Lankan examples. Reliquaries imported from Sri Lanka, and from Eastern India, probably played an incalculable role in shaping designs of Southeast Asian reliquaries and also brick and stone stupas.

This treasure-trove has been the subject of occasional notices, but a fresh examination is merited in view of its importance for understanding Mon civilization and funerary traditions in Southeast Asia during the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## The discovery

The objects were uncovered on 13 April 1855, while “leveling one of the pagodas on the Eastern heights (the site of the new European Barracks)” (Sykes 1860: 299).<sup>1</sup> Old maps and descriptions indicate that these barracks were located “about a quarter of a mile” southeast of the Shwedagon Pagoda (St. John 1895: 201). The brick stupa enshrining the relics was among a “forest of small pagodas” inside

<sup>1</sup> This important trove has been largely overlooked since Sykes' summary of the finds in 1860. The gold helmet was included in a catalogue published by the Victoria and Albert Museum (Lowry 1974) which was followed by an article in which the gold band was incorrectly attributed to Dhammadeti and the gold helmet to Banya Thaw, or Queen Shinsawbu (Singer 1992).

the earthen ramparts southeast of the Shwedagon in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Grant 1995: 29). Three or four small stupas appearing in this area on a map dated to 1852 certainly stood for many more (Khin Maung Nyunt 2000: 34) (Fig. 7). Hundreds of brick stupas dotted the Rangoon landscape in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but only a score or so were in good repair and under worship, such as the Shwedagon, Sule and Botataung (Grierson 1825; Grant 1995).

The small but impressive treasure-trove was sent to Calcutta and then on to the East Indian Company's Court of Directors in London where they entered the Company's museum by 1856. The items were exhibited at a meeting of the Royal Asiatic Society in June 1857, and subsequently noted by Col. W. H. Sykes in the Society's journal in 1860. The objects were thereafter transferred by 1879 to the South Kensington Museum, London (later the Victoria and Albert Museum), apart from the gold band whose whereabouts remains unknown but whose text was included as an eye-copy in the aforementioned journal (Sykes 1860: Pl. IV) (Fig. 6).

Nine objects were enumerated in Sykes' article: "Model of a gold pagoda [reliquary] in three pieces, a larger ditto in four pieces, smaller ditto in three pieces (imperfect), gold helmet set in jewels (broken), gold tassel, gold leaf scroll, small gold cup with ruby on top, gold belt set with jewels, gold bowl with cover." (Sykes 1860: 299). Only four of the nine are now accounted for, all in the Victoria and Albert Museum.<sup>2</sup> The gold bowl contained twenty-one blackened and calcined bone fragments.

The objects were created by the repoussé technique in which gold sheets were formed in the desired shape and then hammered from one side, resulting in raised ornamentation on the exterior. Since the sheets are thin, finished objects are easily subject to breakage. Repoussé was practiced throughout India and Southeast Asia from early in the first millennium and was also used widely during Pagan's classic period (c. 11<sup>th</sup> – c. 13<sup>th</sup> centuries). However, these objects from Rangoon are the only significant surviving examples of repoussé in Lower Burma between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>3</sup> In Thailand, by contrast, numerous specimens of gold repoussé have been recorded during the same period, notably those interred within the crypts

<sup>2</sup> The gold objects in the museum are the stupa (height 13.5 inches), the helmet (height 7.5 inches), a tassel of sixteen stems, and a small bowl with lid containing bone fragments. The waist belt set with 71 stones (length 27 inches), the gold cup and the smallest stupa (fragmentary) (height 2.5 inches) went missing from the museum long ago. The only illustration of the belt is found in Sykes' lithograph (Pls. I, III) (Fig. 1). The complete gold stupa, de-accessioned in 1958, was 14.5 inches in height, 7.5 inches in diameter and was set with 24 rubies (Fig. 3). The twenty-one irregularly shaped bone fragments vary in size, from just under 1 inch in length to slightly more than 2 inches.

<sup>3</sup> The Botataung Pagoda, Rangoon, provides a rare instance of an excavated relic chamber. A stupa-shaped stone casket contained a small stone image of the 'fat monk', probably Gavampati, and a tiny gold repoussé stupa with a single seated Buddha on each side of its base; inside were two small bone fragments, together with a hair relic coated in lacquer (Luce 1985: Fig. 72; Stadtner 2011: 115). The repoussé stupa is of crude workmanship but is one of the few surviving examples from this age in Lower Burma.



Figure 1. Rangoon treasure-trove, lithograph. After Sykes, Pl. I



Figure 2 (above). Gold Reliquary. c. 1400 – c. 1420. h. 13 ½ inches. Courtesy: Victoria and Albert Museum

Figure 3 (opposite). Gold Reliquary, inset with 24 rubies. h. 14 ¼ inches. Whereabouts unknown. Courtesy: Victoria and Albert Museum





Figure 4 (above). Gold helmet, inset with precious stones. c. 1400 – c. 1420. h. 7  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Courtesy: Victoria and Albert Museum



Figure 5 (left). Gold bowl, with lid, containing twenty-one bone fragments. c. 1400 – c. 1420. Courtesy: Victoria and Albert Museum

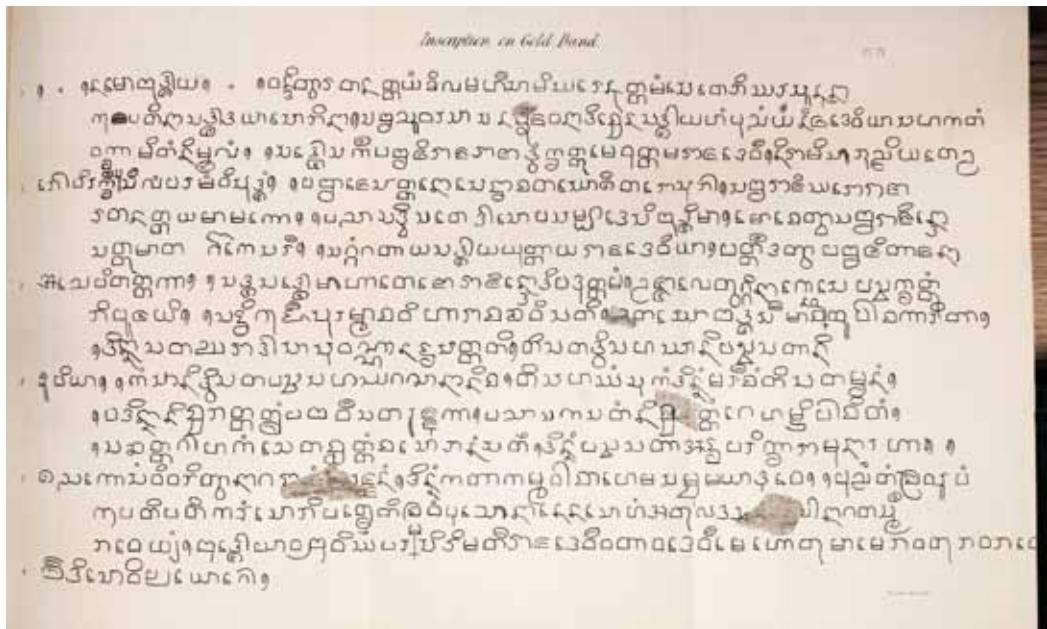


Figure 6. Eye-copy of gold band inscription. After Sykes, Pl. 4

Figure 7. Rangoon, 1852. Sule Pagoda, circled. After Khin Maung Nyunt, p. 34





Figure 8 (above). Ayutthaya gold reliquary, inset with precious stones. Wat Ratchaburana, c. 1424. After Prathom, p. 24.

Figure 9 (top right). Reliquaries, Adu Aludeniya, c. 14<sup>th</sup> century. Colombo Museum. Courtesy: Sanjeeva Rambukwella

Figure 10 (below). Reliquary set, silver and gold. Wat Phraphut, Narathiwat Province. c. 11<sup>th</sup> – c. 14<sup>th</sup> century. After Piriya, Pl. XIII

Figure 11 (right). Gilded reliquary. Possibly from crypt of Sa Si stupa, c. 12 – c. 14<sup>th</sup> century. Sukhothai Museum. Courtesy: Paisarn Piammettawat



of two temples at Ayutthaya: Wat Mahathat, c. 1374 (Prathum 2005), and Wat Ratchaburana, c. 1424 (Pattaratorn 2005).

The principal items in the Rangoon trove were shown in a lithograph included in the Society's journal (Fig. 1). The brick background, together with untamed vegetation, imparts the impression of a fresh discovery, but perhaps the objects were artificially arranged to create a 'picturesque' effect. A cloth covering seems to have once fitted over the gold helmet. The ringed spire of the stupa, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, was broken off at the top and never recovered; the smallest stupa retained only its base, visible on the bottom right (Fig. 1). Since the relic chamber was not invested by treasure-seekers, this breakage probably occurred when the enveloping brick stupa was dismantled.

All the items were acquired by the South Kensington Museum in 1879, the year the East India Company collection was transferred to the museum. Most were "exhibited in a case", at least by the mid-1890s (St. John 1895: 199). The gold belt and gold cup with a ruby on its cover were in the museum in 1895 but cannot be traced today (St John 1895: 201). The complete stupa reliquary was de-accessioned in 1958, for unknown reasons, but was captured in a black-and-white photograph (Fig. 3). Its present whereabouts is unknown. The only well-known object from the assemblage is the gold helmet (Lowry 1974: 28) (Fig. 4).

### The incised gold band

The Pali scholar, V. Fausböll, inspected the gold band at the Royal Asiatic Society, London, in 1858 and prepared a translation that Sykes included in the article of 1860. An eye-copy of the inscription was also appended to the translation, one that Fausböll probably produced himself (Sykes 1860: pl. IV) (Fig. 6). The characters of the inscription relate only loosely to modern Burmese, but Fausböll completed his translation from the original band, judging from one of his endnotes. The Pali record, with diacritical marks, was included with Fausböll's translation.

By 1895, however, the incised band went missing in London. Fausböll reported, thirty-five years after the publication of his translation, that the band had been hand-delivered to him in 1858 at the "Asiatic Society's Rooms", removed from the East India House Library for his examination; he conjectures that the gold strip "must now be kept in either the India Office Library or in the Indian Museum attached to it." (St. John 1895: 433). The band probably remains in London, perhaps now in The British Library, which absorbed the holdings of the India Office Library, or in a cabinet at the Royal Asiatic Society.

Sykes presented two translations, one by Capt. T. S. Sparks made in 1855 and the other completed by Fausböll in 1858. Both translations differed markedly, but similarities prove that the two translators worked from the same inscription. Sparks' reading was beset by numerous errors, while Fausböll's was generally correct.

Sparks, for example, read a date (846), written not in numerals but in words; he then converted 846 to the Burmese Era, producing 1484-1485. How Sparks was misled is easy to appreciate, since he mistook *atta* for *attha* (eight) and *settha* for *satthi* (sixty) and so on (Tun Aung Chain, personal communication). Fausböll's translation appears in the Appendix, with minor emendations.

The inscription opens with the donor described as "the son of Setebhissara", or the son of the Lord of the White Elephant. The Pali compound is comprised of three words, *seta* (white), *ibha* (elephant) and *issara* (lord). The Lord of the White Elephant is a common royal epithet in Southeast Asia but was particularly associated in Mon chronicles and inscriptions with Banya U (reigned c. 1348 – c. 1384), the father of Rajadhiraj (Tun Aung Chain, personal communication). That Banya U is the only king to be described as Lord of the White Elephant in a list of Mon rulers in the Shwedagon Inscription is another strong reason for identifying Banya U with the holder of this title in the gold plate inscription (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 15, 20).

Since the donor of the gold band states that he is the son of Setebhissara, that is, Banya U, then the band and the deposits can be associated with Rajadhiraj. Also, Rajadhiraj is explicitly described as "the son of the Lord of the White Elephant" in one Mon chronicle (Tun Aung Chain 2010: 51). The great Mon king, Dhammaceti (reigned c. 1470 – c. 1492), can be excluded as the donor of the gold band since his father did not belong to a royal family and hence could not have borne the title of Lord of the White Elephant.

Banya U inherited a white elephant that was originally gifted by a king of Sukhothai to a Mon ruler in Mottama named Wareru (reigned c. 1287 – c. 1296), or Warow, known only to chronicles. The monarch from Sukhothai gifting the white elephant would have been the celebrated Ram Khamhaeng (reigned c. 1279 – c. 1299) (San Lwin 2007: 9; Tun Aung Chain 2010: 41). This palladium passed on to Wareru's descendants, finally going to Banya U during whose reign the elephant expired. The gift of an elephant from Sukhothai is likely legendary, but Banyu U adopted the title of Lord of the White Elephant (see below). The connections between Sukhothai and Mottama, known as Bann in Thai epigraphs, are still to be worked out, but inscriptions and chronicles in Thailand attest to religious exchanges between Mottama and Sukhothai and with monks who had trained in Sri Lanka (Griswold & Prasert 1972; Pattaratorn 2009; Skilling 2007).

Rajadhiraj is a Pali title, "king of kings", and was adopted by many Mon rulers in Pegu. His personal sobriquet was Sutasoma Rajadhiraj, which appears both in inscriptions and in some Mon chronicles (Pe Maung Tin 1934: 15, 20). Sutasoma enjoyed regional status and was mistakenly conflated with Wareru in at least two Thai chronicles (Wyatt & Aroonrut 1998: 36-37; Griswold and Prasert 1972: 55). The name Sutasoma was adapted from a *Jātaka*, *Mahāsutasoma* (no. 537), in which the *bodhisatta*, Sutasoma, persuaded a man-eating monarch named Porisād to reform his diet. Rajadhiraj adopted this name when a Burmese prince defiantly proclaimed

himself Porisād, emulating the king who relished defeating and then eating other rulers (San Lwin 2007: 124, 174). The relationships between Banya U, Rajadhiraj and their descendants are indicated in the genealogy below, based on later chronicles and Mon inscriptions (Tun Aung Chain 2002: 38).

Mon kings ruling from Pegu

1. Banya U (accession, Mottama, 1348)	1369-1384
2. Rajadhiraj, son of 1	1384-1420
3. Dhammaraja, son of 2	1420-1423
4. Banya Ramkuit, brother of 3	1423-1446
5. Banya Barow, grandson of 2	1446-1450
6. Banya Kendaw, son of 3	1450-1453
7. Mamohtau, brother of 6	1453
8. Banya Thaw (Shinsawbu) daughter of 2, mother of 5	1453-1470
9. Dhammadeti, son-in-law of 8	1470-1492
10. Banya Ram, son of 9	1492-1526
11. Dakaratpi, son of 10	1526-1538

Fausböll first misinterpreted the Pali title *Setebhissara*, or Lord of the White Elephant, but the correct meaning was advanced years later by R.F. St. Andrew St. John, an antiquarian familiar with Lower Burma. He was also the first to correctly associate the epithet with Banya U and the gold band with Rajadhiraj, identifications endorsed in the same year by Fausböll (St. John 1895).<sup>4</sup> The most common Mon term for Lord of the White Elephant in 15<sup>th</sup> century Mon inscriptions was *tila ciñ batāñ*, with minor variations (Shorto 1971: 172).

Banya U is described as Lord of the White Elephant in the sole surviving stone inscription from his reign, a Mon and Pali epigraph discovered in 1998 in the Twante township, about twenty miles west of Rangoon (Bauer 2012). The object of the inscription was to record that in 724 (Burmese Era), or 1362, Banya U erected a structure, or “*prāsada*” (the Sanskrit word is used), associated with Kyaik Jra-ngam, probably a stupa named Jra-ngam once located in the village in which the inscription was found (Bauer 2012; Christian Bauer, personal communication). This is the earliest Mon inscription belonging to the line of kings ruling from Pegu. Following this record dated to 1362, there is a hiatus of extant Mon inscriptions for at least forty years until the gold band inscription of Banya U’s successor, Rajadhiraj. The next dated Mon inscription does not appear until many decades later, in 1455, the Kyaikmaraw stone inscription of Banya Thaw, or Queen Shinsawbu. Such a paucity

<sup>4</sup> Lowry almost certainly read these brief notices by St. John and Fausböll, since he tentatively but correctly identified the son of Banya U as Rajadhiraj (Lowry: 1974: 28).

of early Mon inscriptions adds to the importance of the incised band.

The aforementioned Twante inscription also recorded the year of Banya U's accession, 710 (Burmese Era), or 1348, a date in agreement with most of the chronicles (Tun Aung Chain 2011: 48; Halliday 2000: 97). Banya U is said in the chronicles to have shifted the capital from Mottama to Pegu in 1369, but this donation of 1362 near Twante makes it certain that he patronized monuments in the Rangoon area at least seven years before the king's alleged shift from Mottama to Pegu.

Another reason to connect the gold band with Rajadhiraj is the king's description of himself in the inscription as "a lion towards hostile barbarians", or "*sattumātangakesara*", an appellation consistent with his reputation as a leader defending Mon sovereignty. This epithet, whose first occurrence appears in the gold band, was likely echoed in later chronicles in which he was termed *Sīharājā*, or Lion King (Halliday 2000: 98; Tun Aung Chain 2010: 51; San Lwin 2007: 174). A pair of additional titles found in the gold band reinforces Rajadhiraj's reputation as a leading Mon monarch, such as King of All Kings ("*sabbārājissarorajā*") and Lord of All Kings ("*sabhārajinda*") (Sykes 1860: 302). That these three epithets figure in no other 15<sup>th</sup> century Mon inscriptions underscores the likely association of the gold band with Rajadhiraj.

## Re-evaluating Rajadhiraj

Rajadhiraj and Dhammaceti are considered the two most important kings in Mon history, the former for defending the Mon realm from forces from Inwa, or Ava, and the latter for his reform of the *saṅgha*. Apart from Banya U's aforementioned stone inscription of 1362 and the undated gold band from Rangoon, the history of this formative stage of Mon history has until now relied entirely on later chronicles. The gold band inscription however discloses important facets of Rajadhiraj's career that prompt re-thinking his biography known hitherto only from later chronicles.

The chief source for Rajadhiraj is the acclaimed Mon chronicle, *Akran Kamraulwī Rājadhirāj*, known more widely in its Burmese translation, *Yazadarit Ayedawbon*, or *Struggles of Rajadhiraj* (Nai Pan Hla 1977; San Lwin 2007; Fernquest 2006). This text and later Mon histories extol the king's military feats, especially the outmaneuvering of his nemesis, Mingaung (reigned c. 1400 – c. 1422) (San Lwin 2007; Halliday 2000: 97-98; Tun Aung Chain 2010: 50-51). The chronicle traditions focus on the king's military feats, while his patronage of the *saṅgha* receives scant mention, a picture challenged by the evidence of the gold band inscription (see below). Moreover, the chronicles record conflict between Prince Rajadhiraj and his father's household in Mottama, but no such discord appears in the gold band inscription in which Rajadhiraj in fact pays homage to Banya U (Tun Aung Chain 2010: 50-51; San Lwin 2007).

Neither the gold band inscription nor the stone inscription of 1362 makes

reference to Wareru, the purported founder of the dynasty in Mottama, known only to chronicles. If Wareru was so pivotal in Mon history, then how to explain his absence in all of the Mon inscriptions from this entire era? Indeed, such silence casts doubt on both the very historicity of Wareru and the assertion in the chronicles that the Mon capital was first in Mottama and then later shifted to Pegu. It is likely that the chroniclers sought to link the regional prestige of Mottama, a major commercial and religious hub, with the dynasty that formed in Pegu around the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century by Banya U. Mottama certainly had religious connections with Sukhothai, but perhaps later chroniclers wove a semi-legendary or fictitious king named Wareru into a narrative linking Sukhothai and Mottama to Pegu. By Dhammceci's time Mottama was firmly within the Mon realm, the city's long monastic history summarized in the Kalyani Inscription.

Ascribing a specific date to the incised band during Rajadhiraj's thirty-six year reign is not possible. However, the cremation of his unnamed queen can perhaps provide a clue in as much as the deceased was likely the chief queen. This marriage probably occurred at the beginning of Rajadhiraj's reign, since a king's marriage to his chief queen usually occurred soon after his accession (Tun Aung Chain, personal communication). Some of Rajadhiraj's children are named in chronicles but their mothers are unidentified; the four daughters of the gold band are probably children from different wives and were likely adolescents upon entering the monastery. The gold band inscription also recorded that Rajadhiraj himself joined the monastic life once and his late queen twice. Taken together, these factors suggest that the enshrinement of the relics perhaps occurred between the middle and end of his reign, say c. 1400 – c. 1420.

The characters of the inscription, known only from the eye-copy published in 1860, offer few indications concerning its date (Fig. 6). Mon inscriptions, with their peculiar orthographic conventions, can be dated far more accurately than those composed in Pali; however, the paleography of the incised band suggests that it belongs sometime between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries (Christian Bauer, personal communication).

## The royal donations

The object of the gold band inscription was to record Rajadhiraj's extensive benefactions made to the *saṅgha* occasioned by the queen's cremation. The principal donations included sixty cottages for senior monks ("kuṭī"), twenty-six monasteries ("vihāra"), nine stupas ("thūpa") and four ordination halls ("baddhasīmā") (Sykes 1860: 303).<sup>5</sup> These monuments have left no trace but they were perhaps constructed

<sup>5</sup> *Kuṭī* likely indicates individual cottages for senior monks but it may mean "rest houses" for pilgrims and worshippers. The same term is used often in inscriptions at Sukhothai where it refers to a cottage for a senior monk (Griswold and Prasert 1969: 45).

in the vicinity of Shwedagon. The grant was maintained by donated agricultural land, together with 378 measures, or *ticals*, of gold (“*suvaṇṇa*”), 2,500 of silver (“*rūpiyā*”) and 5,200 of copper (“*kansas*”, commonly known as *ganza*). Other gifted items to the *sangha* included one hundred white umbrellas and two gold covered *kammavācās* (manuscripts containing special Pali passages). Also, five hundred slaves were liberated and enrolled into monastic life (Sykes 1860: 303).

These donations occurred after Rajadhiraj performed a “*pūjā*” [a ceremony] to her hair five times”, a ritual otherwise unknown in Mon or Burmese historical sources and in neighbouring Thailand. The practice of making donations at the time of a royal cremation enjoyed a long history in Theravada societies. In Sri Lanka, for example, king Parakramabahu I (reigned c. 1153 - c. 1186) commemorated his mother’s cremation by constructing a stupa at the site of the funeral pyre, coupled with numerous additional religious donations (Geiger 2003: Pt. II.122). Chronicles associated with Ayutthaya record a number of instances of religious monuments that were established on the sites of cremations (Cushman 2000: 11, 15, 16). In Chiang Mai the cremation of a princess at a monastery in 1522 occasioned a presentation of silk robes to monks and the construction of a library; in addition, more than two hundred individuals were ordained, mirroring the mass ordinations known from Rajadhiraj’s incised band (Jayawickrama 1968: 180). Hence, the king’s donations in Rangoon at the time of the cremation reflect long-standing Theravada traditions.

Rajadhiraj’s incised gold sheet interred within a funerary monument also finds analogies in Thailand. One gold band, dated to 1385, was probably placed inside a relic chamber in a “square *cetiya*” (square base stupa) containing the corporal remains of a king at Sukhothai; the donor was a celebrated monk, Mahāsāmī Saṅgharāja, from Mottama (Griswold & Prasert 1973: 128). Another incised gold band was found inside the chief gold reliquary stupa at the aforementioned Wat Ratchaburana; on both sides was written the name and possible title of a Brahman ritualist (Pattaratorn 2005: 88-89). Wat Ratchaburana was built to commemorate the cremation site of two royal brothers, according to two later chronicles. Another example, an unpublished incised gold sheet in the Sukhothai museum, refers to a ceremony for interring unspecified corporal remains. In Sri Lanka, inscribed metal plaques were also deposited in stupas (Paranavitana 1946: 24). Gold sheets were also reserved for noteworthy communications, such as a gold letter, or “*suvaṇṇapatta*”, sent from Dhammadeti to his counterpart in Sri Lanka (Taw Sein Ko 1893: 41).

The twenty-one calcined bone fragments found within the gold bowl were almost certainly extracted from the queen’s funeral pyre; the largest bones measured slightly over two inches in length (Fig. 5).<sup>6</sup> The other objects in the trove, such as the

<sup>6</sup> Bone relics associated with the Buddha were normally far smaller. These were thought to be in three small sizes, that of “mustard seeds, broken grains of rice and split green peas”, a formulaic classification begun as early as Buddhaghosa (Strong: 11). An inscription from Keng Tung, 1451, relates directly to this description (Griswold & Prasert 1978: 85); also, an inscription, 1399, from

gold belt studded with gems and the gold helmet, can plausibly be identified as the queen's personal effects. A direct analogy are the many objects of a personal nature, such as jewellery and vessels, found within a special chamber at Wat Ratchaburana c. 1424 (Pattaratorn 2005).

The gold band contains the only reference to a royal cremation among Mon inscriptions. Cremations are also rarely referred to in Mon chronicles; even the cremation of the celebrated Dhammaceti receives scant mention (Tun Aung Chain 2010: 102). One Mon chronicle refers to the bones of a cremated noble placed in a golden urn buried on the platform of the Shwedagon, but such references are rare (San Lwin 2007: 79). Royal funerary stupas however were probably built in the vicinity of the Shwedagon Pagoda and the Shwemawdaw Pagoda in Pegu, but none have survived or are recorded. In contrast to Mon sources, Burmese chronicles routinely recorded the deaths of royal court members and their place of cremation but no mention is made of the final disposition of corporal remains (Tun Aung Chain, personal communication). An exception is King Mindon (reigned 1853-1878) whose tomb stands near the restored palace in Mandalay.

Thailand furnishes far greater information about funerary stupas during the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, both in chronicles and inscriptions (Jayawickrama 1968: 147, 180; Griswold & Prasert 1969: 47; Cushman 2000: 15, 18). One epigraph for example records permission for a neighbouring king to enter Sukhothai in order to pay homage to a stupa containing the relics of a deceased king (Griswold and Prasert 1970: 92). A poem associated with the Ayutthaya court records that a "grieving son .... erected a stupa for [the relics of]" of his father, the late king (Griswold and Prasert 1976: 143). The remains of King Borommatailokanat and his son were enshrined in 1492 inside a stupa at Wat Phra Si Sanphet, Ayutthaya (Santi 2005: 61). The ashes of the celebrated King Tiloka (reigned c. 1441-1487) were interred in a newly built stupa, a brick monument still standing in the compound of Wat Chet Yod, Chiang Mai. (Jayawickrama 1968: 147). Hence, the evidence in ancient Thailand suggests that funerary stupas were constructed with some frequency, providing a contrast to the meager examples known in Burma.

By the Rattanakosin period (1782 - present) funerary stupas containing the remains of kings became customary, witnessed by four enormous stupas commemorating the first four kings of the Chakri Dynasty in the compound of Wat Phra Chettuphon, or Wat Pho, Bangkok. A recent royal cremation was for the sister of King Rama IX in 2008, with six processions, the last of which culminated with the interment of the cremated remains in a stupa at Wat Ratchabophit.

The gold band inscription is in addition the only Mon record attesting to

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Sukhothai describes two relics from Sri Lanka as "middle-sized like a broken rice grain, like crystal" and the second as "small as a mustard-seed" and coloured like the *bikula* (*Mimusops elengi*; *bakul*, Sanskrit), fruit or flower; this description of the relics is repeated twice, on both faces of the stone panel (Griswold & Prasert 1969: 44, 52).

Mon monarchs, their queens and their children enlisting in monasteries. The pious Dhammaceti never entered the *saṅgha* during his reign but was a monk only before becoming king, according to chronicles. Sukhothai period inscriptions furnish instances in which the king and other relatives entered a monastery for a period and then returned to royal duties (Griswold & Prasert 1971: 202). This practice was also known in 15<sup>th</sup> century Chiang Mai (Jayawickrama 1968: 136).

The gold band inscription concluded with the donor's wish that his good works would be rewarded by his becoming a Buddha, a theme echoed in Dhammaceti's Kalyani Inscription of 1476 and in certain Sukhothai inscriptions (Skilling 2007: 192-193; Patrick Pranke, personal communication).

### The three gold reliquaries

The study of stupa-shaped reliquaries in Southeast Asia, India and Sri Lanka in the first half of the second millennium is in its infancy despite a great number of surviving examples. Many are without firm provenances, in as much as they were removed in the course of unauthorized digs and are now in museums and private collections. Also, reliquaries, even those recovered in sanctioned excavations, may have often been produced in locations quite distant from their find spots. In addition, less than a handful of examples from this entire age in Burma, Thailand and Sri Lanka can be dated with much precision or certainty, a fact enhancing the significance of the three gold stupas from Rangoon attributed here to the early 15<sup>th</sup> century on the basis of the gold band inscription.<sup>7</sup>

Stupa-shaped reliquaries played a number of diverse functions, only one of which was to contain corporal remains. The three gold reliquaries from Rangoon for instance contained no bodily remains but were merely among the precious objects interred with the queen's bones. The stupa-shaped gold reliquary found in one of the crypts at Wat Ratchaburana, c. 1424, was also empty (Pattaratorn 2005: 89) (Fig. 8). Other evidence for empty containers in the shape of stupas are the portable offerings sent by Dhammaceti from Pegu to honor the famous Tooth Relic in Sri Lanka. These included a "golden relic container" ("suvaṇṇamaya-dhātu-mandira", Pali) fashioned in the shape of a stupa ("cetiya", Pali), "a relic-receptacle made of crystal" and a "stone alms-bowl, embellished with sapphires of great value"; whether the 'golden relic container' was a work of repoussé or a gilded bronze is unknown (Taw Sein Ko

<sup>7</sup> These from Rangoon and the gold casket from a crypt at Wat Ratchaburana, c. 1424, (Pattaratorn 2005) are among the few examples that can be dated with a degree of certainty. Others would include eight stupa-shaped objects of diminishing size, one placed inside the other, excavated from a stupa within the compound of Wat Phra Si Sanphet, Ayutthaya, a set likely dating to the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, with shapes conforming closely to Sri Lankan designs (Subhadradis 1981: Fig. 105). Another set, comprised of seven caskets, was found in the crypt at Wat Mahathat, Ayutthaya, c. 14<sup>th</sup> century. No metal reliquaries in Sri Lanka from this period can be dated with much precision.

1893: 40, 207). These objects, without relics, were likely placed in the immediate vicinity of the Tooth Relic reliquary. Upon receipt of these offerings, the Sri Lankan king set the Tooth Relic temporarily inside the “golden vessel” (*suvaṇṇamaya-patta*, Pali) from Pegu (Taw Sein Ko 1893: 43, 210). The same practice is noted in the following century when Bayinnaung (reigned c. 1551 – c. 1581) also sent an empty reliquary to Sri Lanka for temporary enshrinement of the Tooth Relic (Tun Aung Chain 2004: 108). Even in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century an elaborate metal reliquary crafted in Moulmein was transported on a steamship to Colombo to offer to the relic in Kandy (Stadtner 2011: 183). These examples underscore the enduring ties between Upper and Lower Burma with Sri Lanka.

One Pali term for a reliquary was “*karaṇḍa*”, known in religious chronicles of Sri Lanka (Geiger 1986: 211; Strong 2004: 128, 136; Paranavitana 1946: 24). These objects normally contained relics and were interred within stupas or they could be presented, without relics, to monasteries as donations, to judge from a late 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century stone inscription from Mihintale, Sri Lanka. This record speaks of both a “registrar of caskets” (*karaṇḍa-lēkhaka*, Pali) and a “keeper of caskets” (*karaṇḍu-atsamu*, Pali). A special structure in this monastery preserved the reliquaries and was termed the “reliquary house”, or *dhātu-gēha* (Pali) (Wickremasinghe 1904: 101-102). The context makes it clear that this “reliquary house” was for the safe storage of caskets and was not a stupa. It can be conjectured that the laity presented empty caskets, as offerings, that were placed in a special structure located within the monastic compound.

Reliquaries were fashioned from a variety of materials, such as bronze, crystal, stone, silver, gold, and even stoneware. One reliquary assigned to 15<sup>th</sup> century Thailand even combined a metal base and an ivory finial.<sup>8</sup> Some are only a few inches in height, while the largest in Thailand is a gilded bronze standing nearly three feet in height, now in the Sukhothai museum and said to be found in the crypt of Wat Sa Si, Sukhothai, attributed to the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 11) (Rooney 2008: 86). Also, the shape of reliquaries and their ornamentation varied widely (Figs. 8-11). Indeed, no two reliquaries are identical, even those belonging to the same hoard. The three gold stupas in the Rangoon trove for example appear similar but differences emerge upon closer inspection, such as the disposition of the encircling bands below the drum. (Figs. 1-3).

One enduring tradition was the interment of superimposed stupa-shaped objects of diminishing sizes (Strong 2004: 13, 110; Geiger 1986: 211). The relic itself was placed in the smallest, innermost casket, usually made of the most precious materials, such as gold or crystal. Such sets of caskets are known from inscriptions at Pagan but no complete examples have been located (Than Tun 1978: 131). An inscription from Keng Tung, dated 1451, speaks of a graduated series of six containers made of gem

<sup>8</sup> British Museum, Accession number OA 1957.1014.2

crystal, gold, silver, sandalwood, ivory and copper (Griswold & Prasert 1978: 83-84). Sets of reliquaries have survived at Ayutthaya, at Wat Phra Si Sanphet (Subhadradis: 1981: Fig. 105), Wat Ratchaburana, c. 1442 (Pattaratorn 2005) and Wat Mahathat (Pratum 2005: 21). Another was found at Wat Praphut, Narathiwat Province, comprised of an outer silver container, seven inches in height, containing two smaller gold caskets; it has been attributed to the c. 11<sup>th</sup> - c. 13<sup>th</sup> centuries (Piriya 1980: 222; Jacq-Hergoualc'h 2002: Fig. 209) (Fig. 10).<sup>9</sup> Many single caskets in museums likely once belonged to dispersed sets but it is usually impossible to be certain.

The influential role that Sri Lanka played in determining the shapes of Southeast Asian stupas has long been recognized, but the details of this complex transmission are not completely understood. The process began at least as early as the 11<sup>th</sup> century in Burma, at Pagan, with brick stupas revealing Sri Lankan influence, sometimes side by side with examples exhibiting features from Eastern India.<sup>10</sup> Traveling architects or monks may have been the prime instigators of such influence, but it is more likely that portable reliquaries imported from Sri Lanka to Southeast Asia played a far greater role in furnishing the prototypes than has hitherto been suggested.

Sri Lankan stupas are marked by well established characteristics: three prominent parallel rings encircling the dome at the base, a broad rectangular block capping the dome which supported a wide solid circular shaft that was in turn surmounted by a tapered finial comprised of tightly spaced rings of diminishing sizes (Paranavitana 1946; Gatellier 1978). The base is designed with elephants arranged in a frontal position in some cases. Many of these basic features have been observed among numerous brick stupas at Pagan. However, Pagan period architects largely rejected both Sri Lankan and East Indian forms and favored an indigenous design in which the wide diminishing rings of the spire emerged directly above the dome, without a crowning block; there are also no prominent bands encircling the base of the drum. Among the best known examples at Pagan are the Mingalazedi and Shwezigon stupas. The Shwedagon stupa in Rangoon also largely follows this basic contour, testimony to the endurance of this design.

Although Sri Lanka influence waned by the end of the Pagan period, celebrated Sri Lankan stupas at Anuradhapura directly inspired at least two monuments in Burma,

<sup>9</sup> The photograph here shows only two stupas but a third, innermost gold casket, in the shape of a stupa, was included in another photograph (Sujit 1988: 23).

<sup>10</sup> The earliest examples would include the West and East Hpetleik temples, the former showing influence from Eastern India, the latter from Sri Lanka. The best example of Sri Lankan influence at Pagan is the huge Sitana-gyi stupa (no. 987), complete with small elephants around the square base. A bronze reliquary probably imported from Eastern India to Pagan was discovered long ago at Pagan (Luce 1969: III. 449a); it closely resembles a metal reliquary attributed to Eastern India, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (accession number 1982.460.3) and many reliquaries associated with Tibet (Zwalf 1985: Fig. 198). Reliquaries from Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu, may have been known in Burma but none have been found; their design shows Sri Lankan elements but also unique features (Ramachandran 2005: nos. 70-75).

both attested to by accompanying inscriptions. One in Sagaing, dated to 1431, was said to be modeled after the famous Ratanaceitya (modern Ruwanwelisaya) built by King Dutthagamani (Than Tun 2004: 225). The other, the famous Kaung-hmu-daw stupa near Sagaing, was described as resembling the Thuparama, although its shape bears no resemblance to the Sri Lankan Thuparama (the inscription is dated to 1650; Stadtner 2011: 237). Both stupas in Upper Burma were major royal donations and the Kaung-hmu-daw stupa ranks among the nation's largest, highlighting the religious and cultural importance of Sri Lanka.

Although the Sri Lankan-style stupa lost favor in Burma, it became ubiquitous in the Ayutthaya and Sukhothai realms and in subsequent periods, coexisting side by side with stupas based on entirely different indigenous designs (Gosling 1998; Santi 2005; Woodward 1993). Unlike in Burma, Sri Lankan-style stupas remained influential into the modern era, judging by the massive rebuilt central stupa at Nakhon Pathom and the Phra Sri Rattana Chedi within Bangkok's palace compound.

No Sri Lankan metal reliquaries from the middle of the second millennium can be securely dated by inscription, so comparisons with Southeast Asia examples must remain tenuous and tentative. However a partial parallel with the Rangoon reliquaries are unpublished bronze caskets in the Colombo museum that have been assigned to the Gampola period (1345-1406) (Fig. 9).<sup>11</sup> This was an age that witnessed many connections among the *saṅghas* of Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand. Affinities with the Rangoon examples include the same three bands at the base and the large rectangular block crowning the dome. Unlike the Rangoon examples, the encircling bands are ornamented with simple incised foliate designs. Also, the complex and prominent base moldings of the Rangoon examples are completely absent in these Sri Lanka examples.<sup>12</sup> This comparison indicates that these examples from Lower Burma adopted certain Sri Lankan features but verged sharply away from Sri Lankan models in other respects. Also, large reliquary stupas made by the repoussé technique are unknown in Sri Lanka during this period. The evidence leads therefore to the conclusion that the Rangoon reliquaries were likely produced in Lower Burma and were not imported from Sri Lanka.

<sup>11</sup> These reliquaries were discovered in 2004 within a ruinous brick stupa at Uda Aludenya, a village near Kandy. Seven tiny bone fragments, each wrapped in gold foil, were found inside a gold dome-shaped object that was inside a silver stupa surrounded by twenty-two silver and gold seated Buddhas (T.K. Nimal P. de Silva, personal communication) (Fig. 9). A smaller third reliquary was part of the same hoard but it contained only a seated bronze Buddha. The surviving tapered spire of one of the Rangoon reliquaries is similar to Sri Lankan examples attributed to this period (Listopad 2003: 35, 36). Other reliquaries with clear connections to Sri Lanka are known in Rakhine, from Mrauk-U (Gutman 2001: Fig. 59).

<sup>12</sup> The raised floral patterns encircling the base of the Rangoon repoussé reliquaries are similar to a certain number of bronze reliquaries associated with Sri Lanka (see Zwalf 1985: Fig. 214 and Coomaraswamy 1914: Pl. XXVII, 189). Bronze reliquaries attributed to the Polonnauva period (993-1235) are designed with the three rings below the dome but are without the floral bands on the base (see Listopad 2003: pp. 34-35).

Another reason pointing to a local origin is suggested by a motif found on one of the encircling bands of the example in the Victoria and Albert Museum (Fig. 2). This is the *kīrtimukha* (Sanskrit), or ‘face of glory’, a fanciful face spewing forth vegetal ornament. The motif began in India but is widely encountered throughout Southeast Asia. At Pagan, the *kīrtimukha* was used over the centuries, both in stucco and in mural painting, where the faces appear in a continuous horizontal row. The *kīrtimukha* is found in Sri Lanka but is generally employed alone, as a single motif, usually in the center of a doorway or above a Buddha image; the *kīrtimukha* never seems to have been used on reliquaries from Sri Lanka or from other parts of Southeast Asia.<sup>13</sup> It must be said that the *kīrtimukha* motif, while common in Upper Burma, has not yet been noted in Lower Burma in the 15<sup>th</sup> century; but so little has survived in Lower Burma that this is scarcely surprising.

One reliquary differing sharply from those from Rangoon and Sri Lanka is the aforementioned casket from Wat Ratchaburana, c. 1424 (Fig. 8). Not only are the three characteristic rings at the base absent but also the block capping the dome, two chief Sri Lankan features. Also, the elaborate bands of precious stones embedded within raised bands on the exterior finds no counterpart in other known examples. One possibly vital match with the Rangoon trove however is an inverted square motif adorning the lowest register. In the Ayutthaya example it alternates with a circular design, while in one of the Rangoon caskets it is placed between couchant lions (Figs. 2, 8). That this identical motif is used in an identical fashion in these two roughly contemporaneous examples is probably not coincidence and suggests a distant common origin. The source may be Sri Lanka but no similar examples have yet turned up among the known Sri Lankan reliquaries. The compelling similarity of this motif in the examples from Ayutthaya and Rangoon raises critical questions that can only be answered upon the discovery of additional reliquaries in Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka.

## Conclusion

Rajadhiraj’s Rangoon relics open a new window to better understanding the formative phase of the Mon kingdom which arose by the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century in Lower Burma. This celebrated Mon ruler, Rajadhiraj, has been previously known only from later chronicles, but the gold band inscription yields significant new information that challenges previous interpretations. Painted in the later chronicles as primarily a military leader, this inscription reveals that the king entered the monastic life once during his reign and that he was an active patron of the *saṅgha*. The gold band and the stone inscription dated to 1362 also provide convincing

<sup>13</sup> Another name, “*kalā*”, is also used for this motif. Connections between this motif in Sri Lanka and Thailand have been noted (Pattaratorn 2009: 184).

evidence that the first two Mon rulers at Pegu, Banya U and his son Rajadhiraj, were sponsors of religious monuments in the Rangoon area, hitherto recorded only by the later Shwedagon Inscription and later Mon chronicles. This brief survey of stupa-shaped caskets from Burma, Thailand and Sri Lanka also underscores not only their tremendous diversity but also the need for a comprehensive documentation of reliquaries. These objects, though small in themselves, can shed much light on the larger issues in Southeast Asian history and civilization.

## Appendix

### Pali Inscription (Fausböll translation)

1. Having bowed down to the Three Gems, that good (work which has been preformed) the by Ruler of the Lords of the whole World, the son of Setebhissara [Lord of the White Elephant], the Prince shining with faith and mercy, the fleet Sun.
2. That meritorious, spotless (work) done in conjunction with his Queen, will I, who am steadfast in the excellent commandments of the All-knowing, faithfully relate.
3. The King of Kings, endowed with faith, assumed the monkish habit once, the exalted Queen twice; living without desire, they both maintained pure lofty virtue.
4. The King, Ruler of all Kings, anxious for the Three Gems, caused his excellent four beautiful daughters to enter the monastic life.
5. The wise Lord of all kings, a lion toward hostile barbarians, having liberated 250 slaves, had them ordained priests.
6. When the faith-endowed Queen had gone to heaven, after conferring blessings, a like number of persons entered the religious life
7. The most faithful, glorious Lord of Kings having burnt on the pyre the most exalted of human beings, he made *pūjā* [a ceremony] to her hair five times.
8. Sixty fair cottages [*kuti*, rest houses, or individual cottages for senior monks], and twenty-six *vihāras*, four ramparts [*baddasīmā*, or ordination halls] and nine stupas were erected (by him).
9. A hundred domestic slaves, seventy-eight *suvannas*, two thousand three hundred (and) five hundred rupees were granted (by him). [this should read: 378 measures, or *ticals*, of gold (*suvanna*), and 2, 500 *ticals* of silver (*rūpiyā*)]
10. Two hundred *kansas* (goblets) and five thousand *gananas*, three thousand *sukas* were granted, and also three hundred *ambanas* of pepper. [should read: 5,200 of copper (*ganza*, not *kansas* or goblets).
11. A piece of land comprising one hundred fields was given for continued maintenance; one hundred and fifty daily meals were dressed [prepared] (by him) in his house.

12. Also a hundred splendid (gold) handled white umbrellas, were offered (by him) and five hundreds sets of eight articles required for monks.

13. Having opened his granaries, gifts were given to the citizens, and two gold covered *kammavāchas* were provided (by him).

14. That Prince thus expresses his desire that such a good work should be rewarded: “For this good work may I be hereafter an incomparable Buddha;”

15. And while I am an incomparable Buddha may the most excellent and glorious Queen be my wife, may there not be such a separation for me in the worlds to come.”

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