

Elizabeth H. Moore, *Early Landscapes of Myanmar*. Bangkok, River Books, 2007, 271 pp., ill.

Isolated for decades, Burma (Myanmar) was a virtual *terra incognita* until the country slowly opened to foreign investigators, beginning largely in the early 1990s. This new openness, coupled with spurts of energy on the part of the Department of Archaeology, has meant that the nation's early archaeological record is finally coming out of the shadows. Scores of articles by Burmese and foreign scholars since the early 1990s have broadened our horizons considerably, notably an entire issue of *Asian Perspectives* (40/1, 2001) devoted to Burma in 2001, followed by an updated overview in 2006 by Bob Hudson and Pamela Gutman ("The Archaeology of Burma [Myanmar] from the Neolithic to Pagan" in *Southeast Asia: From pre-history to history*, London, 2006). Elizabeth Moore's *Early Landscapes* is, however, the first comprehensive survey to appear between the covers of one book, replete with over a hundred color illustrations, numerous maps, line drawings and an extensive bibliography. Moreover, much of the material has never been illustrated or has been tucked away in poorly distributed reports published in Burma. The bulk of the photographs were taken by the author during decades of field research, studying first-hand the principal sites and public and private collections.

The ambitious scope of the work is a summary of the major archaeological

sites and key trends, beginning with hunters-and-gatherers and concluding in ca. 900 A.D., when Pagan is thought to have become inhabited by Burmans. The Introduction is a synopsis of the subsequent chapters, together with a useful survey of the development of archaeology in Burma, beginning with the British and taking the story up to the present, including the important role of aerial photography. The first four chapters are devoted to the early pre-historic material, presenting for example the Neolithic presence of polished stone tools throughout much of the country. Included here are also some of the possible megalithic sites of Upper Burma. The Pyu and Mon are treated in a lengthy penultimate chapter, while the last chapter is a summation.

Many sites the author has covered in her articles over the years, but this handy volume unites this material in a continuous narrative. Indeed, the fresh discoveries in the Upper Chindwin in Upper Burma, the Samon valley south of Mandalay, and along the Sittaung, Salween (Thanlwin) and Tavoy (Dawei) rivers have expanded our vision of early Myanmar immeasurably. Also, the immense scale of Burma's early walled cities is conveyed by a handful of war-time aerial photographs drawn from the Williams-Hunt Collection at SOAS.

The Samon region has yielded an astonishing number of Bronze-Iron Age findings over the last three decades, much, unfortunately, the product of looting. Especially impressive is a wide assortment of beads, such as carnelian, with affinities to Pyu ornaments and

what is also found in Lower Burma. The Samon valley appears to have connections to the Yunnan bronze cultures of the Dian, a focus the author sees as shifting to South Asia with the rise of Buddhist kingdoms and the earliest inscriptions.

For the historic period the most exciting new finds are those near Tavoy, from Thagara, where excavations in 2001 revealed brick structures and remarkable sandstone figures with connections to Indian sculpture, Pagan, and to other Southeast Asian cultures. Equally important are previously unpublished remains from the Buddhist monasteries excavated at Winka, an early Buddhist site near Thaton. Excavated over twenty years ago by U Myint Aung, none of the most impressive finds had been illustrated until the appearance of this publication. A large terracotta plaque in the Moulmein (Mawlamyine) Museum from Winka features two rampant lions disposed in a fashion reminiscent of lions depicted in relief on the laterite wall ('Hsindat-Myindat') in Zothoke. Even stronger parallels exist with the famous terracotta roundels from Kyontu, only 25 km northeast of Pegu (Bago), suggesting a homogenous cultural zone uniting a major swatch of Burma's coastline, that is, from the Thaton region to Pegu. For decades the Kyontu terracottas appeared in a vacuum, unrelated to anything, but these finds near Pegu can now be tied to developments much further down the coast. In a broader context some of the discoveries from Winka share an affinity to stone work from Dvaravati Mon sites in Thailand,

notably a motif depicting alternating lozenges-and-circles. Also, at least one type of votive tablet at Winka relates to a common type found in Thailand. That this important material was excavated so long ago and has only now come out indicates the extent to which the archaeological record in Burma is so poorly known. Other new riches include three standing Buddha bronzes found south of Twante, across the Rangoon (Yangon) River from Rangoon, discovered accidentally by a farmer in 2005. The three relate to other bronzes in the area and to one discovered long ago from the Thaton area. This material and much more rounds out our picture of Lower Burma, especially the Delta and the lower peninsula bordering Thailand. Indeed, the material from Lower Burma in this new book irrevocably redresses the previous focus on the Pyu sites in central and Upper Burma.

Burma has been blessed with a rich tradition of chronicles, beginning in earnest in the sixteenth century. The chronicles touch on major pre-historic sites, such as Sri Ksetra, Tagaung Beikthano, but their direct bearing on events in the first millennium has yet to be established. The shortcomings of later chronicles and Chinese sources are noted in the introduction, but this later body of indigenous history continues to muddle our understanding of Burma's past. Indeed, these diverse chronicles provide the matrix for the government's desire to confirm myths gleaned from these sources. The recent discovery of Pyu material at Tagaung and the rush to vindicate the chronicle accounts is

only one example. ("Such findings [from Tagaung] will also be able to rebut with evidence the scoffs at Myanma history books as though what was said in them were legendary.", *New Light of Myanmar*, March 9, 2004). The author, however, carefully sifts the hard archaeological evidence and the chronicles, but readers unfamiliar with the pitfalls of the chronicles may find the close juxtaposition of archaeological descriptions with the later myths a trifle confusing. Also, some of the information cited from the chronicles is perhaps given too much weight, such as the splitting of three groups upon the legendary demise of Tagaung, known in the chronicles (p. 236). On the other hand, this valuable legendary material will be of great interest, especially for those new to the subject.

The cornucopia of newly-published discoveries, skillfully woven together with more well-known material, makes this essential reading for those interested in the early history of Burma and mainland Southeast Asia. As such, it is a landmark that one hopes will encourage similar publications.

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Wil O. Dijk, *Seventeenth-century Burma and the Dutch East India Company, 1634–1680*. Singapore, Singapore University Press, 2006, xvii + 348 pp., 12 maps (with appendices in CD-Rom).

In 1939 the renowned historian of South-East Asia, D. G. E. Hall, observed that the history of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in Burma received almost no attention. That remained true for some 60 years, before Wil Dijk undertook her doctoral research at Leiden University on this subject. Although the research is based mainly on the records written by VOC employees, this book is not merely a history of trade between Europeans and Asians in the early modern period. As those familiar with these records can confirm, in order to trade effectively the VOC merchants also became perceptive of local politics and society. Besides writing an extensive history of the VOC-Burmese relations from 1634 to 1680, the author seeks to reconsider issues relating to Burmese economic history, Burmese political and military historiography, and the history of VOC's operations in Burma.

The book begins with the historical background of seventeenth-century Burma, which was stabilized and increasingly centralized under the rule of the Restored Toungoo Dynasty (1597–1752). The Company's men-on-the-spot had the opportunity to observe and report local conditions in Burma; these included natural resources, law, military capacity, the monetary system, the Buddhist religion and ethnic ten-