There was also clearly a lot of "near-money" in circulation. The fourth chapter display the vast range of gambling tokens made from porcelain, bronze, tin-lead, and pottery, often in designs more intricate than the silver coinage.

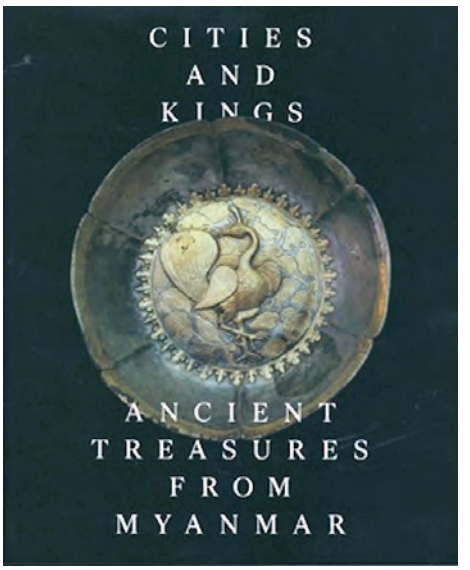
In the transition from the Narai to Phetracha reigns at the end of the 17th century, any trend towards standardisation seems to have gone into reverse. Again, there is a proliferation of different designs, and the usage of several different alloys. What were the economic forces, if any, underlying these changes?

The coinage in the early Rattanakosin period continued the forms of the late Ayutthaya era. The first flat coins were made in 1856, after the expansion of the economy had created a shortage of currency, leading to widespread use of Mexican dollars and other imported specie. The first coins were hammered by hand, but in 1857, Queen Victoria sent King Mongkut a hand-operated minting machine and some dies. The book ends with the transition to a decimal coinage in 1897.

Ronachai is an American, who arrived with the US armed forces in the 1960s, then practiced law, took Thai citizenship, and developed this unique interest. His book is a magnificent source for historians and collectors. By presenting this vast range of coinage in one place, in high-quality photography with good annotations, the book should stimulate historians to think more deeply about the changes evident from era to era.

Chris Baker

Cities and Kings: Ancient Treasures from Myanmar, edited by Stephen A. Murphy. Singapore: Asian Civilisations Museum, 2016. ISBN 978-981-11-1730-5. S$40.



Long in the shadows, the art of Myanmar has finally come into the limelight, spawning no less than five major exhibitions within less than four years. This wave began with an overview of early Southeast Asian art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, (2014), which included the Pyu, together with the three exhibitions devoted solely to Myanmar hosted by the Linden-Museum, Stuttgart (2014), the Five Continents Museum, Munich (2014) and the Asia Society, New York (2015). *Cities and Kings* is then a welcome addition to this burst of new interest.

Sixty objects are featured, ranging from the first millennium to modern times. Twenty were drawn from the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore, together with seven from private collections. Nearly a score of the most important were borrowed from Myanmar in 2015 by the Asia Society and therefore the Singapore exhibition mirrors the one in New York to that degree.

Six illustrated essays treat various facets of Myanmar art, introduced by a solid

overview by Stephen Murphy, the volume's editor. His informative text and carefully chosen photographs serve as tasty *hors d'oeuvres*, whetting the palate for the subsequent essays. One must, however, pause before associating Bagan's Nanpaya temple with Hindu worship, based solely on the stone reliefs of Brahmā, particularly after the recent discovery of huge painted Brahmā images inside the Ananda Temple's entrance halls. Also, Kṛṣṇa is not included among the stone *avatāras* on the walls of the Nat-hlaung-kyaung. In addition, only four bodily relics from Sri Lanka were interred in the Dhammayazika stupa, not thirty, according to the donative inscription. (Luce 1969: 1. 235)

The next essay, "The Pyu", co-authored by Win Kyaing and Murphy, sticks closely to archaeological evidence and happily refrains from speculations based on later chronicles. A workmanlike synopsis of decades of research on the Pyu clarifies what we know and what we don't know. Thousands of artifacts, large and small, are known but key pieces to the puzzle are missing. The Pyu language, for example, still stubbornly resists decipherment.

Silver bowl, with inscription. C. 9th century. Diameter 19 cm. National Museum, Nay Pyi Taw. Courtesy: Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore

The most exciting Pyu objects are two silver bowls discovered at Śrī Kṣetra and attributed to the 9th century, based on comparisons with a more securely dated Chinese example from Famen, near Xian. Among a hoard of bowls, this pair and two others are incised with short Pyu inscriptions. The suggestion that they were produced in China and incised at Śrī Kṣetra is probable, providing tantalizing evidence that the Pyu were perhaps flourishing as late as the 9th century. Dominating the center of one bowl is a spectacular gilded repoussé peacock in shallow relief, an image juxtaposed on the catalog's jet black cover, creating a stunning effect.

The customary misuse of later historical chronicles is in full swing in "The Mon Cities**"** (San Win, Nan Kyi Kyi Khaing, Khin Ma Ma Mu, Elizabeth Moore) and "Bagan" (Charlotte Galloway). The most favored chronicle, both inside and outside of Myanmar, is the *Hmannam Mahayazawingyi*, a part of which was translated into English in 1923 as *The Glass Palace Chronicle* (GPC). Compiled in about 1829 and based largely on a chronicle from the preceding century, this text reflects thinking from that era but furnishes little reliable information for interpreting early Myanmar. While this chronicle is remarkably accurate for later periods, its veracity diminishes greatly for events before c. 1200, as Victor Lieberman has cautioned. (Lieberman 1986)

Researchers have been irresistibly lured to the later chronicles, like mice drawn to a cheese morsel set atop a trap. This is amply illustrated by interpretations that have enveloped a brick stupa at Bagan covered with glazed tiles, the Nga-kywe-nadaung. (p. 44) The stupa's incorrect 10th century attribution by Taw Sein Ko entered the literature by 1906 from whence it grew like a snowball. Only decades later did G. H. Luce correct Taw Sein Ko's error but by then it had become another "truth" embedded in the evolving

picture of Bagan. (Luce 1969: I. 259) Luce dated this stupa no earlier than the reign of Kyanzittha (c. 1084 – c. 1113); the earliest securely datable glazed work appears at the Shwegugyi, dated by an inscription to 1131. This is but one of scores of cases where unsound interpretations of later texts have muddled our understanding not only of Bagan but early Myanmar.

The essay on Bagan is a conventional survey drawn from modern histories, most of which are founded on later chronicles. For example, the claim that "Anawrahta and Kyanzittha were the founders of Burmese Buddhism as we know it today" is hyperbole, since, if for no other reason, these two rulers have left us so little. Also, no hard evidence corroborates the claim in the GPC that Kyanzittha completed the Shwezigon stupa begun by Anawrahta. In fact, the theme of one king finishing a monument started by another was more likely inspired by Sri Lankan traditions, since a nearly identical episode appears in the island's *Mahāvaṃsa* (xxxii: 59); this text and its commentaries were widely influential in later Burma, as Peter Skilling reminds us. (Skilling 2007) Also, repeated here is the seductive argument that Bagan's decline resulted from an all-powerful Sangha inexorably gobbling up land and resources, a thesis successfully challenged by Tilman Frasch but which is not addressed in this essay. (Frasch 1996)

Was Bagan's religious art created to inform and educate worshippers about Buddhist tenets or did it function to satisfy an insatiable need for patrons to accumulate merit? (Brown 1997) A growing consensus correctly argues that "merit" trumped didactic aims, as Galloway points out in connection with the hundreds of unglazed *jātaka* tiles at the East and West Hpetleik monuments. (p. 50) Yet, overlooked were fourteen inscriptions incised in stucco separating the top and bottom rows of plaques inside the aisle facing today's entrance of the West Hpetleik. (Luce 1969: I. 266) These long Mon glosses encapsulate the subject of each tile, thus amplifying the narration beyond the title and number of the *jātaka* incised on the tiles themselves. Whether these explanatory inscriptions should veer toward our attributing a didactic function to the tiles is ambiguous, but they remind us that these issues are nuanced. Also, if merit was the governing factor, then how to explain the idiosyncratic choice of certain *jātakas* at the Nagayon, each tale highlighted in large painted panels high on the walls in the dimly lit interior? While the Nagayon's artists and patrons seem to have given preference to locally popular *jātakas,* they must have realized at the same time that the murals were never to be seen properly. These examples illustrate that our tight categories of "didactic" or "merit" are far too facile.

The most exciting new discovery from the Bagan era is a small standing stone Viṣṇu, recently discovered at Śrī Kṣetra, attributed to c. the 11th – 12th century, or the period during which Śrī Kṣetra came under Bagan's control.

Mon Cities takes reliance on the chronicles to new heights by proposing a history of Lower Myanmar based on "Mon chronicles, oral histories and songs and nursery rhymes". (p. 34) This reconstructed history is marked by three groups of pioneers, the earliest of whom entered Lower Burma from India nearly 3,000 years ago. Even approximate dates for these unnamed chronicles are not cited, but one can recognize certain names used in this essay, such as Trikumbha and Telinga, that belong to 18th and 19th century Mon texts, such as the *Slapat Rajawan Datow Smin Ron*. Such information is indeed valuable for understanding how later Mon construed their history but leads the

reader in the wrong direction for evaluating the first millennium. In the same way, British history would be in trouble if researchers accepted at face value the claim in a 12th century chronicle that Stonehenge marked the grave of the 5th century king Constantine III. (Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain, XI. 4)* Chronicles provide invaluable perspectives on the age in which they were compiled but reconstructing much earlier history through the lens of later sources is filled with pitfalls.

Standing Viṣṇu. Limestone. C. 11th or 12th century. Height. 41 cm. National Museum, Nay Pyi Taw. Courtesy: Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore

This history section, however, is followed by a solid overview of the major archaeological sites and trends in early Lower Burma, building on information contained in Moore's excellent *Early Landscapes of Myanmar* (2007). Also, the well-known Kyontu terracotta panels were not found in the laterite 'city walls' but in a brick plinth intended for one or more stupas. (p. 39) (Duroiselle 1940: 80) This is an important distinction, since it suggests that secular subjects were appropriate for religious architecture. The famous glazed demon tiles from Pegu were never placed on the exterior of the Shwegugyi temple but in niches set into the inside face of the compound wall. (p. 100)

The fifth essay, "Cultural Landscapes of Later Myanmar", by Khine Pyae Sone and Heidi Tan**,** reviews key artistic trends following the Bagan period to the colonial period, such as the shift from Pala styles to indigenous visual modes. Also, Thagyamin, is not one of Four Great Kings, or *Cātummahārajikā* (Pali). In addition, the Arakan was never a tributary of Bagan or the Bengal Sultanate, two tenacious misconceptions. (p. 60) (Leider and Kyaw Minn Htin 2015)

Conan Cheong's "The Art of the Shan State" is an excellent review of historical and cultural developments in this vast area bordering China, Laos and Thailand. Chronicles from within Myanmar and neighboring countries and early European accounts are used judiciously to build up a clear picture of the region's development. Sections on lacquer ware, gold and silver work and manuscript Buddha images round out this valuable survey.

The wide range and importance of these sixty objects, many of which are published here for the first time, and the six insightful scholarly essays by such distinguished specialists ensure that this exhibition will be a lasting contribution. The catalog is certainly a must-read for those interested in premodern Myanmar art. The positive reception of the catalog and the exhibition, I hope, will motivate other museums worldwide to sponsor exhibitions focusing on Myanmar.

Donald M. Stadtner

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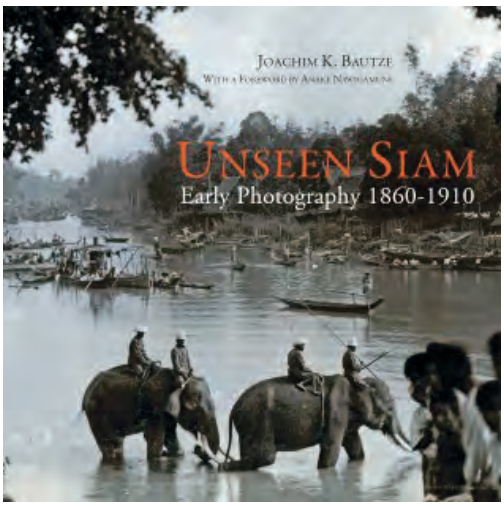
Unseen Siam: Early Photography 1860–1910, by Joachim K. Bautze. Bangkok: River Books, 2016. ISBN 978 616 7339 66 5. 2,000 Baht. Also available in a Thai-language edition: ฉายษลักษณ์สยาม, ISBN 978 616 7339 77 1, same price.



This massive book (280 x 280 mm, 364 pages, 704 pictures, 2.5 kilos) features the work of fifteen photographers in Bangkok between the 1850s and 1900s. While some of the shots, particularly royal portraits, have been reproduced many times, many of the images have been hidden away in collections in Europe, and are made public here for the first time. Likewise, while some of the photographers, such as John Thomson, Francis Chit, Robert Lenz and Joaquim Antonio, are relatively well known, others are very obscure, especially Fedor Jagor, who took some of the most ambitious and interesting early photographs. In terms of number of images and range of subjects, the publication goes far beyond the exhibition, which launched the book last year. The book is clearly a labour of love by a passionate collector over many years.

Joachim Bautze is a lecturer, writer, curator, and collector, who has focused on early photography in Asia. He has sourced the images for this book from collections in Germany, Italy, England, Belgium, Holland, France, Austria, Thailand and the USA. The fifteen photographers featured are: Abbé Larnaudie, Fedor Jagor, Pierre Rossier, Carl Bismark, Francis Chit, John Thomson, Henry Schüren, Gustave Richard Lambert, Max Martin, William Kennett Loftus, Fritz Schumann. Joaquim António, Robert Lenz, Emil Groote, and Kaishu Isonaga.

The book opens with a short essay on the invention of photography in the early 19th century. However, there are no notes on the equipment or techniques used by the featured