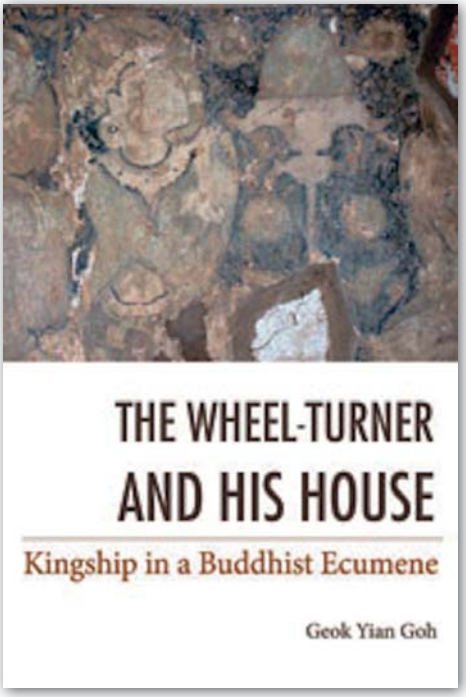
The Wheel-Turner and his House: Kingship in a Buddhist Ecumene by Geok Yian Goh, (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press. 2015.) ISBN: 978-0-87580-716-4. US$35.00



G.H. Luce's celebrated *Old Burma-Early Pagan* opens with a lengthy chapter devoted solely to Pagan's first important king, Aniruddha (c. 1044 – c. 1077). Sifting through inscriptions and chronicles, this doyen of Burmese civilization concluded with characteristic self-reflection, " …. when all is said, Aniruddha remains a dim figure …." (Luce 1969-1970: 1.14). Indeed, our meager evidence surviving from his reign and the classic Pagan (Bagan) period (c. 11th – c. 13th centuries) ensures that the 'real' Aniruddha, that is, the historical Aniruddha, will remain a 'dim figure' about whom myth and conjecture overshadow fact. Geok Yian Goh bravely takes up where Luce left off in this groundbreaking study which brilliantly explores the genesis and transmission of the Aniruddha legends that mushroomed following the Pagan period.

Aniruddha's legacy remains very much alive today in Burma (Myanmar) where he is known as Anawrahta, his name used in most later chronicles. He is remembered today for two pivotal roles: as the country's first unifier and as the ruler who single-handedly introduced Theravada Buddhism to the nation. He is therefore often lumped together with Bayinnaung (1551-1581) and Alaungpaya (1752-1760), monarchs who also expanded the country's borders through arms. A favorite of Burma's military, this august trio is now immortalized by enormous bronze effigies in Naypyidaw. But Anawrahta stands apart, since his career is so entwined with Burma's religious history.

Anawrahta slips comfortably into a long list of historical figures enveloped in myth. A well-known parallel is Emperor Ashoka whose posthumous biographies diverge radically from the little gleaned in his famous stone edicts. Myths, as the author underscores, are like open-ended books, with added chapters reflecting ever-changing political and social milieux. This explains why bits and pieces of legends are sometimes entirely dropped or reinterpreted and why Anawrahta's legacy was never restricted to a single definitive version. Indeed, chroniclers openly wrestled with contradictory accounts of Anawrahta as they formulated their own conclusions, as Goh notes. Anawrahta's legacy was therefore fluid, fashioned from many different pieces, with each version differing slightly, all coexisting in time and space.

The version that carries most weight today flows directly from the famous *Hmannam Yazawindawgyi*, authored by court savants in Inwa, or Ava, around 1829; a portion was translated into English, titled *The Glass Palace Chronicle*. (Luce & Pe Maung Tin 1923)

Anawrahta weaves in and out of nearly forty dense pages, the chief episodes being his conversion to Buddhism by the monk Shin Arahan, the capture of the Canon, or *Tipiṭika*, from Thaton in Lower Burma, his suppression of the heretical Ari and the imposition of Buddhism at Pagan. Over a dozen separate fanciful incidents fill these pages, such as quarrels with his half-brother and son, and even his failed union with a Shan princess. Whence did this legendary material come and why and when did it filter into the various chronicles are the questions at the heart of the ambitious task set by the author.

The book opens by reviewing what is known about Anawrahta from Pagan-period sources. The only tangible evidence from his reign are scores of small terracotta 'votive tablets' bearing the king's name, suggesting to scholars long ago that Anawrahta is the first important Pagan ruler whose historicity is certain. These tablets have been discovered widely, from Katha in Upper Burma right down to Tenasserim. Goh attributed one Pagan inscription to Anawrahta's reign, with a possible date of 1058, but others have more plausibly attributed it to the time of Kyanzittha (c. 1084 - c. 1112) (Aung-Thwin 2005:84-85; personal communication, Tun Aung Chain).

Goh advances the notion that Anawrahta's later fame was predicated in large part on his presumed epithet, *cakravartin* (Sanskrit), or *cakkavatti* (Pali). One literal translation is 'wheel-turner', broadly interpreted as 'universal monarch.' (p. 17) No stone inscriptions from his reign survive, but a single Pagan epigraph, dated 1207, refers posthumously to the king as "*cakkravattiy Anuruddha*." The strongest evidence for Anawrahta's assumption of this title, though not brought forth, is that one of Anawrahta's successors, Kyanzittha, adopted the title as part of his extended epithet in two inscriptions ("*paramiswarabalacakkrāwar*") (Duroiselle 1917: 142, 144). However, following Kyanzittha, the term is very rarely found in Pagan inscriptions, for unexplained reasons (Frasch 1996: 86). Also, the term *cakravartin*, or *cakkavatti,* enjoyed very little currency in inscriptions and even in chronicles in subsequent centuries, as the author acknowledges. (p. 24) For example, in Bayinnaung's Bell Inscription or in Alaungpaya's records, the terms are noted by their absence. In post-Pagan contexts, the term is therefore used sparingly and is usually written as *chakravaté* (personal communication, Tun Aung Chain). Moreover, in the copious inscriptions from the Buddhist kingdom of Sukhothai, the term occurs rarely and not as an epithet (Griswold & Prasert 1972: 119). Taken together, perhaps we can conclude that far too much weight has been attached to this concept in modern historical writing on mainland Southeast Asia, especially in view of the term's restricted use (Leider 2015: 403-404; personal communication, Jacques Leider; Gombrich 1988: 82). Moreover, diverse evidence has too often been improperly interpreted "to reconstruct a supposedly commonly shared notion of Southeast Asian Buddhist kingship." (Leider 2015: 403)

If the designation '*cakravartin*' does not likely explain Anawrahta's later importance, then how did this king come to enjoy such an influential legacy in Burma and even in Northern Thailand where he made cameo appearances in certain chronicles. His enduring legacy likely springs from his actual conquest of Lower Burma, an event of momentous consequence that altered the direction of Burmese history. This distinction between the role played by his presumed epithet of *cakravartin* in the formulation of his legacy and his actual military accomplishments may seem like splitting hairs, but

it sheds a different perspective on Anawrahta and the very process by which facts and fiction are spun around historical figures and incorporated into chronicles.

If Anawrahta achieved his lasting status through a conquest of Lower Burma, then what is the evidence? His small portable terracotta 'votive tablets' in Lower Burma are often taken as proof for Anawrahta's southern campaign, but Goh rightly questions this. (p. 52) The author cites *en passant* the Maung Di stupa located between Yangon and nearby Twante and attributed by Luce to Anawrahta. (Luce: 1969-1970; I. 23) The full significance of the Maung Di monument has not been tapped, since it provides a convincing argument for Anawrahta's presence in Lower Burma. Dozens of large terracotta plaques connected to Anawrahta encircled the stupa's two lower terraces which supported the solid brick dome; the tiles were never part of the stupa's original design, strongly suggesting that they were placed on the monument after its completion. These tiles closely resemble the common small 'votive tablets' in design, measuring no more than seven inches in height, but the Maung Di plaques are huge. By far the largest 'votive tiles' in Southeast Asia, each stands nearly three feet and weighs no less than thirty pounds (h. 2 ft. 7 in. x w. 1ft. 6. in. x d. 5 ½ in.). Many retain incised Pali inscriptions with the same brief text used on certain common small tiles: "This Blessed One [the Buddha] was made by the great king, Śrī Aniruddha the divine, with his own hands, for the sake of deliverance". (Luce 1968-1969: III. 2) By setting these large tiles on a pre-existing Mon stupa, Anawrahta was intentionally proclaiming Pagan's new hegemony in Lower Burma. The large plaques, by their size and location *in situ,* differ qualitatively from the many small 'votive tablets' of Anawrahta found in Lower Burma. The moulds for the tiles were probably taken down from Pagan expressly for producing tiles used in this fashion; a few unpublished fragmentary tiles from the same moulds were recently found at Pagan (personal communication, Thein Lwin). We can never know if Anawrahta personally supervised his troops in the South, but his forces were certainly there. Ironically, while this stupa near Yangon can be associated with

(above) Anawrahta's tiles were placed around the top terraces of the Maung Di stupa, near Yangon.

(below) The largest tiles in Southeast Asia, nearly 3 feet in height. All are in fragments.

Anawrahta with remarkable certainty, no monuments at Pagan can be attached to the king's patronage with the same degree of confidence. It may be true, as Goh and others have presumed, that the Shwesandaw stupa and Hpetleik monuments date to Anawahta's reign, but no firm proof exists.

Additional evidence are Anawrahta's small 'votive tiles' discovered within the relic chamber of the Pyu-period Bawbawgyi stupa at Śrī Kṣetra; other confirmations are stone inscriptions in Lower Burma from Anawrahta's immediate successors, starting with Sawlu's near Mergui and Kyanzittha's Mon records in and around Thaton, two of which are dated to 1098 (Luce 1968-1969: I. 19, 46, 56). This art historical evidence may seem unrelated to the book's thesis, but the king's lasting legacy was a product of this very conquest and had little to do with his presumed epithet of *cakravartin* or *cakkavatti*.

A key source in the trajectory of Anawrahta's legacy is the Kalyani Inscription in Pegu (Bago), dated to c. 1479. This comes only some 200 years after the Pagan era and the shift of the capital to Inwa, and therefore furnishes the earliest reliably dated recording of a key part of the Anawrahta legend, that is, the capture of Thaton, the Pali canon and the city's monks. The inscription also contains the first mention of the Mon king in Thaton, "Manohari" whose "weak kingdom" presumably accounted for his defeat. (Taw Sein Ko 1893:17) The name that appears in the inscription itself is Manohara (personal communication, Jason Carbine). In later chronicles, this same king was taken prisoner to Pagan where he expired; in the *Glass Palace Chronicle,* he is Manuha. Known by many variants, this ruler can likely be identified with a king named Makuṭa noted in two Thaton inscriptions assigned to the 11th century. (Luce 1969-1970: I. 24) No evidence suggests that Anawrahta's actual conquest was spurred by a desire to seize the Pali Canon in Thaton, as Goh rightly points out.

By linking Anawrahta to the captured Canon from Thaton, the Mon in Pegu laid claim to establishing Buddhism at Pagan; and it was indeed this very version of history expressed in the Kalyani Inscription that shaped the entire history of Buddhism in Burma in all major subsequent royal and religious chronicles (Pranke 2004: 23, 201, note 73; personal communication, Patrick Pranke). The only major components added later to the legacy were the king's conversion by the monk Shin Arahan and the suppression of the Ari, elements first recorded only in the early 18th century. This evidence suggests that Mon chronicles available in 1479 preserved the memory of the invasion of Rāmaññadesa by Anawrahta but painted the Mon defeat in a positive light by claiming that the Mon furnished Upper Burma with the *Tipiṭika*. The next important step for tracking Anawrahta's narrative is the influential *Mahayazawingyi*, or *Great Chronicle*, c. 1720, by U Kala in which virtually the full-blown legend is found. Once Burmese chroniclers embraced the idea that the Canon came to Upper Burma from Thaton, expressed in the Kalyani Inscription, this triggered a lasting need to elevate Thaton in the ongoing religious history of the nation. This probably explains why the famous 5th century Buddhaghosa is said in certain later chronicles to have been associated with Thaton (Luce & Pe Maung Tin 1923: 46). A separate chapter, "Makers of Burmese History after U Kala", is a rigorous in-depth discussion of the numerous chronicles subsequent to U Kala and their role in shaping the legends.

Anawrahta's fame extended beyond Burma where his name figures, albeit rarely, in chronicles from Sri Lanka and Northern Thailand. Goh summarizes the Sri Lankan evidence, based mostly on the famous *Culavamsa*, in which "Anuraddha" is named once. He is said to assist King Vijayabahu I (c. 1070 - c. 1110) by sending gifts for motivating Sri Lankan troops into fighting the Cholas. These passages indicate that "Anuraddha" was a well-known player in the geo-politics of the Bay of Bengal. The 'facts' are reported in 'historical' time, unlike the Thai chronicle tradition framed in 'legendary' time.

The treatment of Anawrahta in Northern Thailand is most fully expressed in the well-known Pali chronicle, *Jinakamali* (JNM) by Ratanapañña, 1516/1517, in which "Anuruddha" appears in two different sections. Goh interprets passages in the JNM to suggest that the kingdom of Haripunjaya "derived its Buddhist traditions from both Myanmar and Sri Lanka" (p. 99), but the references in the JNM are far more narrow in focus since the sections in which "Anuruddha" appears are devoted merely to enhancing two lineages of Buddha images in Thailand. (p. 99) One case involves a set of five black stone Buddhas fashioned by the ancestors of "Manohāra" in "Ramanṇa Country"; Manohāra refused to hand over the images to Anawrahta, prompting an invasion in which Manohāra is sent captive to Pagan. (Jayawickrama 1968: 156). The JNM, as Goh observes, has conflated the story about seizing the Pali canon with this set of Buddha images.

Anuruddha weaves again into the JNM in the peregrinations of the Emerald Buddha, an image prophesied to "shine among the races of Kamboja, Arimaddana, and Syām" that was eventually taken to Sri Lanka (Jayawickrama 1968: 142) 'Anuruddha' retrieved it from Sri Lanka, with four sets of *Tīpiṭikas*. The Emerald Buddha, with two sets of scriptures, returned to Burma on a separate ship, which sailed astray and landed in Mahānagara, or Angkor. 'Anuruddha' then mounted a flying horse, and, after demonstrating his prowess by cleaving a stone with his urine at Mahānagara, is conducted to the king from whom he demands the Canon. The Angkor ruler ceded the sets but 'Anuruddha' left for home "without remembering the Jewel-Image [Emerald Buddha]." (Jayawickrama 1968:144) In each case, Anawrahta serves only as a foil to elevate the importance of the Buddhist images found in Northern Thailand. Anawratha is nowhere described as a *cakravartin* in this Northern Thai chronicle but this dated text indicates that the conquest of Lower Burma and Anawrahta's mythical or factual link to Manohara enjoyed a secure place in regional chronicles centuries after the supposed events.

To explain these occurrences in three disparate regions, Pagan, Northern Thailand and Sri Lanka, Goh proffers the concept of the *ecumene*, or a common Buddhist civilization that shared fundamental values. It came into being in the 11th century and flourished in the 12th and 13th centuries when "intense exchanges occurred between the three centers"; the *ecumene* began declining in the 14th century with "the end of Pagan, the rise of Ayutthaya and the demise of Polonnaruva" (p. 38). The term *ecumene* comes from Greek, one definition for which is 'house' and by extension a region "which shared common cultural beliefs and practices". (p. 42). The *ecumene* "functioned as a religious political sub-system within a larger Buddhist world system and had a specific time span,

from the 11th through the 14th century." (p. 42). One wonders if such a distinct beginning and termination of the *ecumene* is somewhat arbitrary, in light of the strong continuous contacts among Southeast Asian Buddhist kingdoms and Sri Lanka throughout the second millennium. Indeed, the 15th century could be proposed as a watershed of shared influence, in light of the Mon missions to the Kalyani monastery near Colombo and the numerous references in Sukhothai inscriptions linking Sri Lanka, Lower Burma and Thailand. Indeed, precisely these interconnections in the 15th century prompted one scholar to use the word *ecumene* in relation to this very period (Frasch 2011).

Another pivotal moment in Anawrahta's legendary biography is his conversion by the monk Shin Arahan who hailed from Thaton. This well-known story is modeled directly upon the later legends of Ashoka's conversion, a major observation first made by Patrick Pranke (Pranke 2004: 201, notes 72, 73). As Luce observed, the Shin Arahan of the later chronicles is likely the very same chief priest, or "*mahathera*", also named Arahan, who is featured in a lengthy inscription by Kyanzittha, attributed to c. 1102. (Luce 1969-1970: I. 72; Duroiselle 1923: 1-68). This Arahan of the Pagan period, according to the Pagan inscription, presided over extensive ceremonies involving 1,408 monks; whether Arahan hailed from Thaton or served under Anawrahta cannot be fixed, but he was certainly a key cleric at Pagan whose memory persisted for centuries. That this Arahan of the later legends and the historical Arahan are probably one and the same, though unstated in the book, is another illustration of how historical figures were interpreted freely by later chroniclers. But a basic question is what exactly was known about Pagan's history, real or legendary, to the chroniclers immediately following the classic Pagan period?

An instructive parallel with Anawrahta is the Mon ruler based in Pegu, Rajadhiraj (c. 1384 – c. 1420). This king weaves in and out of Mon/Burmese and Thai chronicles in a fashion reminiscent of Anawrahta. His personal sobriquet was Sutasoma, taken from a heroic figure in a *jataka,* no. 537; the name is attested to in the 15th century Shwedagon Inscription. The king's White Elephant, according to a Mon chronicle, was a gift to his descendants from a ruler in Sukhothai, thereby forging a tie, albeit probably mythical, with a powerful neighboring kingdom ruled by an unnamed king who was, based on the chronology, none other than Ram Khamhaeng. (San Lwin 2007: 9) Yet in a second chronicle, Sutasoma is said to have presented his daughter to the famous King Mangrai of Chiang Mai. (Tun Aung Chain 2003: 6) Sutasoma turns up for a third time, in *The Chiang Mai Chronicle,* in which he is conflated with a powerful king ruling in Mottama, or Martaban, identified indirectly with the famous Wareru (Wyatt & Aroonrut 1998: 36). Sutasoma, like Anawrahta, was yet another strong ruler whose legacy was preserved in chronicles and probably folklore, local theatre and ballads.

Both Ananwrahta and Sutasoma demonstrate how the memories of strong monarchs coursed through diverse chronicle traditions spread over a wide area and many centuries, ready to be tapped in narratives. A blatant example was the claim by King Bodawpaya (1782-1819) in the Mingun Bell Inscription that Anawrahta failed to wrest the Mahamuni Buddha from Rakhine; the Buddha image itself then prophesied to Anawrahta that it would be taken from Rakhine only by the Buddha of the Future, Metteyya, that is, Bodawpaya himself (Tun Aung Chain 2014: 195). European history

affords similar examples, such as the Plantagenet's ties to the legendary King Arthur or the Capetian claims on Charlemagne.

The last chapter is a fitting conclusion, since Anawrahta's story is taken right up to the present. A thoughtful review of recent books and films suggests the various nuanced versions of today's Anawrahta legends, blending his religious and soldierly roles. A line quoted from a speech delivered by the former Senior-General Than Shwe leaves no doubt about the revival of this ancient revered king. (p. 3) Another reminder of how the present piggybacks on the past is Pagan's recently built 'Anawrahta Palace', adding yet another gargantuan eyesore to the site's scarred landscape.

The author's dogged pursuit of this shadowy king's legacy takes us squarely into a neglected dimension of historical writing in Southeast Asia, that is, how historical figures and events are endlessly re-interpreted. This pioneering book, it is hoped, will spur others to follow in Goh's footsteps and unravel the history and myths of other key Southeast Asian protagonists. The *Wheel-Turner* is a must-read for those interested not only in pre-modern Southeast Asia but also in understanding how the past is reinvented in our time.

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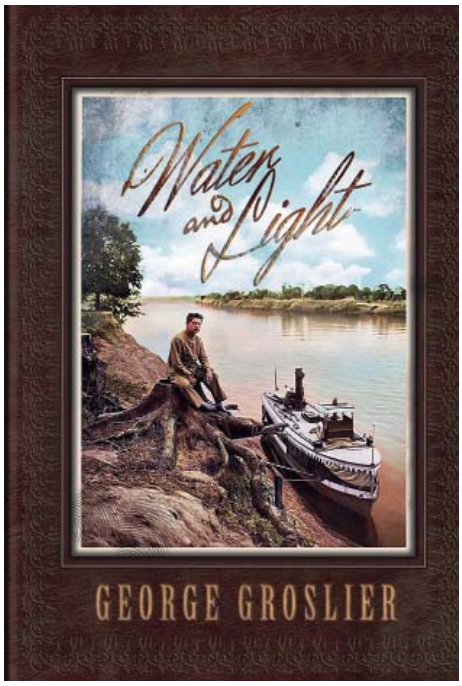
Water and Light, by George Groslier, translated by Pedro Rodríguez, edited by Kent Davis (Florida, USA: DatAsia Press, 2016). ISBN 1934431877 and ISBN 978-1934431870. US$34.95.



Water and Light recounts two river journeys on the Cambodian Mekong made by George Groslier in September-October 1929 and February-March 1930. Born in Phnom Penh in 1887 to Antoine Groslier, a French administrator, and his wife Angelina, George's first stay in Cambodia only lasted two years. When Angelina miscarried her second child, she quickly took George back to the safety of France, later giving him the opportunity to benefit from a Western education, studying at the School of Fine Arts in Paris. In 1910, aged 23, Groslier returned to Cambodia to take charge of a mission at the service of Albert Sarraut (1872-1962). Then Minister of Public Education, Sarraut would in his long political career serve as Governor-General of Indochina, as Minister for Colonies and briefly as Prime Minister of France. Sarraut's trust in Groslier's abilities would have a profound effect on his professional life. Groslier was tasked with the documentation of the kingdom's most remote Khmer temples and founding a new school for the preservation and restoration of Cambodia's traditional arts. His real mission, and enduring legacy, was to preserve Khmer art and culture by establishing the Albert Sarraut Museum (now the National Museum of Cambodia) and the School of Fine Arts.

The background of *Water and Light* was Cambodia at a time when the country was as yet untouched by the great crises that would befall Indochina in the 1930s and beyond. The two journeys took Groslier to numerous places, including Kampong Cham, Stung Treng, Kratie, the Bassac River, Angkor Borei, the Tonlé Sap and Kampong