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The legendary Sri Lankan king Dutthagamani ordered the construction of a massive stupa to honour relics promised by the Buddha himself. Suddenly, a senior monk of 'wondrous power' came forward at the ground breaking and counseled the ruler to restrict the size of his monument, arguing that one lifetime was too short to finish such a project and that moreover huge stupas spelled only huge headaches for future generations stuck for repairs. The king wisely bowed to this sage advice and so drew in the stupa's circumference (*Mabavamsa*: XXIX.53). This cautionary tale haunted me in as much as I often questioned the wisdom of embarking on a study with such limitless parameters. Indeed, tabulating Burmese sacred sites is perhaps as futile as counting the stones in the Great Wall of China. My ready excuse was that since sacred sites were not born over night, then I would need more than one night to unravel them all. Compounding the problem was that each time I returned to Burma, new material and questions came up.

A great number of colleagues contributed to this book in various ways. Some patiently went through the bulk of the text, notably Robert Brown, Pamela Gutman and Patrick Pranke, while others reviewed selected pieces. Michael Charney shared his insights on the Rakhine section, Pierre Pichard carefully examined the Pagan section, Victor Lieberman reviewed the Pegu section, Jacques Leider critiqued the Rakhine section and the Introduction and Tilman Frasch elucidated key issues relating to Pagan. Alexey Kirichenko generously responded to the Pagan and Kyaik-hti-yo sections and the Introduction with a raft of suggestions, most of which have been adopted. For the first-millennium and its thorny archaeological questions, Bob Hudson and Elizabeth Moore were always there to answer questions.

For the Mon material Mathias Jenny provided invaluable translations concerning the Golden Rock at Kyaik-hti-yo. I was also in touch with Christian Bauer who made many thoughtful suggestions for the Pegu and Thaton sections and for issues related to Mon epigraphy. He also supplied me with a translation of a Mon bell inscription from Pegu that shed new light on the mythology of the Shwemawdaw. Elizabeth Moore and I discussed my Kyaik-hti-yo and Shwedagon sections, and she put me in to touch with her colleague, U San Win, who shared unpublished translations relating to the Golden Rock. To understand the role of *nat*-worship, I turned often to Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière. Others with whom I conferred from time to time include U Thaw Kaung, Tampawaddy U Win Maung, Catherine Raymond, Patricia Herbert, Chotima Chaturawong, Alexandra Green, Michio Takatani, Pattaratorn Chirapavati, Sunait Chutintaranond, Peter Skilling, Jason Carbine, Ralph Isaacs, Zayar Ohn, and Francois Tainturier. For the synagogue in Yangon, my conversations with the late Ruth Cernea will always be remembered. For the Parsis, I am grateful to Mitra Sharafi who introduced me to the last representative

of this once influential community in Burma and with whom I toured the new community cemetery on Yangon's outskirts. Special thanks also go to Richard Cooler who allowed River Books to illustrate his rare aquatints made at the time of the First Anglo-Burmese War. Richard's old slides were skillfully digitised by Alan Potkin. Photographs from Schouten's *East India Voyage* are thanks to Catherine Raymond and Alan Potkin, from a French edition (1725) preserved in the National Maritime Museum, Amsterdam.

Many friends in Burma helped me appreciate the subtle but powerful ways in which sacred sites fit into society at large. I am especially grateful to Ma Thanegi, Daw Tin Thaik, Daw Khin Myo Lwin, and Myat Wunna. Much of my traveling was with an old friend, Moe Aung Lwin, who helped me enquire into local lore and to share the bumps on the roads as well as the sunsets with *cbota* pegs.

One key resource for the entire project was Patrick Pranke, a specialist in the history of the Burmese *sangha* and Theravada traditions. His sensitivity to contemporary Buddhist practices and beliefs and their pre-modern antecedents served as a model. Another anchor was U Tun Aung Chain, a retired professor of history at the University of Yangon. He provided me not only with translations from chronicles and inscriptions but also set these illusive sacred sites into the concrete historical landscape. That numerous citations to his articles pepper these pages is therefore no accident, representing only a fraction of his true contribution. He reviewed nearly the entire text, his modest erudition spilling into the margins in red pencil.

Former gurus who shaped my formative and later years include Mowry Baden, Anand Krishna, Walter Spink and Joanna Williams. These senior mentors contributed little to the preparation of this book but all set examples, each embodying different humanistic values. Others who have been influential are Daw Ma Tha Sa and U Pa Du Dee.

Thanks are also due to Stephen Murphy, an able editor at River Books, Bangkok, and a graduate student in Southeast Asian archaeology. His patience was matched by his humour and both were reassuring when deadlines pressed and I needed to make yet another change.

The man behind the lens for much of the photography was Piamsam Piemattawat. He and my wife, Kwanchai, and I traveled to Burma where it was instructive to see Burma through the eyes of two whose life experiences were in Thailand. Narisa Chakrabongse of River Books recognised the value of the project, and her judicious editing in the final stages has greatly enhanced the flow of ideas.

Learned readers can appreciate that a single book introducing Burmese sacred sites inevitably skims the surface. The history and legends of religious sites form a complex labyrinth in which one is easily lost and bewildered, like Alice in Wonderland descending into the Rabbit Hole. Each sacred site merits multiple monographs, not simply the few pages accorded each here. Researchers will surely refine and overturn many of these preliminary and tentative conclusions. I felt that as I came closer to understanding each pagoda there was always further to go, like Sisyphus rolling his stone up the hill.

The sacred sites of Burma are amongst the most beautiful and spectacular in all of Asia. However, the fame and sacredness of these holy places rests almost solely on the myths and legends that surround their founding and the origins of their relics.

These Buddhist tales can arise and evolve with astounding speed and creativity drawing on a variety of sources ranging from local folklore to Sri Lankan chronicles.

This book uncovers the evidence for and traces the development of these intricate myths across a wide spectrum of sacred sites ranging from Yangon and the Mon State in Lower Burma to Pagan and Mandalay in Upper Burma as well as considering the areas of Shan influence around Inle lake.

The author illustrates how sacred sites can emerge with remarkable frequency even in our own time with only those that possess myths catching the imagination of the Buddhist faithful having any chance of long term survival. This book represents an essential read for anyone interested in the development of Buddhism in its many

aspects, be they its art, archaeology, history or belief.