



Preface

There is a Burmese folktale that tells of a magic mirror in which a person sees only what he wishes to see. History is such a mirror; and a historian, however much he attempts to be objective and detached, often finds that he cannot completely overcome his human frailties of prejudice and preference. The reader therefore may find that this history of Burma gives too flattering a picture of the Burmese people. Nonetheless, it seems obvious that a nation which has preserved its identity, its social institutions, and its religion for nearly two thousand years, although hemmed in on all sides by other larger ones with different cultures and traditions, surely must possess some enduring qualities of character. In order that the reader may become acquainted with views of Burmese history different from mine, I have given in Appendix III of this book detailed references to the works of two eminent writers on southeast Asian history. The reader is invited to read in that appendix the opening paragraphs, in which I explain the nature, scope, and limitations of my book. The writing of this book was planned in 1959, when after I had retired from the service of the University of Rangoon it appeared that I was to lead a life of leisure. Professor U E Maung, his wife (my sister) Daw Mya Mu, and the late U Po Lat, Director of Archaeology, were to have collaborated with me. I received an appointment in the Burmese Diplomatic Service, however, and

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accordingly left Rangoon. Had it been possible for them to be joint-authors of this book with me, the chapters on the ancient kingdoms of Prome and Pagan would have been fuller because of their great knowledge of the Burmese inscriptions.

The book was begun in the academic year 1964-1965 in the School of International Affairs at Columbia University, while I was a visiting professor there, continued in 1965-1966 at Wake Forest College, and completed in the summer of 1966 at the State University of New York at Buffalo, Brockport, and Oswego. I take this opportunity to thank my various friends and colleagues at these institutions for their many courtesies.

MAUNG HTIN AUNG

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