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Than Tun's first encounter with inscriptions came in 1952.

The years following Myanmar independence in 1948 were years of great opportunity for young Myanmar. Obtaining his MA in History and employed in the University of Rangoon, Than Tun had had the luxury of choosing between two scholarships for study abroad, one to the United States, the other to England. He chose the latter and arrived there after a long sea voyage.

It happened while he was walking the streets of London and met G. H. Luce. He described the encounter:

He (Luce) had been there a year as a Visiting Professor. Meeting in the street, he gave me a smile; it seems to me he knew me to be a Myanmar from my looks. Guessing that he would be Professor Luce, I went over to greet him.

"What are you going to do?" he asked me.

I told him that I would be working on Shan-Myanmar relations on the basis of English and Myanmar materials. Coming straight to the point, he said,

"Why don't you do your research on ancient Myanmar history? I have no one to succeed me."

I asked him, "How should I begin?"

He told me, "There are 610 Bagan inscriptions. I have them collected in my room. Come and have a look at them."

I had never seen a Bagan inscription before. After looking at the inscriptions, I said,

"I'll start tomorrow."

Than Tun had found his vocation. Living in the world of inscriptions, he completed his dissertation on the Buddhist Church in the Bagan period, then returned to the University of Rangoon, further immersing himself in the inscriptions and in the Bagan period.

A turning point came in 1965. The Chair of History at the University of Mandalay had become vacant and Than Tun went there on promotion. His move to Mandalay opened up a whole new world for Than Tun. Mandalay, the last capital of the Myanmar kings, was steeped in history and, beyond Mandalay, there was much more history to be uncovered.

After his move to Mandalay, Than Tun published three slim volumes under the title *Nèhlè Yazawin* (History on Tour). It was a departure from the work which he had been doing in Yangon. There, he had continued his work on Bagan based on the inscriptions as well as a book, *Hkithaung Myanma Yazawin* (Ancient Myanmar History), in 1969. The *Nèhlè Yazawin* volumes were not only a departure in terms of subject matter but also in terms of style. Than Tun's writings in Yangon were dry and academic, in the manner in which he had been trained in London. The *Nèhlè Yazawin* volumes were addressed, not to scholars, but to the general public and were written in a colloquial style, light and very readable.

The title *Nèhlè Yazawin* also indicated a new direction in the study of history. Than Tun refused to be tied down to his Chair in Mandalay but, thanks to an indulgent Rector, would absent himself from the University for long stretches at a time to travel all over the country, to be greeted by the Registrar on his reappearance on the campus as "the Visiting Professor."

Than Tun retired from the University of Mandalay in 1983 and spent the next several years in Japan and the United States. He also published his monumental ten-volume *Royal Orders of Burma*, a work of devotion and painstaking labour, between 1983 and 1990. Then, he was appointed a member of the reconstituted Myanmar Historical Commission in 1991.

The appointment to the Commission was a return to the world of inscriptions for Than Tun. The Commission had been established in 1955 and over the years it had built up one of the largest collections of inscriptions in Myanmar, with the estampages stored in tubular tin canisters and heavy wooden drawers. The staff of the Commission who had spent season after season in the field with Luce, Ba Shin and others to make the estampages, were still there in the Commission, taking professional care of the estampages and helping scholars with their use. There was a large reading frame for the estampages to be lighted up and subjected to meticulous study.

With the return to the world of inscriptions, Than Tun published a number of studies of the Bagan inscriptions. For the *Études burmanes*, a *festschrift* for his friend Denise Bernot published in 1998, he transcribed, translated and studied four Bagan inscriptions. Then, in 2005, he published the

Hnaungtwei Kyauksamyā (Latterly Found Inscriptions), a collection of forty inscriptions in photographic plates and Myanmar transcription.

Than Tun had translated several Bagan inscriptions for his dissertation at the University of London, among them the Kyazwa Edict Inscription and the Shin Disapramuk Inscription. Making Myanmar material available to scholars who did not read Myanmar was one of Than Tun's concerns. It was impossible to translate the voluminous *Royal Orders of Burma*, he did the next best thing possible and provided summaries in English. Following his coming to the Historical Commission, he started on a translation of the *Jambudipa Oksaung Kyan*, a collection of some 17th century *sittans* (local testimonies related to administration) which had first been published in its Myanmar original in 1960, edited by J. S. Furnivall and Pe Maung Tin. Finishing the translation, he had it published by the Commission in late 2005.

It was perhaps natural that, finishing the translation of the *Jambudipa Oksaung Kyan*, Than Tun should attempt a translation of the inscriptions in the publication itself, he worked directly on a draft which he finished on 11 November 2005, typically recording it with a signature and the date. Not too long after he had completed the draft, he travelled to Mandalay for the celebration of Daw Amar's 90th birthday on 29 November.

Mandalay had been a second home to Than Tun for nearly twenty years. Close to Ludu U Hla in his social concerns and to Daw Amar in her love of Mandalay and its culture, he became very much a part of the wide but intimate circle of writers, artists and intellectuals whom the two collected about them in Mandalay. As always, the celebration was a convivial affair, with good food and good conversation with old friends. But perhaps it was a bit strenuous for the 82-year old Than Tun for he died suddenly that night.

Than Tun did not have time to work further on his translation of the inscriptions so that they remain a diamond in the rough. Nevertheless, they are reproduced without alteration or emendation, although some omissions have been made up and alternative renditions suggested.