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BRITISH BURMA IN THE NEW CENTURY, 1895–1918

STEPHEN L. KECK

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British Burma in the New Century, 1895–1918

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For Samantha

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1
Introduction

Given its place in the Indian Ocean and in the history of the empire, the need for the recovery of British Burma is surprising. This subject has not really been studied systematically or comprehensively by either students devoted to the study of modern Burmese history or those whose focus is the British empire.[1] In fact, what studies do exist are scattered, and in recent years the literature on the subject appears to have been dominated by regional and country specialists.[2] Evidence of British presence in Myanmar abounds, even if some scholars would prefer not to see it.[3] Nonetheless, it has been regional and national scholars who have laboured to make Burma's key historical trajectories comprehensible. Yet they have almost exclusively done so without more than a passing reference to ways in which the country's history fit into the broader themes of British and imperial history. It might be noted that the tendency of regional specialists to ignore the broader themes of imperial history is not confined to students of Southeast Asia or the British empire.[4]

British rule in Burma played a decisive role in the development of the modern Myanmar nation. Because the history of 20th century Myanmar is defined partly as an effort to escape from under the many features of British colonialism, this legacy may be grudgingly conceded by some scholars, who prefer to credit local actors with greater agency. Nevertheless, it would be under colonial governance that so many features of contemporary Myanmar would become visible, and this inheritance remains relevant for the subsequent development of the country, making British Burma at least a critical feature in the prehistory of contemporary Myanmar. Furthermore, despite the fact that many regional and national historians have eschewed the study of colonial texts, the reality is that the richness and complexity of British thought about Burma has been underestimated. By focusing on the vibrant intellectual life of the British in Burma, this study aims to introduce students of empire, and scholars interested in the issues associated with postcolonialism, to a completely neglected subject.

British Burma in the New Century draws upon the work of both regional and national specialists and those who have studied the empire. This study defines its subject as 'British Burma' which requires some explanation: the term had once been used to refer to those parts of the country which had come after the First Anglo-Burmese (1824–1826) and Second Anglo-Burmese Wars (1852) respectively. However, it is deployed here more self-consciously as all of Burma (today Myanmar) which after the Third Anglo-Burmese War (1885) was completely under colonial rule. British Burma was a place of many peoples, cultures and languages, but its governing culture was that of the British, with most of the sources in English. Hence, this study focuses on the Burma which is available through those sources, while the use of the term 'British Burma' begins with the acknowledgement that many voices were simply not heard by colonial authorities. In other words, Britain's Burma was not necessarily or fairly 'Burma'. Nonetheless, to tell Myanmar's story without recognizing the crucial period of history defined by British rule, is probably unsound and unwise. The goal is to make a contribution to the growing literature about both Myanmar and the study of empire itself. Ideally, scholars interested in the history of South and Southeast Asia (including Myanmar) will benefit from the broader contextualization of the country's history; at the same time, it should be possible for students of British imperialism to benefit from a study which is grounded in the work of regional and national specialists.

This study presents a portrait of colonial Burma between 1895 and 1918 in order to help stimulate academic exploration of this subject in the detail that it deserves. Admittedly, these dates may appear to be arbitrary, as neither would be regarded as a significant date for Burma by itself. Instead, they have been chosen in order to focus on what takes place between them.[5] Burma witnessed the consolidation of its borders, the expansion of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company, substantial immigration from India, growing pressure (applied by Burmese and many colonial officials) to disconnect Burma from India, and after 1905 the presence of bubonic plague. Michael W. Charney observed that the period of British rule from the Third Anglo-Burmese War to independence 'was remarkably short' but if 'the colonial period was somewhat of a "temporary success" it proved to be "severe in its consequences"'.[6] New century Burma was when some of the key realities of colonization became fully manifest. More important, this veritable generation proved to be a discrete period in Burmese history because it was the epitome of 'high colonialism' throughout Burma during which the deployment of colonial institutions became fully established,

while the groundwork was developed for much of the resistance that followed.

With British power neatly configured after the completion of the 'pacification,' the cultural challenges associated with colonial rule became evident. Ni Ni Myint, one of Myanmar's most distinguished historians, has argued that it was a challenging moment for Burman society because it experienced the impact of many forms of Western ideas creating a 'cultural clash' in which 'traditional Myanma' society was simply overtaken by events.[7] The year 1895 appears to be the date at which the Burmans began to create the 'education, religious and socio-political associations' which would prepare the way for the establishment of the YMBA (Young Men's Buddhist Association) in 1906. The year 1895 was the beginning of this 'renaissance' which would lay the ground work for the emergence of Burmese nationalism.[8] U Ottama (1879–1939), an important early nationalist who traveled extensively in Asia during the first two decades of the 20th century, returned to Burma in 1918. More conveniently, 1918 witnessed the end of the First World War and with it the beginning of a new set of challenges for both Burma and the British empire. Furthermore, events subsequent to the cessation of hostilities in other parts of the world were accompanied by an increase in challenges to colonial governance in Burma. The 'shoe controversy' and the student strike at Rangoon University the following year quickly showed that British rule would be repeatedly challenged.[9] These protests (and others) took place after 1918, but their roots almost certainly lay in the patterns of British rule that became manifest over all of Burma after 1885.

In essence, this study aims to highlight and introduce 'British Burma' as a subject of academic investigation during the high-water mark or apogee of British colonialism. Investigating Burma in this 20-odd-year period also has the advantage of focusing on the country both after the pacification was deemed to be complete, and prior to the increasingly robust anti-colonial nationalism which was fully evident in the 1920s. *British Burma in the New Century* is the first to delineate this moment as a relatively discrete historical entity. Obviously, the period between the completion of the pacification and the end of 'the European War' as Taw Sein Ko, arguably colonial Burma's preeminent intellectual, called it, had many continuities with both the earlier periods of British rule and subsequent historical experience. Yet it was in new century Burma that colonial rule reached its most developed expression and, possibly as a consequence, it would be almost immediately after that a new generation of Burmese would rise up to decisively confront it.

By the beginning of the 20th century—if not before—Burma had become an important province of the Indian empire. To anticipate, Burma played an important, possibly vital role in the Indian Ocean economy, producing rice, oil, teak and minerals, while helping to support the eastern flank of the Indian empire. Although the scholarly exploration of new century Burma will be hardly be exhausted by a single monograph or longer study, this project highlights the writings of a number of Britons who lived in and traveled to Burma in order to introduce the subject. Ideally, it will be something of a beginning as it aims to open the study of British Burma to more sustained research.

Sources

Surviving sources are the key to depicting British Burma. The vast collection of materials housed in the India Office of the British Library provide archival support to the analysis of colonial authors and secondary sources. This study draws upon these materials and the writings of many British men and women who tried to make sense of the country. British writing about Burma is more extensive than has been realized; an intellectual history of the subject alone might well require three volumes. For our purposes here, the writers who engaged Burma are interesting not only for what they had to say about the country, but also for the presuppositions and biases which they brought to the subject. Accordingly, they are more than suitable 'postcolonial' subjects, because their knowledge and understanding of what they wrote about was often purchased by years of experience in the country. Like the materials in the India Office, the works published by these authors bore the stamp of colonial knowledge-making. It is certainly possible to quarrel with the veracity of the information which was often produced by colonial authorities. This study relies upon the British translations of Burmese terms and places (e.g., 'Rangoon' will be used rather than 'Yangon'). Burmese terms are retained where their deployment will not keep the reader from understanding the discussion.

Recontextualizing 'colonial knowledge': the Victorian inheritance

It might be remembered that the production of knowledge was itself aggressively and successfully attacked in Victorian Britain. Thomas Carlyle had his doubts, Charles Dickens satirized it, and John Ruskin challenged the very production of 19th century discourses. In addition,

British intellectuals not only were critical of the changes that dominated their society (i.e., industrialism and modernity), but also looked askance at the acceptance and affirmation with which the vast number of Britons seemed to engage societal transformation. These writers challenged not only many of the tenets of modernization, but the discourses associated with it. The critique of colonial knowledge, then, actually builds upon one of the intellectual preoccupations of Victorian Britain.

However, it bears noting that it would be the British colonizers who would be the first to compile significant information—however imperfectly—about Burma and its peoples. The precedents for many of these enterprises were set first in Britain, where a sustained fascination existed regarding the living conditions of the country's population. If Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Kingsley (and many other writers—including Benjamin Disraeli) portrayed the impact of social change on society in fiction, then it must be added that the efforts to describe these transformations in non-fictive terms may have been as significant. Writers such as Henry Mayhew (1812–1887) in his *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861), the work of the Sadler Report (1831–1832) and Charles Booth (1840–1916) with his monumental study *Life and Labour of the People in London* (1891–1903) all reported on social conditions in great detail.

British thought in the 19th century can boast many achievements—libertarian thought, conceptions of evolution, scientific developments and social criticism to name a few areas—but for our purposes it is useful to highlight the importance of the ways in which the value and practice of description provided a foundation for so many of these efforts. The 'descriptive world' (probably because it is disliked by scholars whose habits and interests reflect the development of subsequent information regimes) is an underestimated series of achievements, but in the 19th century, these discursive acts were a fundamental means to collect and disseminate information. The range of subjects was expansive, including landscapes, natural phenomena, daily life, industrial conditions, the appearances of men and women, city scenes and virtually every imaginable kind of human or natural subject. As a consequence of the realities of this 'description regime' the attempts to understand Burma followed this pattern. To anticipate, the habit of mind which accompanied the description regime involved not only learning to describe or record what had been seen, but also the importance of making it visible in itself. In other words, to the Victorians the appearances mattered.

Another trend worthy of note concerns the reliance upon producing evidence. The collection of information was a stereotype of many facets of official Victorianism. The rise of a kind 'evidentiary positivism',

in which a deep faith in factual information was the basis for knowing about the natural world, human history, science and virtually every other subject, was a frequent target not only for Dickens but for Ruskin as well. These Victorians were well aware that the information collected in search for policy-making was flawed, but it could not be said that it was rejected out of hand. It might be added that the connections between the acquisition of factual knowledge and governance had proven to be durable. As Mary Poovey has observed, by the 18th century the practices of liberal government 'encouraged private citizens and voluntary societies to initiate all kinds of knowledge-making projects' and the type of knowledge which these efforts produced was regarded as supporting the state.[10] Not surprisingly, then, the habits of mind associated with collecting, describing, counting, classifying and evaluating ensured that the commitment to empiricism was quite healthy in 19th century Britain. With respect to Burma, it meant that the colonial state, particularly in the wake of the three Anglo-Burmese Wars, was relatively quick to take inventory of its new possessions.[11]

In addition to the basic organization of mind which characterized the 19th century, the British men and women who engaged Burma did so with a number of habits or concerns. That is, their engagement with Burma, however well intentioned, was subject to many biases, not least of which were priorities associated with the Victorian age. These included domesticity, individualism, character, productivity, social class and religious belief. Many of these concerns were formulated in Britain, but they carried with them hierarchies (such as race and gender) associated with imperialism. It might be well to point out that industrial expansion, the rapid growth of population, new modalities of mobility and many other changes had all helped to produce a society whose actors were increasingly proficient at sorting. British writing about Burma (and other parts of the empire) was shaped by these habits of mind. The variability of British knowledge about Burma is one of the key facets of this body of work.

British writing about Burma

British Burma in the New Century draws upon a number of key imperial authors who sought to explain the country to both colonial and metropolitan audiences. These figures were hardly hostile to British colonialism, but they challenged many of the discourses which accompanied it. Above all, British writing about Burma certainly contained a number of discursive structures which could be associated with 'orientalism' or

'imperialism', but it was not homogenous. Furthermore, when these authors laboured, other parts of Asia—particularly India, China and Japan—were much better known to Western and possibly even Asian audiences than was Burma (and other countries in Southeast Asia).[12] That said, all of these writers shared an insistence upon the importance of seeing and understanding a 'real' or 'authentic' Burma.

Seeing the 'real Burma': the structured gaze

In *Colonial Policy and Practice* John Furnivall discussed the plural society which he believed characterized much of colonial Southeast Asia. Furnivall asserted that Europeans in these areas lived a kind of dual life:

> the incompleteness of individual life and social life is most readily apparent . . . The European works in the tropics, but does not live there. His life in the tropics centres around his business, and he looks at social problems, political or economic, not as a citizen but as a capitalist or employer of labour. Many Europeans spend twenty years or more in the tropics, and on retiring from work to live at home, they know no more of the country than on the day they landed; nothing of the people or even of the language.[13]

This characterization was based upon Furnivall's perceptions, but without any kind of adequate empirical documentation it may not have been accurate for many Europeans in colonial situations. Furthermore, as Neil Englehart has observed, Furnivall's descriptions of many aspects of British governance are questionable.[14] However, for the authors explored in this book, the characterization would certainly be well off the mark. These writers had come to Burma for varying lengths of time and with varying degrees of commitment, but they all came to identify with it in some way or another. Even those who traveled to Burma and wanted to write about it sought to identify their now experienced perceptions with the country. To anticipate, many others would lift their pens with a much greater personal investment in Burma.

The danger of misunderstanding or only superficially seeing Burma was common to many other authors. In fact, there is a telling polemic against globetrotters (who were often represented to be Americans) which runs through much of the British Burma literature (including the satirists). The consistent effort to distance themselves from casual tourists suggests that the phenomenon of mass travel was becoming vivid in Burma. However, it hardly explains the widespread need to attack what

was probably a real source of irritation—but not a significant threat or problem. This remains a subject for future research (including an enquiry into whether it was limited to Burma), but it is at least plausible that these writers increasingly understood that Burma was part of an international system, which was bringing with it visitors whose interest in the country was at best superficial. In other words, these men and women believed that it was inevitable that the globetrotters would not see or even experience the 'real' Burma. It is worth citing Scott's *Burma: A Handbook of Practical Information* (1906) because in that book he laid down expert guidelines on what it took to travel and see in the 'real' Burma:

> The usual short tour of those who have little time at their disposal is from Rangoon to Mandalay by rail, returning from Mandalay to Rangoon by rail, or returning by the steamers of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company, preferably by a cargo boat . . . this may be a way of seeing the country; it is certainly not a way of seeing the Burmese. Rangoon is hardly Burmese at all. The natives of the country are living yearly farther and farther away . . . It is only on the river steamers that anything of the ways of the people will be seen; and the people are much more worth seeing than the country, though that is a constant delight to those who have come from the wide, burnt-up, heartbreaking expanses of India.[15]

Scott added a specific itinerary which offered options for tourist consumption. A short trip would be from Rangoon to Mandalay via the railway with a return down the Irrawaddy by steamer. This would allow travelers to see Burma but 'it is certainly not a way of seeing the Burmese'.[16] Alternatively, he outlined a more extensive trip to Myitkyina or Bhamo to see more of the country. However, he was much more specific about the modalities of staying in Burma as a traveler which were envisioned as a means to become independent from the mechanisms of mass travel:

> It is quite imperative for those who wish to see something of the country, the real Burma, to provide themselves with a "boy" and a cook. These can be hired in Rangoon without much trouble. They are usually far from satisfactory, but if it is any consolation to the visitor, he may be assured that he is no worse off than the residents in the country. The cook will want some cooking-pots, and it would be well for the traveler to check the number of these by his own appreciation of his capacity for food. If he does not the cook will provide enough

> to feed an entire jungle station . . . Both "boy" and cook will want advances to leave wherewithal to support fruitful wives and cherished but aged parents . . . Both will probably be Madrassis. The race does not command unqualified respect, but they are undeniably useful. They can talk practically all the languages of the Indian Empire, in the most atrocious way, no doubt, but still so as to be understood. They are usually Christians, and will, therefore, do anything . . . it would be well to get a Mugh cook . . . There are numbers of dak bungalows all over the country, in which cooking-pots, plates, knives, and forks are kept, but now and again it may be convenient to stop in one of the country zayats, or rest-houses, where nothing but shelter is to be had. Of course, bedding must be taken. That is necessary even for the train journeys, and with it should be brought a camp bed and a mosquito curtain . . . Provided in this way, the visitor will be as independent of railways as the ideal general ought to be.[17]

What was at stake was the ability to see Burma patiently and sympathetically. Seeing the country away from the railway meant encountering it slowly and with some challenges; Scott elaborated that it might be useful to acquire a pony because it was necessary for travel over many parts of the country:

> A saddle, and most certainly a side saddle, should however, assuredly not be forgotten. In the cold weather—and it will be most unpleasant to tour at any other season away from metalled roads—bicycles can be ridden almost anywhere, and will be found most useful. Out of the towns Burma is hardly suited for motors yet . . . The traveler made independent in this way will be able to do much without going really far from the railway or the river. He will be able . . . to devote some time to seeing Pagan. The ordinary rush through made by people from a cargo steamer is very much like trotting through the Louvre after lunch. The Yenangyuang oilfields or the jade mines can also be comfortably seen. A chief advantage, however, will be that it makes it possible to attend one of the country pagoda festivals, when the Burman can be seen to the best advantage, dressed in his best, and enjoying himself hugely. Everything most characteristic of the country can be seen: worship, processions, bartering, plays—both the marionette and the formal play, dances, and other simple joys. Much more may be seen, perhaps, at the annual festivals of the Shwe Dagon in Rangoon, or the Mahamuni in Mandalay, but they are spoilt by the presence and influence of too many aliens.[18]

This really was the same issue which C.M. Enriquez referred to as 'the real Burma' and it might mean to others 'old Burma'. The protective impulse which can be found in Scott's instructions is recognizable in the texts of the other British authors. They wanted not only to separate themselves from the most superficial forms of tourism, but also to defend Burma from misunderstanding. This was an insistence that Burma was fundamentally different from India in just about every way and, at the same time, needed to be protected from the vagaries of an international system to which the country was now connected through the seemingly beneficent promise of British rule. To put this differently, these writers were asserting the primacy of local considerations over generalizing global trends which were becoming increasingly manifest. Looking forward, these Britons would almost certainly have complained about the relocation of the capital from Rangoon to Naypyidaw in 2005, but they would have understood and possibly sympathized with many of the assumptions which led to the move. Beyond these assumptions, these authors reflected varied stances towards the country and its future. In fact, it is possible to delineate a number of strands in British writing about Burma.

Missionaries

Missionary literature devoted to Burma was one of the first forms of British discourse to attract scholarly attention.[19] The career of Adoniram Judson ensured that 19th century Burma would be associated with mission literature. Many of the missionaries who wrote about the country were Americans, but the publications of Dr John Marks and W.C.B. Purser addressed not only the challenges faced by missionaries, but some useful descriptions of social problems which they tried to address. More predictably, perhaps, these authors (and others) helped to shape British understandings of Buddhism and other religious practices.

Memorialists and modernizers

There were a number of writers who wrote memoirs about their experiences, but could not be said to possess any particular agenda. Many of these people wrote because they felt they had to as they had served in Burma and wanted to preserve some understanding of what they had seen and experienced. These writers, mostly males, were employed or connected to someone employed in the administration of British governance or the wider missionary enterprises associated with the

'civilizing mission'. Mrs Powell-Brown's *A Year on the Irrawaddy* (1911) provides a detailed account of her experiences on an oil boat. John Nisbet's (1853–1914) two-volume *Burma Under British Rule—and Before* (1901) stands as an exemplar of this kind of discourse. It might be added that Nisbet, a botanist who had an extended career with the Forest Service, took the trouble to separate himself from official discourses. Nisbet noted that books had been written by 'casual visitors' (he might have called them globetrotters), but his effort would be to provide a comprehensive work 'on one of the richest provinces of our Indian Empire' which would be based on 'experience acquired there in a service extending over nearly twenty-five years'.[20] These authors, by no means confined to Burma, might be usefully designated 'imperial memoirists'. They might be regarded as similar to those 'modernizers'; this group, which included Taw Sein Ko, assumed that British rule was necessary to ensure that Burma could be brought into the modern world.

British writing—with a few exceptions—favored the determined and ruthless modernization of Burma. While modernizers could take many forms, three figures should be highlighted: one lived in Burma, another was famous for his travel to and from the country, and the third was a Western academic: Taw Sein Ko, Archibald Ross Colquhoun and Alleyne Ireland, respectively.

Taw Sein Ko has yet to be the subject of a biography but he was emblematic of British Burma in a number of ways. His family was part of the increase in Chinese emigrants who came to Burma and became successful in commercial enterprises. Arguably he became colonial Burma's leading public intellectual: his most durable achievements would be as the superintendent of the Archaeological Survey and from this position he was active in many other areas of British Burma. In a perceptive article, Penny Edwards referred to Taw Sein Ko as a mediating figure, arguing that he was in effect a broker of knowledge because his 'fluency in diverse cultures and languages' enabled him to help the British interpret and interact with Chinese and Burmese cultures.[21] However, Taw Sein Ko was more than a mediating figure, as he affected many developments in Burma. In fact, he proved to be the classic relentless modernizer: his energies were devoted to reform of social institutions and also the reformation of Buddhism in Burma. Ultimately, his vast work would be recognized by the Crown, but almost entirely forgotten by modern and contemporary scholarship. Archibald Ross Colquhoun, an enigmatic figure in the history of the empire, advocated using Burma to develop a trading network between India and China.[22] Alleyne Ireland was the author of the two-volume *The Province of Burma* (1907).[23] This massive

publication continues to be relevant because of its encyclopedic coverage of the workings of the colonial state.[24] Despite their obvious differences, these two figures are representative of the emphasis placed upon modernization as a way to make sense of colonial Burma.

Travel writers

Another strand connects travel writing, and travel either within Burma or in which Burma was part of a wider set of destinations. It might be tempting to regard these authors as globetrotters but what is striking is that in virtually every case they sought to distinguish themselves from these types of writers—epitomized possibly by Americans.[25] These Britons believed that they had seen the country better than those other travelers. Their confidence may not have been entirely misplaced because they saw Burma with the unofficial privileges of empire. That is, they ventured to Burma and saw it through the structured gaze (see below) made available by colonial authorities. These men and women who traveled within Burma did so with full support of the colonial elites' patronage. Gwendolen Trench Gascoigne, Mrs Ernst Hart, and R. Talbot Kelly all made major excursions into Burma, relying not only upon the rapidly improving mechanisms of transportation, but also on the organized hospitality of key administrators. For example, Gascoigne was entertained by Donald Smeaton, who wrote the *Loyal Karens of Burma*; Todd Naylor, who was a well-placed civil servant; and business leaders and other key figures. This invariably meant that these travelers explored Burma through its elite clubs—the centrality of which might be gleaned from George Orwell's *Burmese Days*. These encounters were critical to Gascoigne's experience of travel (and the subsequent narrative) in Burma. Predictably, perhaps, she made it clear at the outset that she was not a globetrotter. She explained that Burma has been spared 'that most terrible of all scourges, the globe-trotter'.[26] Gascoigne elaborated further that a 'few of the most inveterate Yankees' had 'done' Rangoon, been to Mandalay and 'asked questions, criticized everything, and at the end have come to the satisfactory conclusion that there exists no country and no people but the Americans'.[27] She probably would have spoken for many of these colonial supported travelers when she added that: 'I doubt myself if those same contented Yankees did really see Burma; of course in American parlance, they "did it," but Burma and the Burmans require something more subtle than a mere casual hurried glance.'[28] The dog in *A Dog's Life, Told by the Dog* could be said to have articulated a similar lament:

> Time is nothing and counts as nothing except to the "Globe-Trotter." He bustles up half an hour before the advertised time for a train or boat to start, only to find he is lucky if he has not more than twice the time to wait till the leisurely inhabitants of the country have settled their various business, and said their last words and find it convenient to signify, by getting onboard, that they are ready to start.[29]

It might be noted, as well, that the anonymous author of *A Dog's Life, Told by the Dog* also articulated a dislike for Americans.[30] Kelly was directed into the forests cultivated by the Bombay-Burmah Trading Corporation, while Mrs Alice Hart had other personages to enable her to write about Burma. It might well be that in all of these cases the authors wrote partly to demonstrate to themselves that they were not superficial globetrotting tourists. Nonetheless, precisely because they had the support of colonial civil servants, missionaries, business leaders and other well connected persons they not only saw more, but much of what they saw they had virtually prefabricated. Therefore, these authors make up an important form of colonial writing—a hybrid of travel discourses and unofficial, but almost official colonial administration. These figures are of considerable value for recovering the mindsets of British Burma because they have been instructed in how to see it. Scholarship regarding travel writing, and tourism more generally, have found Urry's concept of the 'tourist gaze' to be useful as a way of trying to depict a set of realities which define the encounter between tourists and what they behold. Unlike ordinary tourists, these traveling authors might be said to look at Burma through the prism of unofficial sets of knowledge, which encoded not only racial and gender-based hierarchies of information, but also organized local knowledge. Instead of with a 'tourist gaze', they apprehended Burma (and other places) as 'officially sanctioned observers' (OSO). To be sure, they digested tourist guide books, and traveled to sightsee, but they did so as informed and privileged travelers.[31]

As officially sanctioned observers, then, they might be said to have consumed and participated in 'Burmascapes'. The Burmascape refers to the ways in which many—if not all—British writers imagined Burma and derived meanings about it from the combination of conceptual vocabulary, images and narratives which enabled them to make sense of what to them was an alien and essentially unknown place. In developing this concept, this study follows both the much older and broader traditions of European landscape painting and the work of Arjun Appadurai who conceptualized global cultural flows around the 'scape' metaphor. The movement of European landscape art encompassed a wide

range of cultural phenomena: painting, engravings, garden design, and debates about 'the sublime' and the 'picturesque sensibility' all connected the arrangement and interpretation of visual space with broader cultural, social and historical realities. In practice, landscape art, itself connected to the 'Grand Tour', was a form of cultural consumption; the organization of visual space in paintings (which would later find their mass tourist expression in new century Burma in the postcard) involved defining a foreign area or place. The images assembled in a picture were deemed to be important, but their composition pointed beyond the immediate appearance. These paintings could then be the basis for cultural interpretation; to cite one example, John Ruskin highlighted a number of J.M.W. Turner's seascapes to call attention to the way in which the painter was actually involved in social commentary. Appadurai's imaginative deployment of the 'scape' concept underscores the ways in which cultures invent meanings for places. In 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy', he suggested developing an 'elementary framework' for studying these disjunctures. He posited ethnoscapes, mediascapes, finanscapes, technoscapes and ideoscapes because Appadurai argued the suffix scape captured the imprecise nature of the cultural constructs:

> the common suffix scape to indicate first of all that these are not objectively given relations which look the same from every angle of vision, but rather they are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected very much by the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors: nation-states, multinationals, diasporic communities, as well as sub-national groupings and movements . . . and even intimate face-to-face groups, such as villages, neighborhoods and families. Indeed, the individual actor is the last locus of this perspectival set of landscapes, for these landscapes are eventually navigated by agents who both experience and constitute larger formations, in part by their own sense of what these landscapes offer.[32]

With this discussion it would be easy to imagine that a 'colonialscape' or an 'empirescape' might well provide a useful heuristic device for the study of cultures, colonization and empires. For our purposes, focusing on 'the Burmascape' is attractive because it stands for the kind of construct which might be said to define the ways in which colonial actors understood Burma—including their roles within it. They worked, lived, relaxed, played and experienced homesickness in it; above all they saw it and insisted that it be seen to be understood in a particular kind of way.

The ocular metaphor is important: the memoirs which they produced subsequently are punctuated with images. Watercolours, paintings, photographs and maps all helped their readers 'see' or behold Burma. More important, their experience of coming to Burma and being taken to 'see things' was a fundamental component of their journeys. These men and women took pains not to be globetrotters and they took pains 'to go off the beaten path', but in fact, their paths were well organized or prefigured for them. Nonetheless, these Burmascape writers almost certainly saw things that less fortunate travelers did not, and their memoirs are valuable because they reveal the different mindsets of colonial officials.

It might be added that the scape could be regarded as a modality of power in its own right. Burmascape refers to the way the British at once imagined, understood and conceptually organized Burma. Ocular metaphors have already become influential in conceptualizing the emergence of modern and colonial world views. There are ample warrants for using the scape concept as a means to organize the ways in which the British understood Burma. After all, the emergence of landscape as a subject in European painting accompanied the growth of organized travel—even if in its earliest incarnations, this meant the Grand Tour. Landscape presupposed the ability to look at the world from the point of view of mobile subjects. To create a landscape meant composing a picture which could be inclusive of the natural world, human interactions with it, signifiers of social relations, and theological and moral judgments, all shaped by the means to behold it in an ordered fashion. Subsequent developments associated with the rise of the 'picturesque aesthetic' meant that these landscapes increasingly could become attractive as objects of consumption. To be sure, the age of mass tourism (or the era associated with 'the new imperialism') had yet to begin, but the paradigm of presenting a picture of an ordered, complex and dynamic world was well developed.

Understanding the broader European landscapes and picturesque traditions makes a good basis for recovering British mindsets about Burma. The structured mode of seeing the country which was offered to travelers presupposed a conceptual ordering of the country. At the basis of this presentation was the idea—underscored by significant bodies of information—that Burma could be understood in its totality. The country could be grasped through its many peoples, diverse terrains, predictable climate, recognizable religious practices and ultimately recoverable history. To present Burma as a scape meant enabling visitors and those outside to regard it as a dynamic, complex and changing environment. Consequently, Burma could be presented with its need for hierarchies,

means of classification and narratives which related readily to concepts involving modernization or the civilizing mission.

At the bare minimum, the realities behind the Burmascape reflected the control over transportation which was fully evident in new century Burma. Traversing Burma had always been a challenge, and the ability to move and control movement had served the British in war and subsequently signified their power over the country. More important, possibly, the Burmascape enabled them to envision or make legible for control and administration and it could also serve as the basis on which Burma could be made visible to those outside. The Burmascape came together from the 'imagined geographies' which, in turn, came from the sum total frameworks which the British introduced to the country: the political organization, the information collected from the censuses, the gazettes, the police reports, the information supplied by the many forms of government administration and also that which was represented by unofficial sources. Here, the work of artists, photographers, travel writers, painters and those who produced other valuable images, helped to make Burma visible in the more literal sense. Taken together, the production (and systematic reproduction) of knowledge about Burma (including its larger set of connections with India) reflected an understanding of the country which supplied the British with a basis for making decisions about governing. To put it differently, Burmascape furnished the set of presuppositions which allowed the British to determine how to deploy the regimes of control and modalities of surveillance which enabled them to govern.

At the same time, recovering the parameters of the Burmascape makes it evident that much lay beyond the British understanding of the country. Burma beyond the Burmascape refers to more than the remote areas of the country (of which there are many) or to small and isolated ethnic groups, essentially unknown to the world outside. As we will see, understanding the position and situation of Buddhism, grasping the importance of the monarchy (especially for Buddhism), and comprehending the outlook of the generation which went to school in new century Burma appeared to be largely beyond even the most sage of Britain's Burma watchers.

The Burmascape was the unofficial but officially informed perspective on the country which comes into view in the travel writings of the OSO. Yet, it could be derived also from many other publications and related to the country. The Burmascape was more than a mindset or a worldview because it is directly related to the manner in which the colonial authorities sought to portray Burma to the outside world.

It might be added that it was an important feature of colonial governance to make its power and authority visible inside Burma. To anticipate, this took many forms, beginning with the need to define order. After the Third Anglo-Burmese War, in 1886 Frederick Fryer summarized British strategy:

> What is wanted is police posts spread all over the country. At present any village giving assistance to the Government is punished by the rebels when the troops have left. If a post is established in the village, it assures the villagers of protection, brings home to their minds the reality of our Government, and forms a nucleus round which the well disposed can rally.[33]

The articulation of British power involved the conscious effort at making its many manifestations fully visible. In this sense, colonial administration was following a practice of governance with ample precedent. Even earlier, the importance of the presentation of states in Southeast Asia has been well documented. Here, the civil servants were at once performing administrative duties, while also working to help travelers and other authors portray Burma to the world beyond. Many may have been motivated to simply help tourists and others to document the achievements of empire, but what remains distinctive is the effort to structure the ways in which Burma would be seen and understood.

While the picture which emerged from the Burmascape was not wholly positive, one reality which bedeviled it was the inability to reduce the presence of crime in Burma. The high crime rate was normally not addressed by those who wrote about the country, but they were all too aware that it was a persistent reality. More telling, many of those whom a traveler might meet in a club would be connected in some manner with policing. The laments made by the district magistrate of Prome about the seeming permanence of crime in 1918 were indicative of a deep set of frustrations:

> [T]here is a great deal to contend with—unintelligent investigation; the want of public spirit; the imperfect presentation of cases in Court; the cleverness of many of the criminals; the law's delays; the practice of tampering with witnesses; the want of courage in resisting malefactors; the fear on the part of witnesses or reprisals; the impossibility in present circumstances of getting the force up to strength; the over-elaborateness and unsuitability of the existing system of criminal procedure and the law of evidence; and the lamentable scepticism of the Courts . . . Life in villages is drab and monotonous. Amusements are

> few. Many things are *verboten*. Work is hard all the year round in a large part of the district, and there are various unpopular village duties. The wastrels to whom I have referred do harm in villages because they attract the young men in a not unnatural revolt against the system and often lead them to serious crime. The wholesome influences of the past, the influence of officers, the influence of parents and elders, the influence of headmen, the influence of *pongyis*, the influence of Government officers, are no longer strong enough in many cases to counteract the sinister influence of these wastrels. The decay of salutary influences which I have referred to has helped to cause general deterioration of character. If, as I pray may be the case, the position of headmen is not tampered with in the reforms now under consideration, the influence of thugyis may be expected to revive in consequence of the amalgamation of jurisdictions. Bigger men will be got to serve. But on the whole, personal influence has gone wrong. Many of the sanctions obtaining in more civilized countries hardly exist here now.[34]

Most of these complaints might have been just as readily offered in 1895. Burma had long been connected in the British mind with criminality, and despite the best efforts to portray it as a place of commercial opportunity or where the wonders of 'the East' might be found, it remained a place identified with a crime problem. More to the point, the British outlook might be said to range between portraying (to themselves as well as to those outside) according to the conventions of the Burmascape and not being able to escape from the perception (and reality) that Burma was a place defined by criminality.

Burmaphiles

The most important strand of British intellectual activity for this study will be the Burmaphiles, who it might be said laboured to present the country beyond the easier assumptions of the Burmascape. These were British authors who spent significant time in Burma and not only felt a need to communicate what they had experienced but made no less effort to ensure that the country was portrayed in sympathetic terms. While they were not an organized group, they were regarded differently from other authors. For example, in *Peking to Mandalay: A Journey from North China through Tibetan Ssuch'uan and Yunnan* (1908), R.F. Johnston recognized that there was a group of writers who regarded Burma a bit differently from most others.[35] In fact, these writers often sought to distance themselves from the OSO Burmascape authors just as the OSO had

insisted upon differentiating themselves from the globetrotters. These authors, in contrast to the OSO, wanted their readers to understand that their long periods of service meant that they were never on 'the beaten path'. Rather, their expertise came from length of service in Burma, which included varying degrees of fluency in Burmese. This group—Sir George Scott, V.C. Scott O'Connor, Harold Fielding-Hall, Captain Colin Metcalfe Enriquez—all believed in the necessity of British rule in Burma, but they were committed to making the country better understood.

Despite the fact that Sir George Scott remains known to students of both Burmese and imperial history, he remains an understudied figure. Scott's most famous achievement was the publication of *The Burman: His Life and Notions* under the name pseudonym Shway Yoe. This work presented the life of a Burman so convincingly that reviewers in Britain believed it to be written by a Burmese.[36] Scott, who is recalled for introducing football to Burma, could also lay claim to being 19th century Britain's most renowned expert on Burma. The expertise came from direct experience and observation: as deputy commissioner, Scott administered the Shan States. His work with the Anglo-Siamese Boundary Commission helped to affix the current borders between the two countries. These tasks were extended to defining the border with China as well. Scott was well regarded by the leaders of British Burma; the *Rangoon Gazette* observed that he could impart to a report 'the vitality and significance that hide themselves from the public eye'.[37] Not only was he a talented journalist, but he took pride in collecting Burmese manuscripts. It would be his efforts which lay behind the massive five-volume *Gazetteer of Burma and the Shan State*.[38] Yet, despite occasional academic attention, his achievements and full-length biography remain to be written.

After Scott, the next best known Burmaphile is probably Harold Fielding-Hall, who published a number of key works which sought to present Burma and Buddhism in sympathetic terms. Fielding-Hall's *The Soul of a People* (1898), *A People at School* (1906) and *The Inward Light* (1908) are relatively well known, but he also attempted to preserve the memory of the Konbaung court.[39] To that end, Fielding-Hall wrote *Burmese Palace Tales* (1900) and *Thibaw's Queen* (1899), both of which might be considered early oral histories.[40]

V.C. Scott O'Connor, another civil servant, wrote the two-volume *The Silken East* (1904), which was an elegiac hymn to Burma. This unknown masterpiece was followed by *Mandalay and Other Cities of the Past in Burma* (1907).[41] O'Connor's subsequent career could be said to have followed British fortunes in the early 20th century. Captain Colin Metcalfe Enriquez published a number of works whose titles—*A Burmese*

Enchantment (1916) and *A Burmese Wonderland: A Tale of Travel in Upper and Lower Burma* (1922)—suggest his deep affection for Burma.[42] Enriquez married a Burman and devoted his life to writing about Burma, including his experiences in World War II.

Leslie Milne was an unusual Burmaphile: she was an expert on the Shan States. Her publications *Shans at Home* (1910) and *The Home of an Eastern Clan: A Study of the Palaungs of the Shan States* (1924) were the product of more than a year of living with the Shan.[43] Just as it makes sense to see Fielding-Hall as an early oral historian, so too, Milne's efforts are recognizable as field work.

For very different reasons, W.S. Thom and Colonel Pollock's *Wild Sports of Burma and Assam* (1900) enables them to be grouped with the Burmaphiles.[44] These men were hunters, but in their various expeditions they also articulated a surprising affection for Burma and many of its peoples.

The Burmaphiles regarded themselves as the experts on the country: it was their mission to instruct and explain. All of these figures learned Burmese and possessed a broader fluency with the land and its cultures than those who might visit or stay for only a few years. Ultimately, they needed to write about Burma because they had come to believe very much in it, and sought to communicate what they knew about it. Their voices were artificially hybrid: they could adapt or sought to adopt a Burmese point of view when engaging much of their subject matters. More important, perhaps, these writers recognized that Burma was a province of the Indian empire and that Burma possessed a bad reputation which they sought to address. The Burmaphiles made it their mission to reinterpret Burma to their contemporaries, including those who lived and worked in India and Burma. Last, even though they lived and wrote after reformulation of knowledge in the 19th century, which came to privilege scientific and disciplinary knowledge over observation and direct experience, their publications testify to the persistence of a form of knowledge in which the sustained direct engagement with a remote subject could be regarded as nearly definitive. As Mary Poovey has suggested, after 1870 there was a gradual shift in value of knowledge from observed particulars towards 'elevated rule-governed, autonomous models'.[45]

Satirists

Another form of discourse should be noted as well: those who engaged in satire. Samuel Cocks produced some little satire, and the verse published later by M.C. Conway Poole as the *Ballads of Burma* (1912) reflected this

impulse as well. However, the anonymous author of *A Dog's Life, Told by the Dog* (1909) brought an imaginative satiric voice to the world of colonial Burma. The sharp satire of the Mem Shahbib in *A Dog's Life, Told by the Dog* who enjoyed 'jungling' as a mode of tourist experience, was making fun of a familiar set of cultural practices.[46] In any event, the author of this work kept a critical perspective not only on Burma, but also those who tried to govern it. Inadvertently, it might be added, his writing helped to confirm the realities behind British Burma. After all, it is the common assumptions, experiences and practices which make satire suitable for understanding a given subject. To cite one example, a satiric point of view actually documents the extent to which tourist practices were widespread among British residents of Burma. The author notes that they 'met Burmans—Shans—Chinese—and of course the Colonel must talk to them all and learn where they are coming from, and going to, and as much of their business as they would tell'.[47] Other habits such as hunting and participating in Clubs are regarded as important. Throughout much of the narrative, the main characters actually enact the experience of tourists in Burma as they travel in the country. The reader can glean that they are in the process of exploring (or consuming) Burma and they are represented to look quite stupid throughout their excursions.

These works, which are aimed at satirizing colonial society, form a small but valuable portion of British writing about Burma, because they illustrate the realities that were sufficiently shared to be satirized; they provide a different kind of window into British Burma—a look at many of the assumptions of the colonizers. That is, because they were written to satirize, they could not be said to have been deliberately domesticated or sanitized.

Accordingly, exploring the *Ballads of Burma* or *A Dog's Life, Told by the Dog* reveals what official reports often do not: the savage racism which was a feature of British rule. The Burmascape writers, the Burmaphiles and the restless modernizers may look intriguing or elicit sympathy generations later, but they worked against the backdrop of a society which was constructed with reference to racial hierarchies. That is, these texts depict the brutal indifference and naked greed which remain the key to comprehending many of the colonizing interests. The authors' frustrations played out in satires, but inadvertently they have left behind a record which hardly exists in the other forms of discourse. It is true that racial thought can be easily gleaned from many of these writers and surviving reports, but what comes through from the satirists is the untrammeled racism which punctuated colonial life. There is no reason

to believe that Eric Blair read these works, but the biting contempt which the authors possessed would certainly be recognizable in George Orwell's *Burmese Days*. Accordingly, recovering these discourses should remain a priority for students of Southeast Asia and modern British history alike.

Methodological considerations

Most of these authors are not unknown, but they are understudied. Drawing upon these discourses means realizing the potential to work 'outside the grain'. Students of Southeast Asia, of course, are accustomed to reading sources 'against the grain'. This work will situate these texts 'outside the grain' of the colonial archive. This means that this body of writing will be understood to be distinct from the sources and materials which made up official records and other documents produced under state auspices. In fact, one of the values of reading 'outside the grain' is that it not only emphasizes the integrity and autonomy of these sources, but it also has the potential to broaden our perspectives on these official or archival sources. Comprehending the vast array of documentary evidence left behind by British colonial administrators requires us to see it in its full complexity. Reading 'against the grain' has provided great benefits to the academic exploration of Southeast Asia. It is also useful to read 'along the grain' because a sensitive examination of these sources can provide a wealth of information and insights into virtually every area of colonial life and society.[48] Reading 'outside the grain' highlights not only the nuances of colonial writing, but also some of its revealing moments of self-reflection. Reading 'outside the grain' involves the development of a hermeneutic aimed at ensuring that colonial authors are not removed from the writing of history because of their ostensible or perceived relationship to it. In other words, for scholars, studying these figures and texts 'outside the grain' entails acknowledging that their work, ideas and publications have sufficient intellectual autonomy and are not merely epiphenomena of the colonial state. This hardly means ignoring that some, if not most, of these figures were in some fundamental way connected with imperial projects and ideologies; however, this approach provides the opportunity to understand their situation and work with more detachment and sensitivity. More broadly, to explore these texts is to begin to recover a rich and vibrant intellectual energy—complete with both its advocates and dissenters from imperial practices—which was directed towards the attempt to describe, explain, comprehend and ultimately

evaluate places which were different and inherently, perhaps, rendered 'other'.

In this instance, it will become evident that British authors were hardly indifferent to social transformation—even if they were connected to a multiplicity of international networks which promoted it. To read the Burmaphiles outside the grain means measuring their writings against what can be found in the archive. The sensitive voices of the Burmaphiles contrast with the candid remarks—sometimes unfriendly about Burmans—which can be found in the official reports which lie in many archives. Most important, perhaps, reading outside the grain should refute the often implicit characterization of British thought as homogenous or monolithic. With respect to British Burma, it may better allow scholars to develop a hermeneutic which is sensitive to the multifaceted and hybridic character of the discourses which emerge out of this body of writing.

Recent scholarship

In order to examine the world admired by the Burmaphiles and others, it is necessary to draw upon four distinct research traditions, which have evolved largely without reference to one another. These approaches hardly exclude the methods which might be used to study this subject, but in this case they provide the basis from which to interpret a portion of Myanmar's recent past. Hence, the academic investigations of Myanmar history, imperial history and postcolonial scholarship have alternative origins and research trajectories, but collectively they offer essential windows into the cultural life of British Burma.

To begin with, narrating the emergence of an independent Myanmar has been the focus of significant historical study. However, while most academic attention appears to be focused on Myanmar after 1947, the study of British Burma has been undertaken both as it related to the larger trajectories of Myanmar's history and in relation to larger regional events. The effort here is to reclaim British Burma as a significant field of historical study, relevant not only to Myanmar, but to the broader trajectories of Asian history. At the same time, British Burma has also served as something of a backdrop for scholarship which focuses on select themes in the country's history. In fact, some of the recently published research has explored corruption, opium consumption, gender relations and legal history.[49] These works collectively have enriched our understanding of British Burma and pointed to new ways of conceptualizing the history of Myanmar.

More broadly, historians of Southeast Asia have broken ground in the study of new nations and produced scholarship of the highest quality regarding a number of colonial situations. However, Burma was a part of the Indian empire, well before the term (and field) of Southeast Asia had yet to be developed. Nonetheless, the scholars who have addressed issues involving 'mainland Southeast Asia', the hill country (relevant to northern Burma) and the realities of colonial power in the region have made contributions which illuminate the study of British Burma.

At this same time, the scholarly exploration of the British Empire has also begun to flourish in new ways. The reconceptualization of key themes such as imperialism, colonialism and decolonization is well underway. For our purposes here, it is probably sufficient to say that the empire should be understood as a political entity which is related directly to a much wider and larger international world system. Accordingly, while the argument here does not directly trace these international and transimperial connections to developments in Burma, they may well be evident in many features of British rule.

This study builds upon this growing body of work as it also does on many of the issues raised by the advent of postcolonial theory. That is, the development of a vocabulary about postcolonial conditions has helped to raise questions about the nature of colonial knowledge, orientialisms and the difficulties inherent in subsequent historical interpretation. This research tradition, which draws from the ideas of figures such as Michel Foucault and Edward Said, lies behind much of this monograph. All told, to explore the world of British Burma at the turn of the century means to engage the subjects in their own words, but with reference to these much larger research traditions.

Thesis and main argument

British Burma in the New Century, however, goes a bit further in making the experience of the country under colonialism the primary focus. This study seeks to portray British Burma as an entity in itself and not a temporary moment or necessary stage for independence. Instead, it demands interpretative independence as worthy of scholarly examination in its own right. To be sure, any such discussion will connect the subject to the broader trajectories associated with empire and later independence, but it is useful to try to recover the entity, without subordinating it to fairly predictable narratives.

This book draws upon intellectual and cultural history to illuminate the now lost world of British Burma. By exploring these largely forgotten

figures we not only recover their writings—many of which are important in their own right—but also let them introduce new century Burma. By concentrating on the works of the imperial memoirists, Burmascape writers, the Burmaphiles, the satirists and missionary writers, and using them in conjunction with other primary materials, the outlines of British Burma between 1895 and 1918 should become clear. What should emerge is a picture of a complex, dynamic and fascinating society which was experiencing more changes than its leading actors probably recognized. British Burma was more than an interlude but a colonial society which was dynamic, if unstable. British Burma was a newly made society with its own achievements, failures, patterns of exploitation and missed opportunities. Furthermore, the collective work of the colonial state which accompanied both modernization and economic expansion took place in a newly unified Burma. That is, for all its inadequacies British rule proved to be a homogenizing force in the construction of modern Myanmar. These developments proved to be durable, making the transformations which took place in Burma significant for the country's subsequent historical trajectories.

Building on these ideas, chapter two focuses on the ways in which British writers sought to locate Burma in time and place. Burma became defined by its recent history, social problems and economic opportunities. The Burmascape, as such, enabled Burma to be defined, legible and capable of sustained and detailed administration, while the Burmaphiles regarded it with reverence. Last, while Burma's geography proved to be an ethnic signifier, it also occupied an important place due to its northern borders and connection to the Bay of Bengal.

Examining the governance of Burma at the end of the 19th century sheds light upon the evolution of the colonial state. Accordingly, chapter three explores the ways in which British rule was extended and deepened in Burma. Particular attention will be focused upon regimes of control, the manner in which the state was made visible and the ways in which it helped to modernize the country with reference to both imperial and international standards.

Chapter four investigates British attempts to understand the end of the Konbaung Dynasty (and all that it represented) and the societal changes which were rapidly putting an end to what a number of observers regarded as 'traditional' or 'old Burma'. In the context of these developments, some British writers worked hard to describe, explain and interpret what they perceived to be a rapidly disappearing society dubbed 'old Burma'. Interpreting the end of old Burma meant first trying to understand it on its own terms and, invariably, attempting to

find ways to chronicle and preserve what was left of it. As such, this discussion will draw upon a number of figures whose labours would lay the foundation for subsequent scholarship. Most notably, Sir George Scott, Harold Fielding-Hall, V.C. Scott O'Connor and Taw Sein Ko have been remembered for their contributions to the study of the Burmese past. These authors and others helped to lay the foundations for both sustained archaeological study and the creation of the Burma Research Society. At the same time, the concern which many—if not all—of these figures had about the country's future colored many of their efforts.

The work of Harold Fielding-Hall, Sir George Scott and Taw Sein Ko frames a discussion of chapter five which concentrates upon British attempts to understand Buddhism as they found it in Burma. British interpreters sought to understand the history of the spread of the religion and the ways in which it shaped Burmese life. This included the attempt to tell the story of Buddhism—in much the same way that 19th century Biblical criticism was motivated to reconstruct the beginnings and expansion of Christianity. With respect to Burma, British writers sought on the one hand to comprehend the ways in which the religion shaped Burmese identity and values; on the other hand, colonial administrators were also concerned with finding ways to use Buddhist practices to promote mass education and, more generally, imperial rule.

Chapter six explores the ways in which the British understood cities like Rangoon (and by implication some other smaller cities; following a Victorian convention, it will also examine these places against the ways in which the British understood the 'country'. That is, most writers regarded these cities as fundamentally critical parts of colonial Burma, but many also believed that it was out of the forest, along the river into the village that Burmese life could be found in its purest essential form. Furthermore, British narratives about the country were also focused upon the difficulty of travel through it. Traversing the country either by rail or on board one of the many steamers of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company (which at one point was the world's largest freshwater fleet) signified the many facets of British industrial and technological power.

Assessing the ethnic complexity of colonial Burma was one of the most difficult tasks which faced British administrators. The discussion which makes up chapter seven will examine the ways in which British policy favored some ethnicities over others. Furthermore, probing these writings should make it possible to exhibit the gendered components of colonial ethnographic discourses. Special attention will be devoted to the ways in which the British understood the Karen and the Shan states. The endorsement of 'cosmopolitanism' by advocates of empire

such as Taw Sein Ko will be considered in relation to ethnographic literature. Nonetheless, the discussion will seek to consider another possibility: namely, that for all of the celebration of 'cosmopolitanism', British colonialism proved to be a homogenizing force.

Chapter eight explores the modalities of dissent available to the Burmese and other ethnic groups. Assessing both the support for and opposition to British rule in Burma will always be a difficult challenge. The need for the pacification caught the British by surprise; many of the turn of the century writings wax eloquent about the benefits of imperial governance but also assume the loyalty of the subject peoples. For our purposes, one of the things which makes turn of the century Burma fascinating is that it lies between the end of the pacification and the later development of mass Burmese nationalism. This chapter, then, probes British attempts to understand the nature and practice of dacoity (banditry) in order to expose their inability to grasp the extent of opposition to their rule.

Finally, this study will conclude with a range of considerations about British rule in new century Burma. Ideally, this work should encourage scholars from many different disciplines and research traditions to provide an even more complete picture of Burma under British rule.

2
Locating Burma

Burma's location in the British empire

Most obviously, British Burma (which included the Shan states) was part of the Indian empire. British Burma—a term which had been first used for the provinces that Britain had acquired during the first two Anglo-Burmese Wars—actually combined Lower Burma and Upper Burma. Lower Burma became the term for what had once been 'British Burma' (which included the Mon state, Arakan, Tenasserim, the Irrawaddy delta and Pegu) while Upper Burma came to signify the recently conquered Konbaung entity. However, increasingly as the 19th century came to a close British sources referred to 'Burma'.

With respect to its relationship with India, Charles Crosthwaite thought that it occupied an interesting position:

> Burma will be, in all likelihood, the last important province to be added to the Indian Empire. Eastward that Empire has been extended as far as our arms can well reach. Its boundaries march with Siam, with the French dominion of Tongking, and on the East and North for a vast distance with China. Our convention with France for the preservation of the territory which remains to Siam and our long friendship with the latter country bars any extension of our borders in that direction. It is improbable that we shall be driven to encroach on Chinese territory; and so far as the French possessions are concerned, a line has been drawn by agreement which neither side wishes to cross.[1]

The process of adding Upper Burma had been difficult, and it extended British responsibilities further to the East than had been the case. Crosthwaite added that in 'all likelihood, therefore, the experience gained in Burma will not be repeated in Asia'.[2] Crosthwaite's frustration was born out of the direct experience of extending British power, but it also reflected the sense that Burma was something of a special case. Not

only was Burma a recent acquisition, but it was at once the largest province in the Indian empire and the least densely populated. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the task of locating Burma proved to be a complicated one for both colonial civil servants and those British writers who sought to reflect upon the larger imperial enterprise in the country. As Lower Burma and then Upper Burma came under British rule, there existed an immediate need to understand the country by first trying to assess it on its own terms and then contextualizing it according to the requirements of governance. Britons had visited prior to the First Anglo-Burmese War, but serious engagement with the country could only be said to have begun later. Ultimately, British writers (both 'Burmaphiles' and others) came to locate Burma by describing and analyzing it as a place, trying to comprehend its history, engaging its peoples (especially the Burmans and the larger ethnic minorities) and determining its present and future value.

All of this required addressing a number of issues involving geographic position, identity, governance and economic potential, and these questions tended to produce distinctive discourses. Burma could be situated in relation to concepts which might often be understood to be binary opposites: modern/primitive (or 'natural'), backward/potential, law-abiding/criminal indigenous/cosmopolitan and governable/ungovernable. When these patterns of thought were applied to the denizens of the country they also could produce discursive polarities. In these instances, the poles might be between Buddhist/nat-worship, urban/rural, Burmese/ethnic minority, male/female and supporter/opponent. For travelers it might include accessible/inaccessible with reference to the three seasons which shaped much of daily life. Furthermore, evaluation of Burma tended to be internal or external (i.e., as it related to India, China or the needs of empire). Above all, it is worth nothing that both the Burmaphiles and those whom they wrote against or sought to enlighten, increasingly disconnected Burma from India, and none seemed to want to conflate it with what later became known as 'mainland Southeast Asia'.

Therefore, this chapter will briefly outline the ways in which discussions about geographic place, history, ethnicity and the future enabled the British to define Burma as a place. These locations help to shape the manner in which the British understood their own role and the challenges posed by governing. It might be added that scholars may want to explore the ways in which these discursive patterns produced legacies for newly independent Myanmar. In any event, by the turn of the century, all of this meant that Burma was being defined as an entity which

was a part of India, even though it needed to be logically separate from it. At the same time, Burma was also being located as a valuable entity for both the larger Indian Ocean economy and the British empire.

Burmascapes: real and imagined

Students of Burmese history will recognize that many British authors began their works with a detailed geographic description of the country. These discourses followed the international conventions for cartography, providing exact information about longitude, latitude, climate, and often flora and fauna. Invariably these authors elaborated that Burma was a unique geographical entity, which did much to define the ways in which its many peoples lived.

More generally, in the north and west Burma bounded British India and also territory which was at least nominally Chinese. The land between China and Assam was made up of difficult terrain, much of it mountainous. From these high elevations flowed the Irrawaddy through the large valley in which the Burman people and its kingdom have thrived. British writers observed that the rivers—the Irrawaddy, the Chindwin, the Salween and the Yunzalin held the key to mobility throughout the country. More important, the confluence of the Chindwin and Irrawaddy helps to frame an area known to many students of Myanmar as 'the Dry Zone'. This area receives only about 45 inches of rain per year, but it has long been the centre of the dominant Myanma (Burman) population group. Even though the Dry Zone received significant rainfall, the presence of the powerful rivers ensured that finding sources of irrigation was an early feature of the area's history.[3] Moving south, the Irrawaddy met the Bay of Bengal, making the river an ideal resource for moving goods to the larger world of the Indian Ocean. Further south, Burmese territory extended to Tenasserim.

These writings tended to portray the country according to its basic realities: Burma might be understood objectively, but it was in fact a difficult, scarcely accessible land which was coming under the progressive control of British rule. From the earliest days of British involvement with the country, Burma was understood to be a difficult country and environment, as the narratives from the Anglo-Burmese War amply attest. By 1895, British travel writing and publications directed at potential tourists easily reinforced the idea that Burma was defined by its challenging environment. Nonetheless, many writers emphasized that Burma was increasingly accessible to those who could put up with its travails.

To cite one example, G.W. Bird's *Wanderings in Burma* (1897), which was dedicated to Lord Dufferin, provided extensive information for 'those who may have occasion to visit the country'.[4] W.S. Thom added that his work was intended to supplement Bird's as a 'text-book on sport for those who intend visiting the country'.[5] Guy Lubeigt, a scholar of modern Myanmar, noted that Bird's 'Eurocentric' bias could be readily gleaned from *Wanderings in Burma*. However, it is precisely in recovering Bird's Eurocentrism that the ways in which Burma was located and positioned can be no less easily comprehended.[6]

The basic information which Bird offered exhibits many features of the colonial worldview which flourished in British Burma at the end of the 19th century. Bird's Burma was minted from the 'Burmascape': the picture of the country emerged from steamers, new rail lines, official documents and proven destinations and modes of travel. Bird, who served the Education Department in Burma, drew from many official documents (including *The 1891 Census and the Administration Report for 1893–1894*) to furnish his readers with the requisite information to make Burma accessible, thereby facilitating easy travel. Most basically, Bird explained that Burma could be reached by sea, with the most direct passage coming from 'the Bibby line of steamers, which makes the passage in from 25 to 28 days'.[7]

Bird's information also proclaimed not only reliable British governance, but all the features of modern development. Communication with Britain and the wider world was available through the post and telegraph, which were easily accessible. Currency notes could be obtained from banks. Like Scott, he was careful to describe what might be bought and how servants might be engaged:

> A traveler wishing to itinerate the province is advised to secure the services of a good Madras *boy*. One who has been in the country is to be preferred, as he will invariably be found to have a colloquial knowledge of Burmese—the language of the country—in addition to a knowledge of English and Hindustani. A knowledge of the latter is essential, as most of the Domestic servants, Messengers, Porters, Boatmen, and Cabdrivers are Natives of India, whose language is Hindustani, or a corrupt rendering of it. Burmans there are who know English, but they are not to be relied on in observing any contract into which they may have entered, and the traveler trusting to such an one might find himself left in the lurch, and stranded in some remote part of the country without the aid of an interpreter.[8]

Bird assumed that the needs of travelers varied. For those travelers who sought to escape 'the beaten path' he mentioned where food and eating utensils might be purchased for jungle trips. Bird mentioned several hotels in Rangoon and Mandalay where travelers might stay as well as the *zayat*, which were guest houses in villages.

At the same time, Bird provided a historical and cultural context for his readers: this included sections on the history, religion and polity of pre-British Burma as well as the Shan States. This even included a list of 'Important Personages'. Furthermore, Bird saw fit to make sure that those who came to Burma would be able to participate in 'Shooting and Game' and find 'Places Best Worth Visiting'.

Bird's Burma was a place which was now safe for consumption: *Wanderings in Burma* was organized along 24 routes which a traveler could follow to see the country. These routes were based upon the twin glories of British modernization: the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company and the vast expansion of rail service which was one of the hallmarks of commercial development. Bird provided numerous maps, photographic plates, and detailed miles tables which suggested comprehensive knowledge and mastery over the land. It might be noted that while rail transport was being promoted, absent was any direct line between Indian and Burmese destinations.

Wanderings in Burma presented the country as interesting, a bit dangerous and exotic, but ultimately safe for travel. To put this differently, Bird helped to supply the means for tourists to comfortably gaze upon Burma, purchase some goods and even find time for sport and adventure. With a knowledge of history, contemporary issues, and big tales (possibly supplemented by game trophies), they might return 'experts' on Burma.

The self-confidence (or arrogance) of *Wanderings in Burma* stands in contrast to the ways in which the British had first regarded the country. The first substantial British treatment of Burma could be found in the works of those who sought to narrate the First Anglo-Burmese War.[9] For these authors, Burma was not an easy place to travel and it was a difficult environment. Above all, it was backward, with an absence of developed roads, an abundance of jungle and a climate which made illness nearly inevitable. These writers had little good to say about Rangoon, describing it in terms of mud and poorly constructed domestic architecture. To some extent, these descriptions followed from the experiences of the war, which was inevitably associated with the monarchy and lawlessness (see below). All told, pre-British Burma was not a place where one

could wander: instead, it was a land where corruption and lawlessness were fully ingrained into governance.

Imagining modernity and commercial development

Another set of writers defined Burma in relation to its potential for commercial development of economic modernization. That is, imperial authors were increasingly aware that while Burma represented a series of challenges, it also held out considerable promise. Burma's jungles contained teak, and the country was rich in minerals. More important, perhaps, Burma had a special geographic location: it could connect India to China. Indian commercial interests had long sought to find a direct route to China, and Burma was deemed to offer that opportunity. The missions to Yunnan (the most significant of which were prompted by the Taipeng Rebellion, which ended the caravan trade) produced detailed accounts of what is today northern and eastern Burma.

These narratives reflected a world of vast difference from that of Mandalay, Pegu or Rangoon. Instead, Anderson, Sladen and others aptly described what was a borderland which was populated by a number of different ethnic groups and where the neither the writ of Mandalay nor that of the Qing Dynasty counted for much. Yet, these border areas flashed huge potential for those who believed that it might be feasible to construct a road between Mandalay (through Bhamo) and Yunnan, or find some other means to open up this trade route. This conversation had its famous advocates (such as Colquhoun) and may well have been one of the motivations for the British to throw out the monarchy at the conclusion of the Third Anglo-Burmese War.

Perhaps no one has been better remembered for seeing Burma as a promising land—whose economic development would involve exploiting the potential trade which might connect India to western China—than A.R. Colquhoun (1848–1914). His frustration was evident when he commented in *The Problem in China and British Policy* (1900) that southwest China had 'provinces so much ignored, and yet so important, because providing access from India to the Upper Yangtse' was seemingly overlooked by British leaders, who now seemed to trail their French counterparts.[10] In 1881–1882 he had journeyed from China to Burma as he sought to discover the best route between these countries. Colquhoun's journey is made vivid by his *Across Chryse; from Canton to Mandalay* (1883) which was substantial enough to merit two volumes.[11] His publications reflected both his experiences and strong advocacy for

the cause of commercial development. A.R. Colquhoun, whose activities in South Africa also captured the attention of his contemporaries, may appear to be one of the colorful figures associated with the 'new imperialism', but actually his publications were but a part of a larger genealogy of writing about Burma's potential. In fact, this idea was an old one, as the prospect (or lure) of trade with China had motivated British policy makers prior to the Anglo-Burmese Wars.

Nonetheless, what might be said to unify all of these narratives was the assumption that Burma was an exceedingly difficult country in which to travel. Not only did it present social and cultural challenges, but between the jungles, mountains, hot and wet seasons and other environmental realities, it offered a series of significant barriers. Those metropolitan interests which were focused upon finding destinations suitable for 'settler colonies' could be expected to avoid or remove Burma from consideration.

Romantic reflection: Burma as a unique environment

It is in this light that O'Connor's two-volume *The Silken East* can probably best be understood. O'Connor's elegiac volumes convey his fascination and respect for Burma's many environments. Unlike much of the travel literature devoted to Burma, O'Connor laboured to provide comprehensive treatment of the subject. In addition to describing places such as Rangoon, Pagan and Mandalay, O'Connor ventured to remote parts of Burma. Accordingly, he took his readers to the northern Irrawaddy, the Defiles, Bhamo (which was associated with the route to China), Prome, Thayetmyo, Minbu, Yenangyeung (which was noted for its oil production), and Mogok (where significant ruby mining was taking place). O'Connor also explored four other rivers: the Yunzalin, the Chindwin, the Salwin and the Sittang, and journeyed down the Tavoy coast into the Mergui archipelago. It would not take a careful reader to appreciate the land's diversity and complexity.

More important, the record of his travels might be regarded as an act of piety about or even humility for a land (and its peoples) that he had come to revere. O'Connor not only traveled widely, but he took critical distance upon the very idiom of mass travel as his sections entitled 'The Pomp of Travel' and 'Primitive Travel' made clear. O'Connor was not opposed to tourism, but he understood that it was precisely the untraveled or lesser-traveled areas of Burma which made it majestic. Indeed, O'Connor's steamers are made to seem little or insignificant against the jungles and waterways of Burma. Here, it is useful to

compare his vision with that of Bird, who proclaimed the achievements of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company. The same holds true for communications: Bird wanted his readers to know that Burma was fully connected to postal services; O'Connor anticipated Enriquez's *Burmese Loneliness* by interpreting things differently:

> [I]t may be noted that the personality of the Salwin is wholly distinct from that of the Irrawaddy and the Chindwin . . . Although at Kawkarit it is only seventy miles distant from the sea, although for seventy years it has been under the influence of British civilization, it retains even here its character of a remote river, flowing through but half-known lands. Its people are mainly Karen, shy, sullen, and difficult of access. The stillness of its forests is unbroken by the hum of the telegraph wire, and no engine has ever throbbed above Shwegun. There is only a weekly post, which achieves with difficulty twenty miles a day, and it takes longer to cover the short distance from Shwegun to Pha-pun, the headquarters of the district, than it does to travel from Edinburgh to Moscow. Yet in this very isolation there resides its particular charm; for it takes the traveler into great solitudes, along almost silent highways into a land of primitive people; and the means of travel are such as men were used to, when the world was young.[12]

O'Connor did not minimize the challenging environment, which he actually seemed to relish: the section entitled 'Mosquitos' would have intimidated anyone interested in the country. Furthermore, he chronicled his own experience of 'getting salted'—a term which the Burma hands used for the experience of fever. Getting fever was more than ritual experience because it could signify malaria or lesser known maladies—but 'fever' normally produced more deaths in any given year in Burma than any other disease.[13]

History defines Burma's realities

History also defined Burma, and it did so in at least three ways. Most obvious, the end of the Konbaung Dynasty after the conclusion of the Third Anglo-Burmese War meant the end of a monarchy and, with it, an empire. The British were prone to regard the monarchy as the key to developments in Burma. By 1895 the recent history of Burma was well known and neatly—if inaccurately—ordered according to the needs of imperial history. The Konbaung Dynasty, which had come to power in the 18th century, had become a significant regional power by the early

19th century. With Ava as its capital, it was an imperial state which was built upon the conquest and subordination of many of the country's ethnic groups. Its territorial claims included lands occupied by the Mon, the Karen, the Shan and other peoples. Yet, it would lose three wars to the British Indian empire. The First Anglo-Burmese War (1824–1826) originated as a clash between the two imperial powers, and proved to be difficult for the British to prosecute, but it ended in a decisive defeat of the Konbaung state, which was forced to cede two provinces to the Indian empire. The British acquired Arakan and Tenasserim, both of which might be said to be part of the periphery of the Konbaung's imperial ambitions. Arakan had been a recent conquest, which produced refugees from Burmese rule who fled to Chittagong.[14] Tenasserim had only recently come under Burmese rule and was something of a wild, frontier-like province.[15] The Second Anglo-Burmese War (1852) began with the pretext that British merchants were not being properly treated by the Burmese. The British victory was swift and complete, and the Burmans gave up Pegu (which then included Rangoon) and, with it, the rest of the coast. The acquisition of Pegu extended the eastern border of the Indian empire, and came with considerable expense—which was a point not lost on Dalhousie. Accordingly, perhaps, the northern border of Pegu was established to include the rich southern teak forests.[16]

From the end of the Second Anglo-Burmese War began the economic development of the Burma Delta region. In *Burma Delta: Economic Development and Social Change on an Asian Rice Frontier, 1852–1941* (2011), Michael Adas has explored this subject in depth, carefully tracing the relationship between the settling of the Delta (including Rangoon) to show how the area's development was connected to the rise of Burma as a major rice exporter. To make this concrete, in 1855 Burma exported 162,000 tons of rice and paddy. By 1905–1906, Burma exported 2,000,000 tons of rice and paddy.[17] Rice acreage under cultivation rose from 700,000–800,000 to 6,000,000 correspondingly.[18] In short, the two conflicts produced 'British Burma' of which Rangoon became the centre.

Rangoon offered a direct connection to the broader Indian Ocean commerce, and the city expanded quickly after coming under British rule. After the Second Anglo-Burmese War, Mindon Min ruled what was left of the Konbaung state, moving the capital to Mandalay. He would be regarded by the Burmans and British as an effective king. Mindon Min would ultimately be followed by Thibaw, who famously came under control of Supayalat, one of his queens. Unfortunately, Thibaw proved to be weak and ineffective, and disorder became a feature of the kingdom's

rural areas. Supayalat's reputation for ruthlessness and the rumors of repeated violence (many of them corroborated) led the monarchy to be the target of complaints and a subject of ridicule in British Burma. The Third Anglo-Burmese War (1885), also begun with a trade dispute, ended almost as soon as it started. The British occupied Mandalay and removed Thibaw and Supayalat, terminating the Burmese monarchy. However, the real conflict had only just begun: the subsequent 'pacification' of Burma would not be complete until 1893 or even later.

Understanding Burma's history as the rise and fall of various kingdoms made sense to imperial authors. The British were adept at tracing the rise of the Konbaung Dynasty, and its termination meant that a new era of history was dawning. Second, more sensitive authors also looked back to try to define Burma's 'medieval' and ancient history. As we will see in chapter four, this meant recovering, preserving and interpreting Burma's collection of ruins; it would also come to mean separating things Burmese from Indian. Third, contemporaries believed that the modernization of the country was both desirable and inevitable and that the process would entail the end of 'old Burma'. Looking ahead, the end of 'old Burma' would be the stimulus to recover and capture many aspects of the country's past.

By 1895 the modernization of Burma might be said to be underway. As we will see in chapter six, the economic expansion of Burma was manifest in the growth of Rangoon and other cities. Rangoon, in particular, embodied the prosperity and aspirations of British Burma. Rangoon's growth was as impressive as it was steady; it became the nodal point which connected the economic produce of Burma to the wider Indian Ocean economy. In addition, the development of Rangoon as a port suggested that finding the links to western China could bring even greater profit to merchants located in and around South Asia.

Furthermore, British power was evident with the expansion of the Irrawaddy River Flotilla, which would become the world's largest freshwater fleet. Transportation improvements also included the rapid expansion of the railway (which included the world famous Gokteik Gorge) and the construction of a significant length of metalled roads. Advocates for Burma's commercial potential must have been satisfied with its expansion. Burma became the 'rice bowl' for the Indian Ocean economy, while its forests produced ample amounts of teak and other products. Natural resources were evident as well: Burma experienced a 'ruby rush', while also becoming a major source of oil for the British empire.

Yet, if Burma was located as a burgeoning economic powerhouse, it was still regarded as something of a colonial backwater which required

overcoming the burden of its recent history. The Konbaung era was a signifier for a view of the country which might be defined by a number of 'orientalist' stereotypes. Many Britons assumed that Burma was a place defined by primitive peoples who had neither progressive aspirations nor a propensity to conduct themselves within the rule of law. As the Third Anglo-Burmese War came to its ostensible conclusion, the British believed that they were annexing a state which had degenerated into anarchy. Though they knew dacoits to be a problem, it is quite possible that they did not appreciate the possibility that the establishment of British power in Lower Burma itself had put significant economic pressure on the Konbaung state, making the high level of criminal activity much more likely.[19] Furthermore, even with their experiences in Lower Burma, they may well have underestimated the tensions between local Burmese authorities and the Konbaung centre, whereby the 'fundamental unit of Burmese polity was the locality'.[20]

O'Connor's Burma, which made the Burmaphile vision of the country manifest, was not dominated by discussion of criminality or lawlessness. In fact, the second volume of *The Silken East* might be compared with Alfred Russel Wallace's *Malay Archipelago* because it ends with a note of deep respect for the country and its peoples. Wallace was more directly critical of Western materialism, but in traversing Burma, studying its peoples under British colonialism and witnessing the modernization of the country, O'Connor appears to have come to a similar conclusion. Nonetheless, for most Britons the Konbaung Dynasty was regarded as violent, corrupt, inept and despotic. The removal of the monarchy could have only been an act of British benevolence because, had it persisted, the monarchy would have continued its bloodthirsty ways. Mrs Ernst Hart, who visited Burma in 1895 and was quite critical of a number of aspects of British rule, summarized the common view that the Konbaung Dynasty was 'A Royal Race of Homicidal Maniacs' and elaborated that 'these rulers exceeded in their acts the ordinary despotism of Oriental tyrants'.[21] Mrs Hart did not mince her words: 'there is sufficient evidence to prove that the monarchs of the dynasty of Alompra degenerated into a race of homicidal maniacs, who, by occupying a position of irresponsible power, brought disaster on their country'.[22] This was also a literal assessment: Mrs Hart provided a family chart (to supplement her analysis) to depict the hereditary dispositions towards violence in the royal family. Mrs Hart, who drew upon Sangermano, Gouger, Symes and others, believed that the combination of family in breeding and dynastic politics had made the royal family 'homicidal maniacs'.[23] The more general British assumption was that Burma was a place defined

by various forms of criminality. Dacoits in rural areas, criminal gangs, corruption and violence, in the view of many Britons, were the norm in Burma. In short, British writers found it easy to see the Anglo-Burmese Wars (which were often telescoped into one progressive narrative) as ultimately a good thing for the Burmese.

Ethnicity as geographic signifier for Burma

Ethnic diversity was a key factor in the British assessments of Burma's past and future. O'Connor began *The Silken East* not with the geography or the fall of the monarchy, but with a long and well illustrated section entitled 'Burma's Peoples'. British writing about the subject was vast, ranging from travelers' narratives to the detailed information which went into the gazettes and administration reports. Nonetheless, it is clear that the ethnic composition of Burma was critical to its identity.

At the very centre of these discussions, the British evaluated the Burmans as the dominant group in the country. The Burmans would be portrayed in relation to the monarchy, village life, and dacoity (even though this was clearly a term borrowed from India), and in relation to other indigenous peoples as well as newly arrived immigrant groups. As we will observe in chapter seven, analysis of gender differences played a key role in these assessments.

At the same time, Burma was always a mixed bag for the British. The more sensitive (and ambitious) writers described the major ethnic groups in some detail. This meant that the country was populated by the Mon, the Karen, the Shans, the Chin and the Kachin as well as the dominant Burmese. Many of these groups lived beyond the normal routes of the 'Burmascape': they dwelled in the more remote areas of the country which lay within Burma's imprecise borders. Accordingly, the Chins, Kachins and many other groups were much less well known to British writers.

The Mon, who had been conquered by the Burmans in the 18th century, had been of interest to British policy makers during the first decades of British rule. By the era of new century Burma they were increasingly understood to have interbred with the Burmans, but they still represented one fundamental part of the country's cultural mosaic. The Mons lived principally in Lower Burma, as did many of the Karens, who inhabited areas of the south and east. The Shans populated not only the Shan states, but areas beyond the border with Siam. Indeed, it might well be argued that one of the unforeseen consequences of the 'pacification' was the establishment of a more precise border, which would become increasingly less porous. The combination of the country's wide borders

and the many peoples of 'Zomia' which it contained, meant that Burma was ethnically quite diverse.[24]

However, the issue of ethnic diversity in Burma became explosive not because of the presence of many different ethnic groups, but due to the fact that British rule was accompanied by significant immigration. Both Indian and Chinese immigrated into Burma—especially in the cities of Lower Burma—in increasing numbers in the second half of the 19th century.

The Indian immigration to and emigration from Burma has nearly been written out of history. However, Nalini Ranjan Chakravarti's *The Indian Minority in Burma: The Rise and Decline of an Immigrant Community* (1971) was based upon a careful look at the migratory patterns which played a pivotal role in the development of British Burma.[25] Chakravarti found that the number of Indians immigrating into Burma was largely offset by those who returned. Chakravarti reported that the Indian population was concentrated in Arakan where it grew steadily. The 1891 Census put the population of Arakan at 671,899, with 137,992 identified as Indian, which amounted to 20.5% of the population. In 1911 these numbers would increase to 839,896 with 197,990 defined as Indian, which was 23.5% of the population. Chakravarti provided statistical data without Arakan, which showed that Indian numbers elsewhere were not nearly as impressive. Again, in 1891 Burma (excluding Arakan) had 7,426,915 people of whom 282,908 were Indians, which was 3.8% of the overall population; these numbers would increase in 1911 to 11,275,321 of which 595,298 were Indian, which was 4.8% of the population—outside of those in Arakan.[26] Chakravarti argued that the overall Indian population was never more than 6.9% of the overall population—a figure which was recorded in 1931. However, while these numbers document the fact that Indians were always a minority, they were perceived by many to be a threat. The distribution of these immigrant communities tended to favor urban areas, with Rangoon, in particular, being regarded as an Indian city, where the 1891 Census indicated that Indians were the majority of the population.

However, O'Connor and others noted that impact of immigration was one of the major challenges facing the Burmese. In particular, attention was focused on the economic and social impact of South Asian and Chinese immigration. Chakravarti's *The Indian Minority in Burma: The Rise and Decline of an Immigrant Community* indicated that Indian influence was widespread, but more obvious in some occupations than others.

In fact, the success of these immigrant groups might be said to amount to a form of secondary colonization. The British ruled Burma from India;

additionally, the country experienced Indian immigration as something approaching an invading force. The vast majority of this complex population would remain poor, but contemporaries also noted that some Indians became among the most—if not the most—prosperous people in this easternmost province of the Indian empire. The numbers of Indians choosing to remain in the country might well be exaggerated, but it would be no accident that some of the earliest episodes of Burman nationalism would erupt as a challenge to the Indian presence.

British policy makers did not regard these immigrants as anything but Indian. British writers were fascinated not only with Burma's ethnic complexity, but also with its ethnic history. The history of migration into Burma was usually disconnected from the royal and imperial narratives, but it did not mean that the British were indifferent to this area of history. Rather, the British were interested in tracing the origins of Burma's different ethnic groups (including the Burmese) because they assumed that none were completely indigenous. One of the hidden assumptions of this body of writing was that those who had immigrated into the land during the ancient history of the country could be considered to belong to Burma in ways that later immigrants could not. This large subject, which would have significant implications for independent Myanmar, is beyond the scope of the discussion here, but it should be noted that it meant that recent immigrants were not considered to be Burmese. Instead, the tendency, which would be especially pronounced with O'Connor and Fielding-Hall, was to regard those who had immigrated as other than belonging to Burma.

Conclusion: providing definition to Burma

Mrs Hart ended *Picturesque Burma* with a vision of the future which reflected many of the assumptions held by those who ran colonial Burma:

> Burma is not, it must be borne in mind, the country exclusively of the Burmans; in its immense area it contains races and nationalities differing widely in language, ideas, and religion, and the task the English have before them is to make of these peoples a homogenous country. The Karens have already been rescued from barbarism, and are fast becoming one of the leading races; the Shans have been converted from freebooters to peaceful traders, and their chieftains are being taught the arts of government; the Kachins and Chins have still to be tamed. An united Burma would become a strong country,

> particularly as the Burmans, Karens, and Shans have shown themselves capable of education and anxious to be taught. As the Burmese are not bound by the hampering restrictions of caste, and as the women are free and respected, the national development of Burma is possible, should the people prove themselves capable of sustained effort, and their rulers permit of development on lines other than those of India. Though Burma is for the purposes of government treated as a province of India, it has little in common with India proper. The long independence of the Burmese nation, the absence of caste, the free position of the women, the ethical and non-idolatrous character of the Buddhist religion, the freedom from the thraldom of a priesthood, have combined to make Burma as distinctive in character from Hindu nationalities as is Japan. To pass under the rule of the English, to be freed from tyranny, to be taught good government, is a happy fate for Burma. As the country improves in population, in wealth, and in education, it may in the far future recover its lost nationality, and, freed from ancient Burmese tyranny and cruelty, give the world the example of a people who know how to be happy without caring incessantly to toil, and to be joyous without desiring insatiably to possess.[27]

For Mrs Hart the country's ethnic complexity was ultimately an asset. Burma was different from India, and the future which she envisaged was that it might become an independent country—both from India and the British empire. In addition, Mrs Hart had only traveled to Burma, but it might be said that she had picked up a brief whiff of the perspective that Fielding-Hall and O'Connor would articulate, in which the attractive qualities of Burmese life might produce self-doubt, or at least critical distance from colonial priorities.

Between 1895 and 1918 British Burma might well be located as a progressive society which offered a range of commercial opportunities. Mrs Hart had spoken with a number of colonial leaders and she understood that Burma was going through a 'Great Change'. This meant modernization, which implied sustained economic growth and social development. Both before the publication of *Picturesque Burma* in 1897 and afterwards, Burma also held out the prospect of trade with China. By the end of the 19th century, it is clear that Burma had become important for differing reasons. It would be Burmese rice which helped to sustain the Indian Ocean economies; Burmese oil would be critical in the production of kerosene; Burmese minerals (especially rubies) would be sought by the buyers of luxury goods.

More important, it was becoming increasingly clear that Burma was part of the Indian empire, but it was not Indian. Despite the presence of a visible Indian minority, it was evident that Burma needed to be separated from India. In fact, in locating Burma, what observers such as Mrs Hart could see was that it was a place destined for national development. A new nation might well fit within the imperial framework, but it would need to be independent of India. Taw Sein Ko grasped, as well, that a Burman nation would be a cosmopolitan Asian entity, which would continue to benefit from its connections to British rule. All of this meant that Burma would be a place which must be separated from India: its modes of governance, social organization, educational practices and capacity would all be tested by the process.

Ultimately, the British located Burma as a distinctive place which could connect the eastern Indian Ocean world to the region later known as Southeast Asia and possibly China. Between the wide borders of this new province of the Indian Empire lay a land defined by both varied topography and a predictable climate and, yet, remained relatively underpopulated. It was also a province with both ethnic heterogeneity and one dominant population group. Burma's history did not belong to India (or the rest of the region), but the country's development hinged upon addressing some of the realities which emerged from its past—both ancient and recent. The challenges of governing Burma would be significant, and it was by constructing a colonial state that the British would provide further definition and location to their easternmost Indian province.

3
Governing Burma

The issues raised by Taw Sein Ko, a believer in the empire, who acknowledged in 1919 that Burma had become 'the most criminal Province in the Indian Empire'; his complaint about the seeming permanence of crime went to the heart of the question of governing Burma.[1] By the completion of the 'pacification' of Burma the task of governing had become much more complicated. The history of British governance in Burma remains to be written, but if the experiences of Charles Bayne (1860–1947), who served as financial commissioner and developed a detailed knowledge about the revenues available from the production of teak and the cultivation of rice, are indicative of colonial administration, then the study of the subject might yet produce some unexpected insights into the challenges faced by independent Myanmar.[2] In addition, Diana Kim has called attention to the fragmentation of the colonial elite in Burma, which functioned to produce a façade built upon 'public appearances of unanimity'.[3] That noted, the British state in both Lower and Upper Burma might be regarded as a 'Leviathan', but it would probably be better to characterize it as an activist entity. John Furnivall, who arrived in Burma in 1902, famously described the evolution of the colonial state in *Fashioning the Leviathan* (1939).[4] John Cady and Robert Taylor followed Furnivall's lead and (as has the recent work of Jonathan Saha) made the condition and role of the colonial state the subject of intensive study.[5] This discussion builds upon these projects by suggesting that the state's role was the maintenance of order, but between 1895 and 1918 it also carried with it the promise of the rule of law, commercial regulation and social improvement. The administrators who could be said to embody the presence of colonial government were first and foremost state actors, but increasingly many of their actions were derived from international standards of governance. Furthermore, these state actors were visible parts of new century Burma with their growing engagement with Burman society. For instance, in 1907 Alleyne Ireland published *The Province of Burma* which provided an encyclopedic examination of the

many functions of governance. Ireland, who might be said to represent the trend away from direct observation in favor of academic expertise, described a state whose range of activity was vast. Ireland's expert tour, based upon a systematic investigation of annual reports, took his readers into the civil service, police, judicial administration, the prison system, financial regulation, municipal administration, public works, land revenue, village governance, medical and sanitary administration, harbor policies and the administration of the Shan States and Chin Hills.[6] In other words, 'the colonial state' was a substantial presence in Burma and impacted the lives of its population—even if they were not always aware of it. All told, beyond governance one of the end products of these organized if disparate energies was to help produce a great deal of information about the country and arguably improve the overall quality of life. That said, it might be pointed out that surveillance was a bigger part of the colonial apparatus than may be first appreciated. More important, the collective efforts of these colonial civil servants would help push Burma towards separation from India.[7]

This chapter will explore the ways in which governance was carried out in Burma, and then look at the way it was tested by a number of challenges. These tests in governance included the steady increase in substance-abuse related problems, the rise of crime, the problems posed by corruption, public health issues and broadly, making a colonial population compliant with foreign rule. It bears repeating that the British Indian empire might well be regarded as a form of two levels of colonization, and in order to ensure that it govern securely it constructed regimes of control and methods of surveillance, making its presence visible, while bringing about the dramatic transformations which defined modernity. More specifically, the examples explored here show that the state sought not only to watch, report and assess—all features of description—but also to make its presence manifest to both the local population and its functionaries. In exploring this subject, what should emerge is not only the limitations of the colonial state, but the extent to which its activities could be found in many arenas of its subjects' lives.

Governing with legally recognized hierarchies

It was almost axiomatic that British writers regarded the advent of British rule in Upper Burma, and with it the extension of their rule to the entire country, as a clear example of human progress. As we will see in the next chapter, Scott regarded the Konbaung legal practices with

disdain, believing that they were corrupt and backward. The *Gazetteer* succinctly enumerated the key legal developments which rapidly followed the formal end of hostilities in the Anglo-Burmese War. This entailed the development of a court system and the extension of British law and colonial legal practices.

Legal institutions reflected the imprint of the Indian empire in Burma. To begin with, the Indian Penal Code was the basis for the rule of law in Burma. Criminal procedures began with the Indian Code of Criminal Procedure. Alleyne Ireland quoted John Strachey, who regarded the Indian Code of Criminal Procedure as the most important statute in India. Strachey explained that among 'all the laws in India there is no one more important than this, which regulates the machinery by which peace and order are maintained, and by which crime is prevented and punished'.[8] Furthermore, the Indian Code of Criminal Procedure classified offences, regulated the manner in which the police pursued investigations and authorized the basis and procedures for arrests. In addition, the statute provided the legal basis for preventing assemblies which might be deemed unlawful, the removal of public nuisances and the manner in which the accused could be brought to trial. The Indian Code of Criminal Procedure also provided the legal frameworks for the rules of trials.[9] Ireland added that while the British would have liked to develop a code of civil law, the religious divisions of India precluded such an effort. At the same time, 'customary law' was practiced throughout British India. However, a Code of Civil Procedure was developed which served virtually all of India (including Burma).[10] Above all, the total effect of the introduction of these new legal processes was a fundamental part of the signature of the new colonial state, whose aim, as Robert Taylor recognized, was to 'create and free wealth as efficiently as possible'.[11]

However, it should be remembered that these legal codes made provision for some of the racial hierarchies of empire. From the outset these included a fundamental distinction for the treatment of British and European subjects. This meant in practice that the British, Europeans and Americans possessed striking advantages: for example, in any jury trial at least half of the members of the jury had to be either Europeans or Americans. Again, in cases where the ordinary procedure would require a case to be tried without a jury, these subjects had the right to demand a jury trial with the composition outlined above.[12]

The development of the British legal profession in Burma produced a generation of Burmese lawyers who would be among the key nationalist leaders. In particular, May Oung, Bah Hla Oung, Maung Kin, Maung

Hpaw and Maung Ba Thein all had flourishing legal careers.[13] This group, whom the British came to disparagingly call 'the Burmese barristocracy', and other younger lawyers developed an informal network which would challenge decisions made by colonial authorities in the 1920s.[14] Furthermore, they proved to be forerunners to the success of Burman entry into the legal profession, which they would join in growing numbers during the 1920s and 1930s.[15]

Regimes of control

At the heart of scholarly interpretations of British Burma has been a lively debate about the nature of the colonial state. Like other forms of colonial governance, the state in Burma relied upon regimes of control to manage the daily running of the country. These institutions helped to make the Burmascape visible by securing order and enabling the country to be developed as British political and commercial forces saw fit. To that extent, these regimes of control relied upon a combination of local governance, which in rural areas was embodied by the Headman who worked in conjunction with the police, and the prison system to ensure that crime, particularly dacoity, did not undermine either British rule or conditions necessary for the successful development of commercial enterprises.

The Headman: an indigenous instrument of control

Many of the most important decisions about Burma were made in India, but the effective governance of the country would not have been possible without the Headman system. This institution, which acquired its legal justification in the Village Act, was the place where the Burmans interfaced with colonial administration.

In essence, the headman was someone who was appointed by the British to administer an area or village or group of villages. This position came with significant power and diverse responsibilities. It would be the headmen that ensured that the writ of the colonial government was understood throughout the land. For example, headmen were expected to support excise officers—*The Village Headman's Manual, Lower Burma* (third edition) 1907 stated clearly 'All Village Headmen are Excise Officers'.[16] This meant that they were empowered to carry out searches and inspections, make arrests and confiscate contraband. In addition, the British looked to the headmen to provide them with intelligence about social conditions and, more important, potential resistance.

However, after the pacification was complete the headman also became responsible for helping colonial administrators maintain a high standard of public health. Again, this included providing Rangoon and Mandalay with the information which would normally be expected to come with the administration of local government: residence, and dates for births and deaths. Even before the crisis produced by the arrival of plague in the first decade of the new century, it was a frequent lament of senior administrators that the headman was simply not up to this task.

A detailed procedure was devised for the recording of registration information, but colonial authorities thought that some of the headmen were either incompetent or more likely indifferent. For instance, *The Report for the Sanitary Administration of Burma for 1896* noted that it was difficult to report on the prevalence of disease in both Lower and Upper Burma because of lax reporting by the headmen.[17] In subsequent years this complaint found a number of echoes. In 1909 the problem of rural registration was 'carried out by village headmen, who are often barely literate, and whose duties become more multifarious'.[18]

It would be complaints about the effectiveness of the headmen that would lead the British to introduce an awards system. The promise of awards was extended to include an anecdote in *The Village Headman's Manual*, Lower Burma (third edition) 1907, where an appendix made an incident in which villagers resisted dacoits both the stuff of heroism and the confirmation of award payments.

> On the 15th of January 1896, when the house of ywathugi Maung Hmat of Gyongyongya village was attacked by five dacoits, armed with a revolver and a *das,* the villagers, led by Maung Po Kye son of Maung Hmat, and Maung Lu Gyi, his son-in-law, armed with das, spears and pointed sticks and torches, with which they are provided under the scheme for village defence, surrounded the place and hotly attacked the dacoits. Though fired upon they succeeded in wounding some of the dacoits and caused them all to retreat into the house. Maung Hmat, who was seized by dacoits, was dragged out by the villagers, who led by him continued the attack. At this stage the villagers of Kamamat Taung and Kamamat Myauk, led by their ywathugis Maung Pe Le and U Hlaing, appeared on the scene of the crime with their weapons and took part in the fray. The dacoits, thoroughly intimidated by this, came out and were wounded and captured by villagers. All the dacoits succumbed to the injuries received. The daughter of the ywathugi Maung Hmat was killed by the dacoits.[19]

The narration noted that this had been a collective effort as 'the villagers of Gyongyongya, Kamamat Taung and Kamamat Myauk and their headmen have delivered the Hanthawadday district from a formidable gang of ruffians'. The appendix ended with the delineation of the payment of awards.[20]

Making colonial authority manifest: policing

Possibly the most visible manifestation of British rule in Burma was its police forces. Burma had military, civilian and railway police to maintain order throughout the country. Furthermore, as a result of the 'pacification', military units were stationed in Upper Burma to buttress these forces further. One of the things which defined these forces was the fact that they were made up of non-Burmese. Many were recruited from India and most served under British officials. The organization, composition and procedures of the civilian police merit some examination because they provide a good window into the governance of Burma.

It was assumed that the headmen would work in conjunction with the police. In Burma, police forces were divided into civil and military branches, and both found that meeting the challenge posed by dacoits fell within their purview. The headmen worked with both, but the daily effort to deliver the rule of law meant that they worked more often with the civilian branch of policing. Probably the biggest priority was meeting the challenge posed by dacoits. As we will see, this was a depoliticized concept, normally referring to bandits or outlaws, but the pacification had proved that dacoits could reflect determined resistance to British rule.

The civilian police were divided into village and district forces. The district police was the better organized—it included foot police, mounted police, depot police and municipal police as well as those on the railway.[21] It should be noted that in 1899 Rangoon acquired its own municipal force, and there were other forms of policing which were distinct from the civilian and military branches. Punitive police could be deployed under special circumstances (episodes of civil unrest, the presence of large dacoit gangs, etc.). In practice this normally meant an imposition on the Burmese because under the Police Act local communities were forced to pay for the expense of quartering this additional force.[22]

In addition, Burma also had railway police, whose tasks entailed keeping rail transport safe from criminal activity. The railway inspectors were expected to 'constantly travel up and down their length of line

on inspection duty, or in the conduct of investigations into offences'. This included responsibility 'for the prevention of crime, the detection of criminals, and the general preservation of the peace along his section of the line'. This required gaining 'an accurate knowledge of all the Railway servants'.[23] Furthermore, the Railway Act of 1890 empowered rail officers to make arrests of rail employees who might be intoxicated as well as those who might be said to interfere with the work of a railway employee. Railway police were also authorized to make arrests for intoxication, indecency or 'any persons interfering with the comfort of passengers or extinguishing a lamp'. Finally, they were expected to prohibit 'Male persons entering a carriage or other places reserved for females.[24]

Colonial policing aimed to support both the British administration of the country and the rule of law. With respect to the former, one of the tasks assigned to the police was one of surveillance: to find out if there was significant opposition to colonial rule. Regarding the latter, the rule of law was one of the promises associated with British governance. From the perspective of a decolonized world, it must said at the outset that this ideal was fundamentally compromised by its racial outlook and practices. A cursory reading of the law (and its application) in Burma, which was based upon the Indian Penal Code, reveals reliance on racial hierarchies and exclusions for Europeans. Nonetheless, it is also evident that the effort to guarantee the rule of law in Burma also meant that a high level of professional police work was envisioned. More important, perhaps, colonial administrators were quite keen to improve the quality of policing in the country.

The police forces in Burma were a reflection of both Lower and Upper Burma because they indicated key demographic trends. Most of the police were Burmans, but many also were recruited from the country's many ethnic groups. The perception that the British almost inevitably preferred to employ Indian instead of Burmese may have been essentially correct, but a brief examination of the make up of the police shows a more complex situation. Donald M. Seekins has argued that the British perceived the Burmans to be difficult to train because they were accustomed to 'highly personalistic patron-client networks' and therefore less disciplined, or because they believed them to be lazy.[25] However, these assumptions are not entirely borne out by the makeup and organization of the police forces. In addition, a significant number were recruited from India and a small number came from Britain itself. Exploring the composition of the civil police in 1900 reveals both the diversity of the force and its hierarchies. Europeans accounted for all of the 35 district superintendents and 49 out of 59 of the assistant district

superintendents (six others were 'natives'—which could mean Burmans or Indians—and three were Eurasians). At the inspector level (the next highest) 56 were native, 45 European and 21 Eurasian. Between inspectors and constables there were a few other minor grades and most of these were native: 9 were European, 24 Eurasian and 1, 367 were native. The 10,702 constables were almost exclusively native as there were no Europeans and only three Eurasians.[26] Racial hierarchies were self-evident and undoubtedly affected the expectations for those who would contemplate employment in policing.

Nevertheless, they could also expect a consistent standard for training and professional development. For instance, new recruits had to be between 18 and 30 years old and had to be taller than 5 feet 3 inches; their chest measurement had to be at least 31 inches. For Indians they had to be at least 5 feet 6 inches and have a chest measurement of at least 33 inches.[27] These recruits had to be of good moral character and usually literate. Every recruit would remain on probation for six months. When a police officer was enlisted, he would receive a certificate of enlistment with the careful instruction to preserve the document. In fact, he would receive instruction to place the certificate in the police station when he took leave.[28]

In order to train these recruits, a facility was constructed at the headquarters of nearly every district in Burma. Training consisted of teaching the recruits the basic responsibilities of a policeman and, where needed, reading and writing. The curriculum also included the definitions of the common crimes and instruction in both the Indian Criminal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code.[29]

One of the most important features of the training period was instruction in Burmese (if necessary). This included conversational Burmese to English and English to Burmese. The examinations in the vernacular were known for their rigor, and promotion was not possible without passing the elementary standard of Burmese.[30]

Police officers could also expect both a clear promotion system and a scheme to reward superior service. The *Burma Police Manual* set forth the terms in which 'specially meritorious service' might be rewarded. Normally, outstanding police work might be rewarded by a promotion, but if the officer lacked the necessary qualifications a financial award would be given. The *Burma Police Manual* was clear that '[r]ecommendations for the grant of money rewards should only be made in cases where an officer has shown real detective skill or marked energy or courage in the prevention or detection of crime'.[31] Additionally, a good service certificate could also be given 'for really good work' and it 'should not

be made cheap or lightly prized by being distributed broadcast in very petty cases . . . Certificates should be shown at kit inspections.'[32]

Enlistment in the Burma police came with the expectation of a clear pay scale. At the top of the scale were the inspectors and at the bottom were the sub-inspectors and sergeants. At age 55, officers were examined in order to determine their fitness for duty. An officer could retire at 55 and normally might have expected a pension based upon half of his average salary over the last five years. However, if he had to retire due to 'incapacity' and it was the result of 'irregular or intemperate habits, no pension can be granted'.[33] Pensions were directly related to service and followed the rules prescribed in the Civil Service Regulations.[34] All told, joining the police in turn of the century Burma meant joining a well organized profession, with clearly delineated expectations for both performance and rewards.

Nonetheless, it is clear that despite the many resources invested in policing, the forces were under considerable pressure. In fact, at the turn of the century the condition of the police in Burma appeared to be poor. Following the Police Commission of 1902–1903, Lord Curzon famously criticized the Indian Police noting that it was in a 'most unsatisfactory condition' with abuses and corruption, and defective in both training and organization.[35]

The prison system: the embodiment of the state's management of order

More prisons were built in Britain during the 19th century than at any other period in British history.[36] The development of a number of prisons in the Indian Ocean region at least partly reflected the increase in penal institutions. Burma's connection with the penal colony in the Andaman Islands is well known, but the rest of its prison system in new century Burma remains relatively unexplored. Ian Brown has pointed out that Burma's prison system was heavily utilized: during 'mid-1910s the average daily inmate population as a proportion of Burma' s total population was just under 140 per 100,000'.[37] In contrast, the corresponding figures were 30 in the United Provinces and 50 in Bengal.[38] Burma possessed 33 jails in 1904, which could be classified according to size and mission. Central Jails could be used for all prisoners and a First Class Central Jail had at least 1,000 prisoners (Second Class had less than 1,000 convicts). There were three in Rangoon, including one for Europeans. District jails were also subdivided by population size (into five classes) and were used for prisoners whose sentences did not exceed

five years.[39] To put this into perspective, Burma experienced the growth of its prison population (matching the rise in crime): in 1899 there were approximately 27,989 persons incarcerated; by 1908 the number would grow to 32,038.[40]

It might be argued that Burma's prisons also proclaimed the reality and legitimacy of British power. The Rangoon jail was regarded as a prominent landmark, located on the northeastern part of the downtown area. More interesting, perhaps, was the construction of Insein prison in 1887. This facility, which remains in use and acquired a notorious reputation after 1988, was regarded as one of the largest and most modern in British India.[41] These prisons incarcerated more than 2,000 prisoners each, which meant that together they housed roughly a third of Burma's inmates.[42]

It is clear that the penal system in Burma was well developed, with procedures which shaped the treatment of prisoners, regulated their punishments and provided a basis for evaluating the performance of prison staff. These facilities were subject to supervisory mechanisms, which included gazette visits and annual evaluations. The *Manual of Rules* documents that the penal system in Burma was sufficiently organized to possess a complement of specialized positions which defined the staff's roles (and this was applied to 'convict officers'). Prisoners were classified and separated in some cases by age and gender. Procedures for admission and release were clearly articulated. Records of the prisoner's stay at the jail—the 'history ticket'—were well organized. Standards for punishments were well defined (including those for solitary confinement). The ability to petition was made clear as were prescribed daily routines. Prisoners could work, with a rewards system. There were specific procedures for the transfer of prisoners. Medical evaluations were normal practice, and the institutions had to maintain a high sanitary standard. Regulations governed food and space. For instance, with respect to ventilation 'at least 10 square feet of ventilation area per prisoner should be provided'.[43] There were separate provisions for criminals who had yet to be convicted of a crime.[44]

While the treatment of prisoners might well be regarded as progressive, hierarchies were incorporated into basic practices. For instance, in the *Manual of Rules For the Superintendence and Management of Jails in Burma* (Rangoon, 1906) rules were provided to evaluate a prisoner upon arrival.[45] When the prisoner entered the prison, his medical history was recorded, as well as other information including 'his state of health, the class of labor for which the prisoner is fit if sentenced to rigorous imprisonment'.[46] The prisoner's history included a date of admission;

the issue of clothing and kit; the particular work task to which he was sent and 'every subsequent change of work or task'; reports of sickness or other health-related issues; date of judgements about appeals; the judgement about the appeal; 'The amount of ordinary and special remission awarded from time to time'; offences, which might include failure to perform tasks; and 'location of class B prisoners in cell by day or night'.[47] Inmates were not treated equally, as those with the best backgrounds were granted opportunities:

> Intelligent prisoners of European parentage who have a good character, and who are likely to be useful either from special knowledge or general qualification, and who, being sentenced to long terms, have undergone a least one half of their sentences (equal to 10 years in the case of life convicts), are eligible for transfer, on a license to be at large, to the Andamans, where they will be engaged in superintending native convicts at work and in seeing that the orders of the settlement offices are duly carried into effect or as clerks attached to the different Government offices in the settlement.[48]

This required information about their behavior at the prison, educational background and how they might serve Port Blair.[49] In addition, '[e]ducated prisoners who have behaved well may be allowed a book to read on Sundays or during the rest hour, from the jail library'.[50] Like the legal system, these prisons retained racial and class hierarchies.

The primary mission of this network in Burma was to punish and prevent crime (including dacoit activities), but it is clear that the colonial government sought to capitalize on the penal reform movements which had begun elsewhere. While there may not have been the equivalent of a Captain William Neitenstein (1850–1921), who labored to modernize the New South Wales prison system, until the work of Alexander Paterson there was nonetheless a determined effort to raise the standard for incarceration in Burma.[51] The prisons in Burma were subjected to an inspection regime which was intended not only to guarantee a basic standard for humane treatment, but also to make it possible for these institutions to improve. By the end of the 19th century, it was also clear that juvenile offenders ought to be separated from older inmates and, accordingly, reformatories were opened for boys. By examining these institutions, it should also become evident that if the colonial state merited the term 'Leviathan' it was a reforming 'Leviathan' which sought to incorporate many of the best international practices into institutional development.

Insein prison as an experiment in social reform

The building of reformatories that took place in Britain in the 19th century found its counterpart in Burma.[52] It would be at Insein that a pilot institution would open to try to reform young offenders. The reformatory was transferred from the jail to the education department.[53] Insein also provides a clear instance of the actions of the colonial state's attempt to address the problems posed by crime, while following international standards for the treatment of young offenders. The case of the Insein reformatory reflected multiple considerations: the pressure to provide separate treatment for young offenders had been building for several years. Part of this stemmed from the record number of inmates in Burma's prisons.[54] It almost certainly was envisioned as an instrument for preventing or inhibiting crime in Burma.

The boys at Insein were given an education and curriculum which was designed to make them marketable to potential employers. This curriculum included basic literacy (reading and writing) and industrial arts. Most of Insein's graduates would develop marketable skills in either tin work or carpentry. At the heart of this project was the basic assumption that these young males were not yet lost to criminal careers. They could still be socialized and educated to become productive members of Burman society. Their future agency was the agenda of this reforming state activity.

In addition to the curriculum, the young males were allotted a consistent daily routine which was intended to facilitate their development. It was noted that daily routines were quite important: 'No attempt has been made to alter existing division of reformatory time, 5 hours being devoted as heretofore to work, 5 hours to study, ½ an hour to physical drill and 4 hours to recreation, washing and meals.'[55] That is, the approach to their time at Insein was meant to stimulate discipline, provide basic skills and ensure a basic standard of physical and mental health. It might be added that meticulous records were kept of each boy—including the dates, times and punishments inflicted for disciplinary reasons.[56]

These pupils had their academic and social progress monitored to the extent that it was possible. For example, in 1900 some 73 students had taken exams and 66 passed. More important, perhaps, 31 were released and of those the whereabouts of 21 were unknown, 10 were reported on and only 2 continued in their trade, which in these select instances was carpentry.

Even though the enrollment was moderately enlarged, these would be characteristic results for the next few years. Yet, these results did not demonstrate any kind of significant improvement over the years when

Insein had been a jail with some industrial arts training. For instance, the *Annual Report on the Prison Administration of Burma* for 1897 noted that the educational 'results were again satisfactory, there being a creditable increase in the number of boys who passed the higher standards'.[57]

Nonetheless, by 1902 Insein seemed to possess momentum as it had increased its enrollment and added a board of visitors. The overall assessment in the Annual Report exuded confidence because of the various improvements which had been made since 1900:

> No time was lost in giving effect to these. As far as was possible at the time. The "Reformatory" became the "Reformatory School," and was transferred from the control of the Inspector-General of Jails to that of the Director of Public Instruction. The "Warders" were changed into "School Peons"; their uniform, which was that of the jails, was taken away; and they were given the ordinary clothes that the peons in the Educational Department wear. Their batons were also taken away. Boys on admission are at once drafted into the ordinary school, which teaches the Vernacular course up to standard VII. They are then allowed to select a trade, and are put to work at it. If they show no aptitude for that particular trade, they are put into others, till they fall into one suited. Carpentry, tin smith's work, carving, canework, and gardening are taught. In each of these, except gardening, an annual examination is held, and certificates are given; when the VIIth standard as laid down in Code Chapter II, page 62–70 is passed, the boys receive certificates. Results-grants are paid for passes, and placed to the credit of the boys. The school training, ordinary and technical, is thorough. From the non-Technical Department, boys are allowed to appear for the various Teacher's Tests, if they wish to.[58]

Insein also sought to help its graduates find work whenever it was possible. Some pupils appear to have been quite successful as some of 'the boys have joined our Government Normal Schools, and become teachers. Those who have found work, have all turned out well.'[59] The institution's momentum was such that its leaders looked ahead to seeing if they ought to move the school to a new site because the current one had once been a jail.[60]

The earlier penal legacy did hang over the future development of Insein. The 1903 Annual Report noted that the institution was criticized for having 'separate confinement' for misbehaving boys. While 'separate confinement' was deemed to be an improvement over solitary confinement, it still smacked of punishment rather than education. In

addition, the school's leaders seem not to have been able to trust their pupils, as they refused to provide the richest educational experience that reformatory pedagogy allowed. When Insein opened, it was believed that the pupils should be given discipline, instruction and opportunities to explore the world outside the walls of the reformatory. For example, in 1905 it was recommended that these trips be added to the experience of the boys, but this was almost certainly not done.

J.G. Covernton, Director of Public Instruction in Burma, was impressed with some of physical facilities. However, he was also critical:

> I was not so favorably impressed with the sleeping cells. These consist of cubicles of lattice iron work, and are locked at night. They readily admit ventilation but also in intercommunication and in appearance resemble the cages of a well kept but not up to date menagerie . . . Mr Masters reports that he has not provided for sports and occasional "outings" as recommended last year because he fears the boys cannot be trusted. At present in all these matters the principles of a penal rather than a reformatory system seem too prominent and in such respects the institution appears to lag behind the Indian reformatories with which I am acquainted.[61]

These cubicles had been constructed in 1897, almost certainly before it was clear that Insein would become an educational rather than a penal institution.[62] In 1907 Covernton would again complain that Insein had succeeded in adding shoemaking, but even though the students had four to five hours a day for recreation, they were not introduced to organized sports.[63]

By the middle of the decade it was evident that Insein faced additional challenges. One issue was whether the boys should be taught English; instead, Insein opted for vernacular instruction. At least part of this was an equity issue: Burma's educational authorities were all too aware that instruction in English was too expensive for many Burmese families. Covernton's comment was telling; on the application of teaching English he added:

> I am against such proposals since I consider that while it is desireable in the interests of the State to see that boys of this class receive the elements of a decent primary education I do not consider that the State is bound to supply them with special instruction for which, if they had not been sent to the Reformatory, their parents would have to pay comparatively high fees.[64]

More basic issues began to challenge the promising school. Teacher retention proved to be a problem as the turnover of instructors was high in the middle of the decade. Even though the Annual Report for 1905 was positive it was clear that sustaining Insein was proving to be difficult:

> Mr. Masters has done his work well, and deserves special mention for his long and good service. The teachers of the school have worked satisfactorily ; but the pay and prospects are such that they do not care to stay, and change constantly takes place . . . The recommendations as to sports and outings for the boys have not as yet received full attention, and I trust that the Committee will not lose sight of them.[65]

All told, the school seemed to have been run down by the challenges of basic administration. It was unable to move to a desirable location, it maintained its punitive character and the boys it taught were unable to participate in organized sports or benefit from trips outside. Despite its early momentum, the institution 'has not achieved the success that was once anticipated' and in 1910 it was decided to move the school to Thazi where it would 'enjoy the advantages of climate and situation unobtainable in the present site'.[66]

The rise and fall of the Insein reformatory offered as much information about the inspection regime as did those boys who came into and left its walls. The need to separate the boys from older criminals had produced the opportunity for Insein. However, the ambitions of the prison administrators were such that Insein had difficulty fulfilling its mission. Nevertheless, it should be clear that this episode also reveals that these state actors were concerned to improve their school so that it could promote positive social transformation in Burma.

Making the state visible

Beyond the presence of prisons, police and headmen, the realities of the state were evident in many other areas of everyday life. Tracing the full range of state activities is beyond this chapter, but it will highlight the prominence of excise and customs, commercial regulation (itself made visible by the administration of forests), the efforts to battle official corruption, the maintenance of public health and the courts. Governmental activities in these areas ensured that the state was prominent in British Burma and those who observed its activities only a bit more

carefully might have easily recognized that its performances were tied to policies and procedures developed in and for India.

Making colonial authority evident in everyday life: revenue collection

The presence of the colonial state could be easily gleaned from the resources which it devoted to customs and excise duties. To begin with, the state collected significant revenue from duties on narcotics and alcohol. In addition, the sale of licenses—many to vendors for the sale of opium and alcohol—was a source of state revenue. For instance, the revenue derived from opium in 1885 was roughly 10% of the total revenue.[67] Again, the rewarding of licenses was competitive and could be affected by a range of inappropriate behaviours.[68] More important, perhaps, the presence of state regulation of opium and alcohol virtually ensured that smuggling was a common temptation and reality and the attempts to suppress smuggling virtually ensured that the significance of Burma's borders increased. Excise Commissioner H. Thompson noted that '[n]o real advance can be made against the smuggling of outside opium into Burma until stronger and better trained Excise establishments are entertained in the Ports and coast and frontier districts to which the opium is first brought'. Thompson noted that proposals were under consideration for 'additions to the staff and for the training of Excise Officers'.[69]

It might be added that the Excise provided the means for surveillance. Monitoring annual intake of duties enabled the British to observe the consumption practices of the local population. For example, with the prospect of steady increases in the consumption of opium (particularly after the meeting of the Royal Commission between 1893 and 1895), the excise reports reveal a detailed assessment not merely of revenue but of behavior. Writing about the increase in cocaine consumption (which put the decrease of opium for 1907–1908 into perspective) the commissioner quoting the Collector in Rangoon put in his report:

> The taste for cocaine has continued to spread and in Rangoon the habit is firmly established. There are numerous dens where it is sold, and it is also freely retailed by stall-holders, betel-leaf sellers and petty hawkers of all descriptions. The increase in the sale and consumption of this drug is a matter for concern and it has now attained such dimensions that the small Excise staff are unable to control it.[70]

He added that the connection between cocaine and opium could be found from the patterns of seizures:

> In Tharrawaddy 11,767 grains were seized, and it is said that there is a tendency to use cocaine as a substitute for opium as opium is now more difficult to obtain than formerly, and cocaine by reason of its small bulk and of being easily destroyed, can be smuggled with less risk of detection. A consignment of 12,510 grains seized in the railway train at Prome is believed to have been intended for Tharrawaddy. Seizures were also made in the Bassein, Pyapon, Henzada and Toungoo Districts . . . cocaine has recently been detected as far up the railway line as Pyinmana in the Yamethin District . . . Cocaine dens are difficult to suppress, because of the ease which all traces of the drug can be removed if a search is being made.[71]

The Excise reports amply documented the increased popularity of cocaine and possibly provided adequate information for anticipating the spread of its usage. More generally, the excise duties provided one more means for surveillance upon the local population. It might be remembered that the British did not intend that their Excise officials be faceless bureaucrats. *The Burma Excise Manual* (Rangoon, 1909) stated:

> The Superintendent should spend a large amount of his time on tour. These tours should be employed in collecting and working up information about smugglers, in supervising, examining, and controlling the work of Sub-Inspectors and Inspectors, and in close inspection of opium shops. The Superintendent should arrange to visit periodically all the more important villages in the district, and more especially the villages which are believed to contain a number of opium consumers or which are reported to be engaged in the smuggling of opium or the illicit manufacture of liquor. He should make himself personally acquainted with the village headmen and endeavor to obtain their co-operation in the suppression of opium smuggling and hawking and illicit distribution. He should ascertain from the headman and the elders of the village, and also by private enquiries, what number of opium consumers there are in the village, how they obtain their supplies, and whether there are any persons engaged in opium smuggling or hawking or illicit distillation, and should compare the information he obtains with the reports he had received from the Inspectors and Sub-Inspectors.[72]

In other words, the superintendent should be visible while collecting information about his district and even the possibility of corruption—including that which might be present in within his own administration.[73]

Establishing and enforcing codes of behaviour: the battle against corruption

Finding and understanding corruption (in its multiple forms) with the extant sources of a country's historical record will probably always remain a challenge for historians. By its very nature, corrupt practices are often difficult to recover because they are often marked by the deliberate falsification of records or by practices which are designed to avoid producing records. More interesting, it is arguable that many 'corrupt' practices are actually 'quotidian' but tolerated by state functionaries either because they are too difficult to root out or because those that might do so are actually complicit.[74]

British Burma poses a particular challenge because it was long regarded as a place that was known for corruption—a point amplified by George Orwell's *Burmese Days*. In its earliest incarnation, the colonial state struggled with headmen who under-reported the resources of their villages. Consequently, the headmen relatively quickly reverted to the Burmese practice of exploiting revenue collection. Addressing this problem became a goal of the British administration: the introduction of a cadastral survey in the 1870s had the effect of making the headmen salaried employees. Furthermore, with the creation of a capitation tax, the British believed that they had overcome the under-reporting of assets and corrupt revenue collection process.[75] Robert H. Taylor argued that the gap between theory and practice remained large because 'clientage' became a basic practice of local governance. His comment that it was this practice which 'kept the system of local government from becoming more oppressive than it was' is telling. Assuming the importance of 'locality' for Burmese polities, revenue collection was always going to be a problem for the central state. However, with the advent of British rule in Lower Burma, many of these myothugis became servants of the colonial state and it is possible that they found it increasingly difficult to falsify accounts. More important, perhaps, these figures depended on local support, and much of this revenue may have been consumed at that level as well.[76] For all of these reasons, it might be fair to say that the transition to British governance (which itself was a long process) had the effect of making the issue of corruption a basic signifier for Burma.

Jonathan Saha's study of corruption in the Burma delta at the turn of the century exhibits yet another manner in which the state became visible. Saha's imaginative approach to the subject suggests that both in the daily manifestations of corruption and in the efforts to remove it, did the colonial state become manifest. That is, the ways in which the state's roles were enacted by its subordinates and experienced by the population in everyday life meant that it was actually deeply embedded in colonial society. The cases of village headman Maung Po and township officer Saw U White illustrated that the British could turn a blind eye towards corruption by applying light punishments when they found it. Saha argues that an 'informal economy of discipline' meant that toleration of corruption depended upon the cost of punishing it. The belief that corruption was widespread was commonly held by the British, who often focused on the myo-oks (township officers) as being particularly likely to abuse their powers. The *Times of Burma* carried an article which referred to the myo-oks as 'miniature monarchs'. This followed from an 1899 article in which the *Times of Burma* suggested:

> [O]ne has to have only a slight acquaintance with the subordinate judicial courts scattered throughout the province to find out the approximate number of utterly incompetent Myooks; and the grievance of the public is made all the greater by the lack of conscience and honest principles in those who are not straight.[77]

Corruption was assumed a part of everyday life in colonial Burma. As Saha puts it, the state was hardly the alien, rational bureaucratic entity which was removed from the daily life of those who resided in the Burma Delta. Instead, it was 'duplicitous, theatrical, despotic, highly personalized and masculine' and it was enacted by both those who were its functionaries and those it was deemed to serve.[78]

Addressing corruption could both make the state more present and demonstrate that its commitment to surveillance extended to its own functionaries. The example of the 'Rangoon Outrage' in April 1899, in which a number of soldiers from the West Kent Regiment stationed in Rangoon gang-raped a middle aged Burman woman, aptly illustrates these priorities. There are two facets of this crime which merit attention: the British response to the crime and the subsequent reaction when it became clear that the military tried to cover up or downplay the incident. The incident drew the attention of the imperial world, with Parliament expressing its outrage, while figures such as Rudyard Kipling suggesting that the woman must have invited the assault upon

herself.[79] The case against the perpetrators collapsed, which generated anger and indignation—especially from Lord Curzon who had only taken over in March 1899.[80] Curzon's response was to send the entire regiment (whose officers had tried to conceal the incident) to Aden for two years without leave.[81] In addition, punishments were meted out for poor performance on the part of the Indian Civil Service. The military set up a Court of Enquiry to review both the event and trial and it produced decisive results: the eight soldiers connected with the event were dismissed, two officers were censured and two were compelled to retire. The battalion commander was authorized to retire at a reduced pension. In addition, the civil administrators were also disciplined: the police commissioner, cantonment magistrate, district magistrate and commissioner of the division were all penalized.[82] This particular response may not have been obvious to the subject populations, but it exhibited the presence of the state through its dramatic punishment of a military unit and made clear that it sought to be alert to many forms of corruption. In fact, it is Curzon's frustration that is quite telling: he desired convictions of the soldiers in order to show that the British were capable of punishing their own, and to sustain the larger public lesson that British rule was intrinsically good and enlightened—a lesson which he hoped that sound administration made clear.[83]

Establishing public health in Burma

In contrast, the attempts to improve or at least administer a respectable level of public health could bring the government into direct contact with Burma's peoples. The administration of public health proved to be challenging for British authorities, who appear to have been slow to appreciate the importance of indigenous Burmese medical practices. To be sure, the *hse hsayas* (those who practiced indigenous medicine) were often autonomous and disorganized, and operated 'within a shroud of secrecy'.[84] Not surprisingly, then, British practitioners often underestimated the degree of cultural and religious difference between Burma and India.[85] Judith Richell's detailed study *Disease and Demography in Colonial Burma*, which was published posthumously, illustrated both the best and worst of the British state in Burma. Richell's analysis documents that the British did significantly improve public health in Burma. However, it is also clear that the most important advances were made when the health or welfare of the British military and civilian population was at stake. In addition, Richell suggested that the British were not sensitive or adept at comprehending the Burmese environment. For

example, at a time when deaths from malaria (which averaged around 50,000 per year in the first decade of the 20th century) were increasing, the British attempts to improve agricultural productivity by enhancing civil engineering programs had the effect of creating environments in which the disease could thrive. These 'malaria vectors' developed in places where the disease had been unknown.[86] Richell also explores the challenges which the British faced in collecting information relevant to public health—a task which would be even more urgent when plague became a problem after 1905.

Public health: the case of bubonic plague in Burma

The arrival and treatment of bubonic plague in Burma remains an essentially unstudied topic. Exploring it—however briefly—reveals that extent to which the colonial state was able to mobilize resources to meet a very serious public health crisis. Responding to the plague demonstrates not only a well organized bureaucracy, but also a series of state entities which were capable of surveillance and detailed information about a subject population.

Plague had reached Burma in tiny numbers (probably less than one case a year) before 1900.[87] However, it would be around 1905 that the plague would become a serious health problem. After 1905 the plague would be a feature of life in Burma until the end of the next decade. For those responsible for meeting its medical and public health challenges, it tended to arrive in waves. While exploring this episode is beyond the bounds of this study, it is useful to recount something of the fear and terror which it brought upon people. Even more important is exhibiting the various means that were deployed to combat the problem.

The first responses to the plague involved quarantine and control over the ports (because it was widely assumed to have arrived by sea from India). However, as the epidemics deepened, a different set of measures were used with varying degrees of success. *The Report on the Sanitary Administration of Burma For the Year 1909* noted:

> As in previous years rigorous measures for improving local sanitation and destroying rats were adopted usually only after the presence of the infection of the locality was recognized . . . The only measure of supreme value after the appearance of the disease is evacuation, and this was carried out with good results in the case of infected villages in several districts; notably in Lower Chindwin, Sagaing, and Meiktila . . . Great difficulty has been met with, however, in preventing the surreptitious return of the villagers to their infected premises.[88]

It was evident that in 1909 the plague had become significant in rural areas. This development posed a major challenge because of the limited number of medical staff and 'the general ignorance of the rural populations with reference to diagnosis of the disease and the methods for its prevention'. The report noted that the Lower Chindwin had found plague to be very difficult, but the district administrative officers were able to motivate the population to take sufficient preventive measures. Subdivisional Officer Maung Tun Win was 'indefatigable in visiting the infected villages and in inducing the headmen to organize voluntary ratting and cleaning gangs'.[89]

Ratting proved to be one of the most frequently applied measures to stop the spread of the plague. Medical authorities kept detailed records on the numbers of rats killed, by date and location. The killing of rats had precedent in India, where plague had broken out earlier. In 1909 some 1,711,000 rats were destroyed—most of which occurred in urban areas. This represented an increase from 1,421,902 in 1908. The report noted that this procedure 'showed that co-operation of the country people can be obtained if the District Officers go about it in the right way'.[90] The plague had been suppressed by using the headmen to mobilize the rural populations who might well have remained resistant to the best efforts of the British.

It is instructive to compare some of these efforts with those undertaken in the following year (1910–1911). A number of procedures were abandoned because by 1910 they had been found to be ineffective. These included 'earth-oiling', disinfection and the construction of rat-proof houses; the use of the Danysz Virus was discontinued. However, the 'necessity for close inspection of every death in towns' remained important. In addition, evacuation, inoculation 'of those who would accept it' and the destruction of rats were regarded as critical. Rat drives had to be 'commenced immediately the reports of rat mortality are received'. Furthermore, bazaars and 'infected foci should be dealt with first. When reports are not received early the non-infected portion of the town should first be driven.' Despite many local triumphs, there was a marked note of despair about the perils of indifference in areas that were infected: 'where evacuation and inoculation are refused, nothing can be done by the Plague Department to combat the disease'.[91]

By 1914 the demand for plague prevention had increased. *The Reports on Plague Operations Carried Out in Shwebo, Sagaing and Lower Chindwin Districts During the Early Months of 1914*[92] found various authors making the case for preventative measures. W.S. Nealor, the Civil Surgeon based at Shwebo, recounted that with the commencement of the outbreak 'I soon realized that nothing but a miracle could save Shwebo

from plague'. Refugees were leaving Mandalay in large numbers and Nealor could 'see no feasible way of stopping them'. Nealor thought that

> [i]f Government were to build a plague camp outside large towns with proper quarters, bazaar and water-supply, then measures to prevent people going elsewhere could be adopted. As it is Government 'evacuate' but do not provide any place for people to evacuate to, so that if all other towns and villages are closed to the unfortunate people the thing becomes a farce. Partly for this reason, and partly because practically speaking it was impossible, I made no attempt to prevent Mandalay people coming to Shwebo, nor did I after the plague had once established itself here prevent people running away, rather the reverse in fact.[93]

The *Plague Report for Sagaing* reflected what were perceived to be sustained successes. C.G. Crow, the Civil Surgeon based at Sagaing, reported on the challenges of gaining compliance with the preventative measures.

Crow reported that in 1907, 1909 and 1910 Sagaing had tried ratting, trapping and disinfection and all had been found to be ineffectual. However, better results were gained in 1907 in following a vigorous policy of inoculation, even though they believed it would be unpopular. As a result:

> Meetings were held and officials readily came forward with their wives and families, and had themselves inoculated as examples; with all this 820 cases were inoculated. Among these 820 not a single case of plague occurred and this fact helped us considerably in dealing with the next epidemic, 1909–1910.[94]

Writing about 1914, Crow again underscored the importance of inoculation:

> No difficulty was experienced. People readily came forward and submitted to the operation. No lotteries were held and I am much opposed to this method of seducing people into inoculation. I am certain it weakens personal influence which is the root of success . . . No cases of plague occurred among the inoculated and this is very gratifying when we take into consideration that actually 65 houses had plague rats in them, and that at the very least 325 people were in actual contact with the infection.[95]

Sagaing had its bazaar ratted and it did not need to close. In the villages evacuation took place and the headmen were given instructions to keep strangers out of their villages. Crow observed that 'village headman in the district are splendid'.[96]

The demand for surveillance was articulated after the outbreak in 1905. *The Report on The Sanitary Administration of Burma for the Year 1906* made the case for sophisticated mechanisms of surveillance:

> [T]he prime factor would remain that if the spread of plague from area to area is to be prevented, the *utmost effort must be given to the surveillance of threatened populations*, and the control of those infected . . . as stated by me in the Plague Inspectors Manual of 1902,"these considerations justify the existence of expensive organizations to secure prompt notice of the occurrence of imported cases of plague and as near an approach as attainable to extermination of rats in threatened areas, as a measure not only humane but financially economical." To meet plague, an organized Sanitary Service that shall be capable of contending each inch of territory by the discriminating use of all sound methods is essential. Such a service would not only defeat the invader but prevent invasion; and this is true not only of sanitation *but of finance* . . . the only truly "common sense plague policy" that can be rationally relied upon, and has in one part (Madras) at least stood the test of ten years of practical experience is *systematized surveillance (with full liberty of the person)* of usually controllable human beings, the consequent early sanitary treatment of imported cases in uninfected localities, and the *consequent* prevention of infection of rats who are uncontrollable disseminators of infection. The staff necessary may, at first sight, appal the holders of the strings of the public purse, but that the method is decidedly cheaper and in the true interest of commerce . . . than in allowing infection and *then* attempting to combat it, there cannot be the slightest doubt.[97]

Surveillance, then, was the answer to a leading challenge for public health. The presupposition that the state could possess vast and detailed information about the people it governed reflected some of the core Victorian ideas about information and governance. This was a state that was ambitious in the acquisition of knowledge which it deployed paternalistically.

More important, however, for the argument here, just as the episodes of corruption (and the attempts to police it) demonstrated the presence of colonial power, the administration of public health certainly made

the state visible. It may well be the case that for many people who lived in Burma, the colonial state was a remote and abstract entity. Nonetheless, the plague episodes demonstrate that the state could become intimately involved in the daily lives of its subject populations.

Conclusion: modernizing Burma by imperial and international modes of governance

Taw Sein Ko had recognized the realities of crime in Burma. At the heart of the 'quotidian' British government experience from 1895–1918 was anxiety about not only crime, but the inability to tame it. He cited the *1912 Police Administration Report*, concluding:

> [T]he Burman is becoming more uncontrolled. Discipline in the home is often negligible, and the schools of the present day, if they do not import a better book education than the Buddhist priest, for the most part, singularly fail to inculcate good morals. One officer has noted that he thinks this probably due to the mixture of races in schools. Each race has its different habits and customs. What is sacred to one is laughed at by another, and it may well happen that a youth leaves school with no very fixed ideas of how they should behave.[98]

He added that these numbers were supplemented by the 1912 *Report on the Administration of Criminal Justice in Lower Burma* which attributed crime to three causes: poverty, 'disease and low vitality' and 'defective moral education'.[99] In addition, Lower Burma was in danger of experiencing the 'disintegration of Burman society, which is one of the causes of criminality'.[100] He connected the rise of crime to the administrative changes which were put in place after the Third Anglo-Burmese War, arguing that in Upper Burma it was three permanent institutions—the king, the pongyi, and the myothugyi—'which constituted society, and upheld peace, order and decorum, by creating and maintaining a healthy standard of public opinion'.[101] British administration with its 'efforts to worship at the shrine of the fetish called efficiency', removed the monks and the myothugyi. Consequently,

> In the villages of Burma, which are occupied by over 70 per cent of the population, there is no public opinion, and there is no personage to which the unruly villagers are accustomed to show respect, fear, and consideration. Under British rule, there is no permanency in the official hierarchy: from the Lieutenant-Governor down to the village

> policeman, everybody is a mere bird of passage: and we should not wonder that things are in a state of flux. The solvent tendency of British rule has disintegrated Burmese society and most of their institutions, and it behooves the British government to retrace its step, as far as possible, to pursue a constructive policy in respect of education and the system of village administration.[102]

Social disintegration, then, was made all the more likely by the termination of the monarchy and secular modernization. For many colonial civil servants that meant that crime had in fact become a bellwether for the success (or failure) of British rule. Just as the British believed that their superior legal system served to legitimate British rule, so the increase in crime—all borne out by statistical data—now implied the opposite.

The task of governing Burma, then, was complicated and multifaceted. The British were the first to govern the entity that was modern Burma and this venture proved to be challenging for colonial policymakers. With its legally sanctioned racial hierarchies, regimes of control and surveillance they administered Burma. Much of this was done by largely Indian police forces and public health criteria established outside Burma. Indeed, combining British administrative leadership with Indian labour produced a state that reflected the spectre of 'double colonization'. Furthermore, Taw Sein Ko underscored the fact that Burma was now governed differently than it had been under the Konbaung Dynasty. Under these circumstances, it was inevitable that British rule would feel alien and possibly, as Taw Sein Ko believed, produce behaviors which tended toward criminality.

Yet, it might be argued that colonial governance was well on its way to supporting the social transformations which would help to make Myanmar an independent and modern nation. This brief survey of a small range of the colonial administration's activities, however, does show that this was a government which was active in many social arenas. In fact, it is evident that the state in Burma was increasingly engaged with new areas of governance. Recalling the many things asked of the headman, it would have been obvious that the state was concerned not only with the rule of law and prevention of crime, but the welfare of those that it governed. The treatment of the bubonic plague was organized locally and it followed the experiences of British governance in India, but it drew at least as much from international models. In fact, British policy makers relied on the work of international bodies, organizations and the work of transnational congresses to set the parameters of their

policies in Burma. To put all of this differently, by the time the headman communicated to the people in his administrative district, the messages which he was carrying had in many cases been shaped not only in India and Rangoon, but by imperial and transnational networks. Since the headman was the interface between British policy-making and many denizens of rural Burma, his activities reveal that state actors were concerned with public health, intelligence gathering, and public relations. All told, the examples taken from public health, policing and prison reforms attest to the reality that Burma was governed by an activist state whose actors assumed that it was their duty not only to provide effective government, but to become better at it. In the next chapter it will become evident that these same administrators were committed to recovering Burma's remote past.

4
Interpreting the End of Traditional Burma

British rule over all of Burma required the termination of the Konbaung Dynasty.[1] This overt political transformation was as dramatic as it was decisive, but the country was also undergoing massive social transformations, brought about by rapid economic development. These alterations affected every aspect of Burma, including the interpretations of its past. This chapter focuses upon the ways in which the British conceptualized Burma's past. The immediate priority would be to understand recent history—that which had occurred between the Second and Third Anglo-Burmese Wars. A second larger aim, which reflected the pressures which arose from modernization, addressed comprehending Burma's more remote past.

New century Burma—the combination of British rule, modernization and commercial interests in the Indian Ocean—required the creation of 'old' or 'traditional' Burma and with it a rewriting of its history. Most of the British writing about Burma's history was not without bias, but sought to recover and preserve the past based upon the achievements of Victorian historical thinking. In fact, this body of scholarship should not be forgotten, but viewed itself as a revolution in the exploration of the country. This chapter highlights several key moments in the colonial organization of Burma's past. Scott's interpretation of the Konbaung Dynasty helped to shape or confirm the dominant imperial perspective regarding the country's recent history. With a sense of urgency, Fielding-Hall interviewed former members of the Konbaung court because he perceived that its memories might easily be lost. At the same time, Burma's remote past became attractive to colonial authorities. Lord Curzon's expulsion of the British from the Palace at Mandalay pointed to a commitment to recover and preserve Burma's ancient memories. To that end, the work of Taw Sein Ko and the Archaeological Survey will be highlighted. Furthermore, V.C. Scott O'Connor's meditative approach to

ancient Burma frames the much larger patterns of British engagement with the subject. Finally, the creation of the Burma Research Society in 1910 might well be the product of these wider efforts, but, more importantly perhaps, it also presaged the ever more fundamental nationalist demands which became increasingly visible after 1918.

Interpreting the end of Old Burma

The removal of the Konbaung Dynasty and the unification of Burma under British rule in 1885 energized already existing efforts to recover the country's past. Prior to that development, British historical thought about Burma had explored the country's history, but the perspective was shaped by the presence of the Konbaung state in Upper Burma. Until 1885, the work of two very different British administrator scholars is indicative both of a range of colonial sensitivities and also two different approaches to Burma's past, which while quite different in their commitments, were nearly identical in their presentation of the country's subject matter. British scholars—most notably Albert Fytche (1820–1892) and Arthur Phayre (1812–1885)—had long been interested in the country's past.

Fytche, who was the second commissioner of British Burma (1867–1871) wrote the first historically oriented work entitled *Burma Past and Present* (1878), which was dedicated to his cousin Alfred Tennyson. The two-volume work did evince some real interest in Burma's past, but it might just as easily be cited as an exemplar of orientalist prejudices. Fytche did attempt to draw upon both non-Burmese and a number of indigenous sources, in order to paint a picture of the country's past. However, his curiosity had its limits: 'the later history of Burma is the same old story of usurpations, commotions, rebellions and massacres'.[2]

Phayre, who served as the first commissioner of British Burma (1862–1867) published *The History of Burma* (1883), but even though the book would remain highly significant (and frequently read) it might well be said that there was a new urgency to trying to grasp Burma's past.[3] The end of the monarchy was accompanied by the looting of the palace of Mandalay, and with it some of the most visible embodiments of the Burmese kingdom (and much that it represented) disappeared. Accordingly, unlike the era in which Phayre had written, the kingdom had now been banished not only to India—but to Burma's past.

The completion of the annexation of Burma created a new series of demands for those interested in its past. Scott would labour as a historian to show that the British governance over the entire country was a good thing. Fielding-Hall would feel compelled to recover the heritage

of the court. O'Connor's *Mandalay and Other Cities of the Past in Burma* would be a plea to comprehend much earlier forms of Burman governance. Taw Sein Ko, who would be a leading modernizer, carried the interest in history much further back—attempting to trace the origins of the Burman people. Yet, it might be remembered that there was ample precedent for reformulating Burma's history in the wake of political changes. Michael W. Charney's *Powerful Learning* aptly demonstrates that monks from the Lower Chindwin were able to reposition the country's historical perspective as they served the Konbaung state. The same applies to Tun Aung Chain's observation that the 'most ambitious attempts to reinterpret Myanmar history' since independence came when the Burma Socialist Programme Party assigned its research department the task of producing a work on Myanmar history, which conformed to the Party's philosophy articulated in *The Correlation of Man and His Environment*.[4]

Interpreting the end of 'traditional Burma'

In the years that followed the Third Anglo-Burmese War, British scholars began a concentrated effort to once again explore and organize the Burmese past. Undoubtedly, one of the reasons for this development came from the fact that the Konbaung Dynasty was sent into exile, the palace of Mandalay looted and its occupants removed. U Tin recalled the destruction of many royal records:

> The [only state records] that survived were those that were not burned or looted by the English army and Burman labourers . . . The burning and the looting lasted for seven days . . . The records, parabaiks and so on . . . had been piled up on the ground and then were burned. Seeing this, the labourers who watched the burning taking place carefully [removed records] from the fire and carried them away. Nothing could stop them. They took what they wanted. The burning occurred in this way . . . the English soldiers and officers, etc., and Burmese who were serving in the English army opened up all of the chests [of records], searching them. In some they found valuable items . . . Because they opened and searched the chests in the hopes of finding such things, they ripped apart the bark [pages]. When they ripped the bark apart, they tossed them aside. When they tossed them aside, the rubbish collectors gathered them and set fire to them.[5]

U Tin would begin the effort to save many of these records almost immediately, but their destruction highlighted a different reality.[6] The

British (and many Burmese) came to regard the formal conclusion of this last war as an end point in Burmese history. Examining the ways in which the British shaped the Burmese past is probably much more than an academic exercise: contemporary Myanmar remains shaped by many of the boundaries (physical and temporal) which were formed during its experience with colonization. Accordingly, it seems likely that the tensions which may exist between ethnic minorities and Myanmar identity (which may well have been 'reified' during the period of imperial governance)—as they are made manifest in armed struggle, economic inequalities and definitions of citizenship—stem at least in part from the manner in which the colony was itself defined by the British.

That said, to fully understand the ways in which the British generated knowledge about Burma is to witness a series of discourses develop and change with historical circumstance. It should be remembered that the British were the first to systematically study Burma and its peoples. The information and knowledge which they produced (and is now defamed by the category 'colonial knowledge') was at once deep and wide ranging. It is also a collection of knowledge which itself reflected time and circumstance in Burma. Subsequent generations of scholars would read some of these writers and forget or chose to ignore them, but they remain the surviving witnesses to a country which became permanently changed by colonization, modernization, national struggle, war and economic decline. This fascinating subject has never itself been studied, but analysis of its scope and importance merits attention because it proved to be important for both the study of Burma and the conceptualization of Southeast Asia.

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to fully delineate this body of knowledge, it is worthwhile to recognize that there is sufficient warrant for breaking these discourses into three discrete moments. First, the discourses of 'discovery': these stretch from the late 18th century until the era of the Second Anglo-Burmese War. The key figures include Crawfurd, Burney, Symes, and Yule, but also figures such as Gouger and Snodgrass. The second series of discourses—of which the articulation of 'old Burma' is a part—reveal the domination of British rule: they include the broader context of the Third Anglo-Burmese War until the era of the First World War. Here the key figures range from Sir George Scott, Harold Fielding-Hall, V.C. Scott O'Connor, C.M. Enriquez and Taw Sein Ko. Finally, the third era or moment might be those grouped around dislocation or disillusionment, and they run from the end of the First World War until Burma achieves independence. This last period features a very significant group of intellectuals including Orwell, Collis, Luce,

Taw Sein Ko, Edmund Leach, Hall, G.E. Harvey and, possibly the most widely read by regional experts, John Furnivall. Collectively, these figures represented a much larger and systematic exploration of Burma.

The invention of 'old Burma' occurs during this second period. 'Old Burma' was a term which makes its appearance to signify a view of the country, its history, religious practices and people which was perceived to be disappearing under colonial rule and economic development. This reflects not only an awareness that the termination of the Konbaung Dynasty implied more than the end of royal rule, but also a deep anxiety about the pace of modernization in Burma. This latter theme was hardly confined to Burma or the Indian empire, but became a standard theme in representations about the country. Additionally, Burma's place in the *raj* mattered because many of these authors were Burmaphiles who worked to create an independent Burman past—that is, one that de-emphasized its connections to South Asia. Their collective energies reflected a significant desire on the part of Britons who served in Burma to emancipate themselves from things Indian. Another reason was as immediate as it was striking, namely the impact of Indian immigration into Burma. As we saw in chapter two, the number and success of Indian immigrants (as well as a much smaller, but no less successful entrance of Chinese) raised the possibility that the Burmans would become marginalized in their own country. Yet another strand of writing about Burma could be futuristic: it emphasized the country's potential for growth and economic development. These writers were interested not only in the Indian Ocean, but also China, and they looked provocatively for a road or series of rail lines which might effectively unite the two. It is worth noting that the position of Burma between India and China remains of interest today and may well capture the attention of future policymakers and investors. Therefore, when colonial writers became interested in finding Burma's past it was in the context of a dynamic and changing present; that is, they did so in response to what they perceived to be a multifaceted crisis.

To bring these issues together, it is evident that the invention of 'traditional Burma' occurred in a number of discrete settings. One range of discourses involved the province of historians, who attempted to assemble a master narrative of Burman history, which ended with the conclusion of the Third Anglo-Burmese War. Another concerned the exploration, identification and interpretation of material artifacts. Most obvious, this involved the creation of the Archaeological Survey and its commitment to explore Burma's ruins and other extant structures, but it also was related to other facets of material culture. There was also an

attempt to preserve some record of the *lebensforms* (or what could be regarded as some instances of 'intangible heritage') as they were manifest in Burmese life. That is, several writers were impressed at what they perceived to be the traditional forms of life which were under the threat of extinction from the forces of change and modernization. Since this body of literature is significant, particular attention will be devoted to the historical writings of Sir George Scott with some reference to other figures. That said, this discussion is open-ended, and the treatment of Scott's writings aims to be suggestive, rather than be in any way comprehensive. All told, it should become clear that his historical writings contributed to the making of a view of Burma's past which might be understood as a unity. In recapturing the creation of a past for Burma, it may be possible to also recover the ways in which colonial knowledge foregrounded new national identities.

Sir George Scott as historian

Students of Southeast Asia will recognize Sir George Scott as one of the most iconic figures associated with colonial Burma. He famously wrote *The Burman,* and did most of the work for the *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan State* (1900), but also administered much of the Shan States, played a pivotal role in the establishment of the country's boundaries, and even introduced football in Burma; perhaps not surprisingly, he became Britain's major authority on the country in the process. In compiling the *Gazetteer*, Scott was updating the material from the Gazetteer which had been published in 1880—when the Burman kingdom was intact and would be so for the foreseeable future.

A definitive biography of Scott remains to be written. Edith Mitton, Scott's wife, published *Scott of the Shan Hills* (1936) which drew upon her knowledge of the subject to compile what amounts to a mere sketch of Scott.[7] Despite the existence of a large Scott archive at Cambridge, where his papers have been preserved, there has yet to be a single comprehensive scholarly study of Scott. Andrew Dalby surveyed Scott's career as an explorer of Burma's eastern border and key figure in the British annexation of the Shan states.[8] In fact, it might not be too much to claim that Scott is one of the great undiscovered subjects of the British empire because his achievements were significant. Scott served mostly in Burma—which could be quietly overlooked in the 19th century as Myanmar could be in the 20th. Scott could, after all, be easily identified with the larger-than-life characters who were usually, though not universally, advancing British aims across the globe. That is, were his

exploits better known, Scott might be grouped with Cecil Rhodes, Richard Burton, James Hannington Speke, Alfred Russel Wallace, Evelyn Baring (Lord Cromer), T.E. Lawrence and other cinematic figures.

Working as a journalist, Scott came first to the Malay peninsula where he was able to cover the reprisals for the murder of British Resident J.W.W. Birch in Perak in 1875 for the London paper, *Evening Standard*. After that, he went to both Rangoon and Mandalay, where he wrote for two London papers: the *Daily News* and *St. James Gazette*. Scott would stay in Burma for about seven years, where he not only wrote, but taught at a school. These experiences gave him the time and motivation to become fluent in Burmese. It was also during this stretch that Scott wrote *The Burman*, a book which could neatly and insightfully make great use of the division between Upper and Lower Burma. It might well be recalled that this book was a successful hybrid: the book published under the pseudonym Shway Yoe so effectively promoted a 'native' or Burman point of view that some reviewers in Britain thought that it was written by a Burmese author. Scott would serve colonial administration in a number of capacities, including compiling the 1900–1901 *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States* (five volumes—which remains of use to scholars today) and participating in the Burma Commission which established the country's borders with Siam and China.[9]

In the *Gazetteer* Scott attempted to use Burmese sources to tell the story of the country's recent history. Scott explained once that he was 'ordered' in 1891 to produce these massive volumes. He spent six months in Rangoon on 'special leave' working on what amounted to a monumental task. In order to expedite the process, all of the deputy commissioners sent significant amounts of information. However, a good number left it to their clerks, and the information arrived in Burmese. Therefore, before writing, Scott dedicated his energies to simply gathering and translating information.[10] In the second chapter of the massive five-volume work, he explained that in the papers of the Hlutdaw was found 'a sort of Annual Register, a chronicle in Burmese, of the events of the King's reign'.[11] Scott used this and notes from 'foreign servants of the King' to construct a 'disjointed narrative' of the chief events in the reign of Mindon Min.[12] This included his accession after the Second Anglo-Burmese War, treatment of court politics and the establishment of the new capital at Mandalay. In addition, British readers would have found the accounts of the British (and French) missions to Mandalay of interest. Scott regarded Mindon Min well, as he was 'one of the best kings Burma ever had'.[13] In fact, Mindon Min was 'for ever engaged in pious and meritorious works' and remained a responsible monarch with

a deep commitment to Buddhism. What is critical is that Scott regarded Mindon Min as a product of Burmese court politics, which was the same manner in which he placed Pagan Min and Thibaw. To some extent this resulted from following his primary sources, but it pointed to a bigger conclusion, namely that Mindon Min's reign was not essentially different than those who preceded or the one who followed. Rather, Mindon Min's success reads as a combination of character and luck and possibly good British governance in Lower Burma. Thibaw emerges as being incompetent and in the hands of Supayalat, but this was quite consistent with Burmese history.

At the same time, Scott used this chronicle and a couple of other local sources to try to provide a detailed picture of the reigns of Mindon Min and Thibaw. These figures were portrayed dispassionately, and in this chapter the author took pains to make the Burmese annals speak to British readers. What follows is a chronicle, which is detailed in places and Scott's assessment of the major characters involved. Unfortunately for contemporary readers, Scott did not adequately document all of the sources of his information. It should be pointed out that he was working without any kind of formal archival training and before the widespread practices which were adopted for archiving documents. His priority, however, appears to have had a strong preservationist impulse, as he was concerned to acknowledge and communicate a written summary of the *Hlutdaw* source.

More important, perhaps, this second chapter is a serious attempt to include Burmese voices in the *Gazetteer's* version of Burmese history. It would be followed by another chapter in which Scott's voice changes from transmitter to historian—deploying British documents to tell another side of the story. It is hardly worth recounting the details of this discussion here, except to note that much of the chapter functions to justify the British declaration of war, which precipitated the end of monarchy. In this instance Scott is not above the most obvious form of British bias.

However, it is in the second volume (part one) that the chapter entitled 'Palace Customs—Native Rule' can be found, and with it an attempt to preserve cultural heritage. Scott explained that the 'facts in this chapter are taken from the *Lawkabyuha, Inyon* volume, from the Kanni *Sikke's* Mandalay *Yazawindaw*, or on the authority of ex-Ministers of State'.[14] That is, Scott drew the chapter from Burmese primary sources and interviews (probably conversations, since the discipline and procedures associated with oral history were yet unknown) with significant figures. In other words, Scott was working with source material to portray the realities of Burmese court life as accurately and completely as possible.

The most salient feature of this discussion was the fact that the author believed he was portraying a lost world—even though it had flourished only 15 years earlier. Only half a generation before, and yet, as we shall see, it was now rooted firmly in a view of the past which might be called 'old Burma'.

A brief review of the topics described reveals a sophisticated court with very precise rituals and codes of behavior. Scott treated his readers to a detailed discussion of the coronation procedures, the thrones, the kings and queens (including the minor queens), lists of Mindon Min's children, court rules and regulations, court feasts and the language of the court. This last topic included (from Burmese to English) forms of address to the king and queen, forms of address to the crown prince, forms of address to ministers and officials and forms of conversation with king and chief queen. Scott also saw fit to include the language used by courtiers speaking with each other about royalty. Other topics beyond forms of address and language were also captured by Scott: titles, umbrellas, betel boxes, drums and royal boats were all discussed. All told, this work, which would be published in the same year as Harold Fielding-Hall's *Burmese Palace Tales* (1900), proved to be a largely disinterested attempt to secure the memory of the court and many of the practices that had defined it—which had now disappeared forever into the past. It might be remembered as well that these efforts found a greater echo in Lord Curzon's work not long thereafter to preserve the Palace of Mandalay.

Elsewhere, Scott was less reverential and less able to segregate past from present. Like many of his contemporaries in Britain he assumed that discussions of domestic architecture could reveal a great deal about the character of a society or a part of the population. Accordingly, his discussion of Burma under 'native rule' explored rural life, including the layout of villages. Scott held that the physical organization of the village itself revealed some of the significant deficiencies of Burmese rule:

> Villages in Upper Burma are generally surrounded with a double or at least a single, thorn hedge, with one or more gates, usually well protected. This as much as anything else shows the insecurity of the country under native rule.[15]

He did point out that houses were of a temporary character, with the exception of some constructed of brick which 'belonged mostly to Chinese or Indian traders'.[16] He also tried to chart wages in three moments—the reign of Mindon Min, the annexation in 1885 and at the turn of the century.

These efforts, however, paled in comparison with his attempt to write about Burmese law and government. Like many British authors, Scott was not impressed by either the government or the legal system in Burma. In the chapter on 'Government and Administration Under the Burmese Kings' Scott portrayed a thoroughly despotic and corrupt system. For example, his treatment with the Burmese legal code reflected his frustrations with larger questions of governance:

> The written Code, civil and penal, though severe was on the whole wise and good, but it was little more than a dead letter. Rulers from the highest to the lowest decided cases according to their own judgement, or more frequently according to their own interest . . . The punishments were cruel and severe. The lowest in the scale was imprisonment in fetters. The prisons were miserable places in point of accommodation and as insecure as they were insanitary. Their insecurity gave rise to the necessity of every prisoner being put in the stocks. Fetters varied, according to circumstances, from one pair to nine. No definite term of imprisonment was specified. A man simply went to gaol and stayed there ordinarily till no more could be got out of him and his friends. Food had to be provided for him by relations. If he had none, he had to beg for his bread and was allowed to clank about the streets in his irons for the purpose. Other punishments were confiscation, flogging, mutilation, perpetual slavery at the pagodas, and various forms of death, more or less cruel. Decapitation was the most common, and crucifixion was the usual punishment for dacoits. They were, however, usually killed before they were tied up, or immediately afterwards. Money, however, would expiate any offence, except treason and sacrilege. The incorrigible, when no longer able to pay fines, were tattooed with a circle on the cheek . . . In important trials torture was applied to both principals and witnesses, and gaolers frequently had recourse to modified forms of it for the purpose of extorting their money from prisoners.[17]

The portrayal of Burma's legal system stood in contrast to the ways in which Scott represented the British efforts to administer the law. Scott may well have followed Henry Gouger's work, which actually referred to conditions about 75 years earlier. Unlike the discussion of the villages (which could not remain enmeshed in the past) the articulation of the Burmese legal system was a past reality, which so usefully contrasted with the British rule of law in the present.

These brief snippets of the *Gazetteer*, then, reveal an attempt to provide up-to-date information about Burma at the turn of the century. At the heart of this work stood a view of history—namely that Burma was decisively changed for the good by British colonization. The monarchy, the villages, commerce, government structure and legal protections were all profoundly different (and mostly inferior) and now belonged to the past. It may not have been Scott's immediate intention, but the use of the past in the *Gazetteer*, like the efforts which would be made by the Archaeological Survey, clearly served to legitimate colonial rule. In tracing the last generation of the Konbaung Dynasty, Scott was not only establishing a basic narrative, but making it possible for Burma's history to be reformulated as part of a larger unitary colonial narrative. That is, with Burma now under British rule, the story of the end of the kingdom could be a key episode in the making of a new Burma, easily improved by British rule. In fact, it was a formulation which found many echoes (including the outlook associated with the Burmascape) and affinities: the work of colonial civil servants, the study of Burmese objects, the labors of the archaeologists and the exploration of Burma's traditions were all serving to produce a unified past which situated the temporal and cultural boundaries of colonial society.

Scott as a Victorian

Post-colonial scholarship has been largely successful at depicting the shortcomings of 'colonial knowledge'. Many of these arguments have their merits; however, when assessing Scott and some of the British writing about Burma it is hard to escape the fact that they bore the stamp of their time—the Victorian or 19th century discourses which proved to be so influential and were therefore so worthy of criticism. That is, the fascination with description, which was discussed in chapter one, was amply exhibited by the *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States*.

Scott's historical writings reflect many of the anxieties which were also in evidence within the publications of leading metropolitan authors. To begin with, the desire to preserve the past (in its many manifestations) was a major concern—if not an obsession—with the Victorians. John Ruskin, William Morris and others did much to launch what would later be called 'the heritage crusade'.[18] This cultural impulse may have itself been a reflection of a still deeper one: namely, the fascination with things. The Victorian obsession with the object—which was manifest in the Great Exhibition of 1851, the development of museum collections,

the debates about industrial design, the new opportunities for shopping and in so many other ways—found its way to the study of things Burmese. The same might be said for documentation. Scott deployed documentary evidence where he found it and, in so doing, was obeying one of the cultural imperatives of his day.

Scott's portrait of the court life might today seem priggish or compulsive, but despite the fact—possibly because of it—that the Victorians were moving towards political and cultural democratization, they were no less concerned with hierarchy. When Scott's fascination with the details of the court are addressed, it is worth noting that the same culture produced *Alice in Wonderland* and made Queen Victoria's *Leaves from the Journal of our Life in the Highlands* into a national bestseller. One eminent historian has provocatively put this into the broader pattern of world history and referred to the importance of 'ornamentalism' in imperial thinking.[19]

Furthermore, the Victorian attempts to make sense of the past increasingly sought to do so without reference to moral judgements. Lord Acton worried about this, and Scott's inclusion of multiple voices looked ahead to the value placed on inclusivity as well as objectivity. Yet, my argument here has been that for all of these efforts, Scott individually, and the British collectively, seem to have left Burma with a unified history—which not surprisingly met their own needs.

One of the things which the British historical thinkers were less alert to was the use of the past—both as it was preserved and as written history. In this sense, the work of post-colonial scholarship has gone a good way to making the Victorians and their Edwardian successors, who sat atop the world's largest and most powerful empire, look naïve. Scott was like many of the British writers: he sought objectivity; eschewed moral judgments; believed that a range of artifacts could disclose substantial meanings; relied on documentary evidence; and laboured to preserve the past as he found it. Nonetheless, for all of these exertions these authors produced a narrative of Burma's history in which monuments exist to proclaim the decay and lawlessness that dominated a corrupt and scarcely competent but often cruel monarchy. That is, Burma's monuments must be preserved, its chronicles studied, and cultural habits recorded—but the direction (and meaning) of its history were easily already evident.[20]

Finally, to return to 'old Burma' it might be more accurate to say that it was invented rather than interpreted. New Burma—the combination of British rule, modernization and commercial interests in the Indian Ocean—required the creation of old Burma and with it a rewriting of

its history. Most of the British writing about Burma's history was not without bias, but sought to recover and preserve the past based upon the achievements of Victorian historical thinking. In fact, this body of scholarship should not be forgotten, but itself be viewed as a revolution in the exploration of the country. Burma—Myanmar—would be studied differently, in fact it had to be. Scholars who study Myanmar under the umbrella of Southeast Asian Studies may have more in common with their predecessors than they might believe. Most are not Burmese and many live outside the country, but draw inspiration from regional scholarship and the worlds of university publishing. The point to contemplate here is that these scholars have their agendas, biases and interests as did the Victorians. Despite their achievements, the Victorians are now easily dismissed, but in exhibiting the work of Scott and other Burmaphiles it should be clear that they are worthy of study in their own right.

Harold Fielding-Hall: an early attempt to preserve memory

Another Burmaphile, Harold Fielding-Hall (1859–1917), produced works which were attempts to preserve the memories of the court life of the Konbaung Dynasty. In two publications, *Thibaw's Queen* and *Palace Tales*, Fielding-Hall sought to revise the picture of the Konbaung court. While he did not ultimately disagree with Scott, he tried to represent exiled monarchy more positively. More than most observers, he was sensitive to the ways in which myths are often created in the present about events in the recent past. He opined that of the events of the last two reigns (Mindon Min's and Thibaw's) 'it is extraordinary to find how ignorant we are, how little we know of the kings and the government of those times . . . If they had been a thousand years ago we could not know less. We have curious stories that is all.'[21]

Fielding-Hall wrote out of a sense of crisis: he interviewed former members of the court in order to keep their voices from being forgotten. The facets of court which *Thibaw's Queen* exhibited have not often been the province of academic historians, but Fielding-Hall grasped that they were to be captured while they still could be. That is, he understood better than most that the survival of the things past into the present and future is inherently difficult. Fielding-Hall was almost certainly captivated by what he heard:

> [I]t was very pleasant in the palace. There was little work to do attending the queen, it was a pleasure not work. The maids read aloud to

> her sometimes, sacred books and books of plays, and every one would listen, and stories would be told . . . There were always something to play at, always so many to play with, all girls. No, of course we were not allowed to have pages to play with. They kept to their place in the palace, to their apartments and their duties, and we kept ours . . . We played all our games among ourselves with the queen and sometimes the king. We used to play many games. There was hide-and-seek in the gardens . . . The queen too would hide and we would look for her. It was not a proper thing to find the queen, and so the princesses and the maids of honour would go wandering about and looking in all the wrong places. "What happened if any one was rash enough to find the queen?" I asked. The girl laughed. It appears that when she first went to the palace and played hide-and-seek she found the queen. "For indeed it was easy enough. I could see her kneeling down on a little hill behind a clump of bamboos. Every one who looked could see. I went up and found her. I thought I was clever," "And then?" "She boxed my ears. She was angry." . . . No one could ever find her but the king, if he were playing with us. Then after a time when she was tired of seeing us wander up and down and look in all the wrong places, she would come out laughing, and say she was too clever for us and some one else must hide.[22]

Again, it might be remembered that when Fielding-Hall made these efforts oral history was an unknown sub-field of academic history. In some ways, then, he appears as a farsighted observer who recognized before many of his peers the need to preserve memory.

The Curzonian moment: the need to recover Burma's ancient past

Lord Curzon's tour to Burma—a place he scarcely knew but appeared to have enjoyed—had a significant impact upon the organization of the past in new century Burma. Curzon reached Mandalay in November 1901 and it was at a Durbar for Shan princes that he delivered a speech on the importance of historic preservation. Curzon delivered the speech (which would later be the Minute of December 1901) at the Palace, which had been the home of the Upper Burmah Club. Members had to have been shocked when Curzon evicted them from the premises:

> The Club should be given notice to leave at the same time. There has, I believe, been some talk of a lease that was alleged to have been

> given to the Club for a term of years. But no evidence of such an arrangement exists: nor would it have been in the power of a Local Government to dispose of a Public Building in such a fashion without superior sanction. The main reason for the removal of the Club is, as has already been pointed out, the danger of fire. Moreover, its continued presence in one of the principal Palace buildings, though I believe fraught with little or no damage to the latter, which seems to have been treated with praiseworthy care, conflicts with the principle upon which the whole is to be preserved as a national monument. There will be less need for so large a club building for Europeans in the future, owing to a reduction of the garrison of Fort Dufferin; and it will be for the Local Government and the members of the club to decide where they can be accommodated.[23]

In essence, Curzon was arguing that the preservation of the Palace as a national monument was serving a public good. Curzon's ideas about the significance of historic preservation reflected his earlier work in India. In 1899 he had argued that preserving old buildings was a responsibility of government. In India he had had to argue against conservative Christians who were opposed to the preservation of buildings which had functioned in religious traditions which they deemed to be pagan. For Curzon, the original function of the building was much less important than its preservation:

> If there be any one who says to me that there is no duty devolving upon a Christian government to preserve the monuments of a pagan art, or the sanctuaries of an alien faith, I cannot pause to argue with such a man. Art and beauty, and the reverence that is owing to all that has evoked human genius or has inspired human faith, are independent of creeds, and, in so far as they touch the sphere of religion, are embraced by the common religion of all mankind. Viewed from this standpoint, the rock temple of the Brahmans stands on precisely the same footing as the Buddhist Vihara, and the Mohammedan Musjid as the Christian cathedral. There is no principle of artistic discrimination between the mausoleum of the despot and the sepulchre of the saint. What is beautiful, what is historic, what tears the mask off the face of the past, and helps us to read its riddles, and to look it in the eyes—these are not the dogmas of combative theology, but are principal criteria to which we must look . . . To us the relics of Hindu and Mohammedan, of Buddhist, Brahmin, and Jain, are, from the antiquarian, the historical, and the artistic point of view equally

> interesting and equally sacred. One does not excite a more vivid and the other a weaker emotion. Each represents the glories or the faith of a branch of the human family. Each fills a chapter in Indian history. Each is part of the heritage which Providence has committed to the custody of the ruling power.[24]

In practice, Curzon substantially increased the funding for local projects which were devoted to the conservation and preservation of buildings. This included the restoration of key monuments at Agra to their original conditions. Consequently, when Curzon removed the Upper Burmah Club from the Palace, he was making a decisive commitment to historic preservation. Interestingly, he was critical of some potential local initiatives (such as the possibility that Burma would have its own university), but his impact upon the study of Burma's past was decisive. Curzon's intervention advocated archaeology as well as historic preservation.

The history of archaeology and historic preservation in Burma remains to be written, but the annual *Report on Archaeological Work in Burma* provides a useful overview of the subject. In response to criticism from India, the Archaeological Survey began to compile a list of the buildings and monuments 'which are already being maintained and conserved at Government expense'.[25] The list which accompanied the 1902–1903 report is impressive: 18 structures were under some form of maintenance by the Public Works department. These included a range of sites (not all ancient) including King Mindon's tomb, Mandalay Palace, the Queen's monastery (built by Supayalat), King Alaungpaya's tomb and a number of famous pagodas. Annada, Gawdawpalin, Thatbyinnyu and Shwegugyi—all at Pagan—were being maintained by the public works department. The following year evinced a larger commitment when the government archaeologist recommended 32 new projects for preservation. Most of these would be undertaken in the coming decade.[26]

Taw Sein Ko remembered the history of archaeology in Burma differently. The appointment of Dr E. Forchammer, with whom Taw Sein Ko had worked, to the position of government archaeologist in 1881 was the beginning of the discipline in Burma. It would be Forchammer who published on sites in Akyab and Rangoon. However, when Forchammer died in 1890 he was not replaced until 1899, and in Taw Sein Ko's words 'the active archaeological research in Burma remained in abeyance'.[27] It would be Taw Sein Ko who was appointed government archaeologist in 1899, and over the next 20 years he would systematically organize the study of Pagan. As we will see in the next chapter, Taw Sein Ko would engage a number of public issues, but it would be as the director of the

Archaeological Survey that he would make his mark. His writings have never been adequately analyzed, but in the two-volume compilation *Burmese Sketches* there appear 70 articles dedicated to the interpretation of key archaeological sites. Upon his retirement in 1920, the *Rangoon Times* saluted him for the 'elucidation of the many historical and artistic problems presented by the growing collection of inscriptions and of archaeological discoveries in Burma'.[28] Taw Sein Ko, after all, had brought a wide knowledge of Asia to the study of local monuments and concluded that the 'archaeological buildings of Burma form a distinct group by themselves'.[29]

Taw Sein Ko claimed that all 'conceivable forms of Burmese architecture are found at Pagan'.[30] It is significant that the British fascination with Pagan actually came late, in the wake of the Third Anglo-Burmese War. Paul Strachan has recounted the Western 'discovery' of Pagan, arguing that it is impossible to situate. Strachan cites a number of figures who visited during the 18th and early 19th centuries, focusing first on Michael Symes and then John Crawfurd and ultimately Arthur Phayre's 1855 embassy to Ava.[31] This narrative is useful for developing a genealogy of Western or British comprehension of Pagan (and other sites in Southeast Asia) but the attempt to trace 'the discovery'—as interesting as it may be—may not be as useful as determining the process by which Pagan came to signify things which proved to be important for both the British and their Burmese subjects.

Pagan became increasingly important as the 20th century approached. Not only did this reflect the fact that the British now controlled all of Burma, but it also pointed to the broader 'orientalist' project to describe, classify, analyze and ultimately evaluate ancient ruins in South and Southeast Asia. In the case of newly unified Burma, Pagan was very useful to the Burmascape which colonial officials saw and wanted those outside to see. In any event, invoking the concept of 'orientalism' carries with it the risk of devaluing these efforts: European writers were not only interested in the ancient pasts of now-colonized countries, but also concerned with the ways in which the prominent realities of the past were now disappearing in metropolitan countries. To study the ancient ruins of Southeast Asia (or 'Further India' as more commonly described in around 1900)—in this case Burma—may have meant coming to the subject with an 'orientalist' mindset; but if so, it was a mindset which was already discomforted by an assumption about the inevitability of disruptive modernity.

In addition to Scott and Fielding-Hall, a number of British writers had regarded Pagan as critical to Burma. In *The Burman* Scott noted that

Pagan was in many respects the 'most remarkable religious city in the world'.[32] He informed his readers that the city was deserted 'for the few flimsy huts that stand by the river are inhabited only by pagoda slaves and men condemned to perpetual beggary'.[33] O'Connor would expand on Scott's assertion that despite the pagoda laves Pagan was superior to anything in India.[34]

In *Mandalay and Other Cities of the Past in Burma* O'Connor attempted to interpret the significance of Pagan.[35] O'Connor was impressed with the discontinuities which seemed to define Burma's history. These 'ruptures', as such, provided shape to comprehending the land and its peoples in the present:

> [T]he Past holds the secret of the Present in its hands . . . The Buddhist religion has grafted upon this instinct the disregard of merely material things; and it is the simple truth that nearly every man and woman in Burma to this day is vastly more concerned with storing up spiritual merit than the good things of this world. Hence it has come that even at the height of its power and glory, and under the greatest of its kings, the nation has arrived at permanence only in its sacred edifices. The walls of its old cities alone challenge with the numberless Pagodas of Burma the memory of its past.[36]

In *Mandalay and Other Cities of the Past in Burma* (1907), Pagan mattered because it gave O'Connor the chance to measure the encroachment of modernity, contemplate the country's history, reaffirm Britain's role in 'the East', explore the fate of 'pagoda slaves' and separate Burma from India. Here, he argued that the Burman simply does not care as much about material pleasures—therefore, they are less competitive, but much wiser than their South Asian counterparts. Nonetheless, O'Connor, who may very well have followed Scott's description, found despair rather than pride in Pagan:

> But the supreme note, as it always is at Pagan, is one of desolation and despair; of desolation in these vast spaces crowded with decaying spires and ruined walls, the dead bones of the past; of despair of all human progress, since it is liable to such sweeping cataclysms as this. The mat hovels, the squalid hamlets, that now exist amongst the ruins are but a poor broken sequel to the old-time splendor of Pagan.[37]

This view of desolation was tied to a view of both history and the present. The contrasts between Pagan past and present signified that Burma

had not only a rich cultural heritage, but also one that had been mismanaged and poorly governed. Pagan proved to be commentary not only on the past, but also the dynamic and threatening realities of the present. Recent and contemporary Burma was signified by the fact that these temples were ruins and they had not been nurtured or maintained in a way that was evident to O'Connor. In addition, the pagoda slaves were an important signifier because they exhibited the desolate and backward condition of the country. Desolation, then, reinforced the rationale for colonial administration and Burma's place as a colony in the British empire.

Possibly with Indian immigration in the background, O'Connor asserted that the Burmese achievement at Pagan was actually superior to its counterparts in India.

> One does well to linger over the temples, for in their architecture they represent the utmost limit that has been attained in Burma. In 800 years there has been nothing done to surpass them. The problem as to how they came to be built at all is one of some fascination. The explanation in both cases seems to be that the impulse under which they were created was an exotic one, absorbed for the time being by the people, given a fresh vigour in their hands of national exaltation; but in essence, extraneous and short-lived. It may be also that the temples of Pagan, which in one sense are the glory of Burma, are in another an exhibition of her shame, since they display the inherent limits of the race, and seem to point to the lack of that quality of persistence in a people which can alone lift them to any great place in the world.[38]

Pagan represented a high-water mark of Burman history. As we have seen, Scott observed that Burman pride in Pagan was directly connected to the perceived superiority to counterparts in India. O'Connor may well have followed Scott, but by this time he was also able to draw on the scholarship which was not immediately available to the author of *The Burman*. More to the point, there was much greater urgency with this argument for O'Connor than there had been for Scott nearly a quarter of a century earlier.

Given the arguments of *The Silken East*, his antipathy to Indians in his treatment of Hindu images at Pagan was predictable. While acknowledging the critical importance of Indian influences, he speculated that Pagan was built with Indian labour and that a number of structures with Hindu ornamentation were erected for this migrant work force.

> West of the That-byin-nyu is a small ruined building described by the people as a Nat-house, but really a Hindu temple. It has been rifled of most of its statues, but there is still within a figure of Siva, with four arms holding a trident, a hammer, a short sword, and a bludgeon. On the outside are figures of the avatars of Vishnu. The temple it is conjectured, was built for the use of the Hindu stonemasons employed in the building of the great pagodas, and the conjecture is borne out by an inscription in Tamil characters of the thirteenth century which indicate that Pagan was restored at the time by Vaishnava Hindus from various parts of the India Peninsula.[39]

O'Connor postulated an 'Indian Ocean' answer: Indian coolies had been part of the construction of Pagan, but the Indian presences should in no way be exaggerated. In other words, Hindu images did not really belong to what was important or essential in Pagan. O'Connor might easily be accused here of reading what he rejected in Rangoon into Pagan and deeming it unworthy of Burma. Again, in using sculpture to interpret the history of labour, O'Connor was following Ruskin's analysis in *The Stones of Venice* (1851–1853) of Gothic workers in Venice. Yet, Ruskin examined the Ducal Palace and concluded that it revealed the excellent and free character of medieval workers; O'Connor drew on the role of stonemasons to separate things Indian apart from those Burmese.

At the same time, the treatment of the 'pagoda slave' may well have followed Scott, but O'Connor made it more vivid by a more specific discussion. Here, he may have followed *The Burman* in focusing on the status and condition of the pagoda slave. Both Scott and O'Connor moved beyond the 18th century's fascination with ruins to the human context which helped to define their landscape. That is, the ruins became the occasion not only to examine the remote past but to critically reflect on social inequality in the present. Using ruins to expose the disjuncture between a magisterial past and a pathetic state of affairs in the present proved to be a recurring theme of British travel writing in the 19th century. At mid-century John Ruskin had contrasted the secular or at least religiously indifferent behavior of Venetians to the builders of St. Mark's; even more striking was the contrast articulated by British travelers in Luxor and Cairo.

In addition, it furnished the opportunity to make reference to the 'resignation of the East'.[40]

> For Pagan, once the capital of an empire, is now the high capital of the pagoda slave. The great majority of people are slaves, the

> descendants of slaves, bound in perpetuity to the service of its countless shrines . . . Where shall one find anywhere a more striking illustration of the conservatism, of the resignation of the East? In all other matters the Burman has absorbed into his blood the Buddhist philosophy of equality and toleration. No caste distinctions bind him down, nor sour the social air he breathes. But in this one respect he is exclusive to the last degree. For the pagoda slave there is no room in the social life of Burma. Hospitable to the humblest passing stranger, the Burman will not marry the pagoda slave.[41]

The institution of pagoda slavery exhibited the backward practices of the Burmese—even though it existed under enlightened British rule.

Pagan, then, provided O'Connor with the occasion to address the future of the Burmans, portray Burmese achievements in a favorable light and situate both against the rising tide of modernity. The ruins of Pagan were useful—possibly essentially—to understanding what was happening to the country in the early 20th century.

Mandalay was comparatively less interesting—except as the place to decode the many failures of the last act of the Konbaung Dynasty. O'Connor recognized that Mandalay had urban problems, which included poverty and prostitution. Yet, its future was in question because 'its atmosphere is altogether of the past. It stands today for a dynasty that is no more, for a Court whose splendor and whose etiquette are already fading into oblivion.'[42] Rangoon, in contrast, stood for the future. To assess the city's future meant to see the new Burma: 'Its future is doubtful . . . Mandalay will retain its present proportions so long as the palace survives and it is the chief administrative centre of Upper Burma. But each year must lessen its importance by comparison with Rangoon; and as the population of the country increases and the new centres of activity are developed, it may cease even to be the second city in Burma.'[43]

The Burma research society: towards the development of a nationalist historiography

The legacy of these developments have been possibly underappreciated, but the move to organize Burma's past, at least partly in conjunction with the new unified state, might well be regarded as one of the building bricks of the 'imagined community' which would later develop into Myanmar. The creation of the Burma Research Society proved to be an important event which reflected both colonial priorities and early

nationalist aspirations. The inaugural meeting was held in 1910 and its membership included John Stuart, Maung May Oung, G.R.T. Ross, Maung Kin and Sir Herbert Thirkell White among the members of the colonial establishment in Rangoon. The Burma Research Society aimed to 'promote the study of questions relating to Burma, its history, its ethnology, its philology, and other cognate studies and at the same time, to foster, encourage, and increase the good feeling and mutual respect between the Briton and the Burman, which I am proud to say is a characteristic of our province'.[44] The publication of the first volume of the Burma Research Society's Journal the following year included works by the young John Furnivall, Taw Sein Ko, R. Grant Brown and Maung Tin. The topics included the study of matriarchy, Karen folklore, Burma's kings and translations of Burmese songs. Su Lin Lewis has suggested that a similar dynamic holds for the creation and development of the Siam Society.[45] The founding of the Siam Society was a 'strategic move' on the part of the country's aristocracy which was informed by sensitivity to Siam's place in the broader region. With the founding of *Ecole francais d'extreme orient* in Hanoi in 1902 and King Chulalongkorn's desire to 'project an image of Siam as a "civilized nation" on the world stage, on par with European nation states', the creation of the Siam Society (of which Sir George Scott and Taw Sein Ko were corresponding members) reflects an instance in which scholarship and nation building can be readily related.[46]

Maung May Oung's inaugural address stressed the possibility of developing knowledge which would focus upon Burma. What was envisioned might complement the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, which had been established more than a century earlier 'for reasons and with objects bearing in many respects a great resemblance to our own'.[47] He made the case not only for historical interpretation, but the possibility of collecting knowledge for future study:

> Here then is another thing which we can do, even the least gifted of us. We can put on record permanently the facts which strike us in our daily occupation. Half an hour's walk about Rangoon, half an hour on the great pagoda platform in a wholesome attitude of curiosity will enable us to put questions which we might ransack the Bernard Free Library to answer. Why for instance, are tagundains erected, why do they have streamers floating from them, why surmounted by the golden hintha, what is the general opinion among Burmans to account for them; why are so many pagodas octagonal at the base, why set them upon three tiered terraces, why build of

> brick; why is there a shrine in Merchant Street worshipped alike by Burman and Hindu; who built the thein from which the big bazaar derives its name, why is Shwe Dagon so called, why Sule Pagoda, why the Botatoung? . . . All of us can take notes, and all of us can wonder, and the Journal of this Society will form the permanent record of our notebooks and our wonderings.[48]

The aim of making things in Burma an important aim of study was coupled with the prospect of a modernized source for collective memory. As Maung May Oung put it: 'we must remember that we are young and as we are young we must be vigorous'.[49]

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that British historical interests shifted in the last decades of the 19th century. Imperial dominance over the whole country changed the priorities of those authors who were interested in trying to understanding Burmese history. Accordingly, it was no longer important to disparage the Konbaung Dynasty. Instead, with the assault on Burmese institutions, the veneration of the country's ancient past and the reframing of its future meant that a new grand narrative was on the horizon. More interesting, perhaps, the other great Victorian impulse—'heritage'—was at least as attractive, and furnished another resource for nation building. Fielding-Hall was hardly alone in worrying that the Burma that he had known—and heard about—was vanishing as the country became increasingly connected to the broader Indian Ocean world. The arrival of the new Burma made traditional Burma appealing; the realities of British power also ensured that the corruptions, incompetence and violence associated with it were no longer a threat. The forces which made the new Burma conceivable made the traditional Burma the subject of nostalgia and longing.

5
Translating Buddhism

British observers were nearly united in finding Buddhism to be one of the most conspicuous features of Burma.[1] Buddhism might well be regarded as one of the country's picturesque signifiers as the title of Gwendolen Trench Gascoigne's *Among Pagodas and Fair Ladies* (1896) suggests. Nonetheless, British assessments of Buddhism (which included its relationship with nat worship) diverged beyond these most basic considerations. This chapter will exhibit some of the range of this divergence: Nisbet and Talbot Kelly wondered about Buddhism's durability in the face of modernity and Christian missions. Taw Sein Ko, himself a committed Buddhist, understood the religion to be one of the cornerstones (the British empire was another) for the successful modernization of Burma. In contrast, Harold Fielding-Hall followed Sir George Scott and wrote from a Burmaphilic position to enable their readers (both colonial and metropolitan) to understand the appealing and humanistic side of the religion. The chapter will call attention to British converts to Buddhism and end with considerations that while many of these figures were publishing, the YMBA was born. At the same time, despite the fact that Buddhism was part of the Burmascape in that for all Britons it helped to signify Burma, the British were not alert to ways in which the religion itself was being transformed by developments in the 19th century. All told, understanding (and adapting) the role of Burmese Buddhism defined not only the turn of the century outlook, but the country's subsequent destiny.

Picturesque Buddhism

Buddhism was one of the key signifiers which not only denoted a distinctive Burmese identity, but suggested to the British that Burma was separate from India. Gascoigne's *Among Pagodas and Fair Ladies* linked the realities of the religion as she encountered them to a conception of the Orient as exotic and fascinating. For instance, pagodas were 'tapering,

picturesque edifices'[2] which signified nothing less than 'one of the greatest ambitions of a Burman's life'.[3] Gascoigne, who followed Scott (see below), noted the pagoda slaves at the Shwedagon even though she was attracted to the 'most picturesque little stalls' in which they worked. Her hope was that they might eventually achieve freedom under British rule, 'but as things move slowly in Burma, it will take time'.[4]

John Nisbet looked forward, but drew a different conclusion, believing that the combination of secular modernity and Christian teaching would prevail in Burma. Nisbet attempted to contextualize Burmese Buddhism by providing a history of the subject. Yet, his readers would have quickly discovered that he adopted the language of Christianity to describe Buddhism. Hence, he referred to the hierarchy as archbishop, high and low church and might be said to have first unintentionally 'baptized' his subject matter. While he viewed Buddhism as an import from India, he assumed that it went through transformation when it encountered the presence of nat worship in Burma.[5] Consequently, he regarded Buddhism in Burma as unique but he was not sufficiently impressed with its durability. Even though he expressed admiration for many of the practices associated with the *pongyi*, he believed that at the turn of the century Buddhism was on the defensive. Nisbet assumed that western secular education would ultimately replace what might be found in the monastery.[6] He predicted that the 'gradual advance of civilization in Burma must in course of time sap the political and social power of the monks, and must thereby inevitably tend to lessen the influence which Buddhism retains over the daily life of the Burman'.[7]

R. Talbot Kelly regarded Buddhism as the embodiment of Burma. Buddhist practices provided the subject matter for Kelly's many paintings of Burman life. In *Burma Painted & Described* (1905) Kelly noted that 'our occupation at Burma had practically destroyed a nation',[8] but argued that Buddhism was far from decline. Instead, it was in their 'religious buildings . . . that we recognize the chief expression of their art sense, where influenced by their environment and imitating the exuberance of nature, they are elaborate in design and lavish in their decoration'.[9] With his commitment to the natural world and belief that art should express it, Kelly showed that there was a hint of Ruskin in his thought. He elaborated that it was precisely in pagoda building that the vitality of the religion was clearly exhibited. Having been told by a friend that he would become sick from seeing too many pagodas, Kelly found that his interest grew the more he studied them. Kelly worried that piety would overcome artistic considerations: '[T]he religion of the Burman is active and living, though many of these buildings are the tangible expression

of the piety of past generations, new pagodas and kyaungs are constantly springing up, while many existing shrines are annually being added to and enriched by devotees of the present day.'[10] Kelly worried that the enthusiasm of many believers actually endangered the major pagodas and he called for a 'department of preservation . . . in whose hands would rest the restoration and preservation of the best examples of native art'.[11] He added that such a body would be able to 'guide the enthusiasm of present-day devotees into channels of usefulness' in order to prevent the corruption of buildings.[12] Here, Kelly was bringing to Burma his experiences in Egypt, where the concern for historic preservation had become a priority at least a generation earlier.

British converts to Buddhism

One of the most direct attempts to translate Buddhism came from Bikkhu Ananda Metteya, whose original name was Allan Bennett. Bikkhu Ananda Metteya had been trained as a chemist, but left Britain after a breakdown. His youthful encounter with Sir Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia* proved to be decisive, leading him to convert to Buddhism by the time he was 18. It would be in the 1890s that Bennett was closely acquainted with a number of avant-garde or radical ideas associated with the occult. In particular, he was a founding member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and it was through this connection that he became closely associated with Aleister Crowley. He went to Ceylon in 1900 and spent quite a bit of time in British Burma, where he would be ordained as a Therevada monk. In *The Religion of Burma*, a book published after his death, the imperative for translation was explained by the anonymous editor:

> Has he, like so many western expositors, introduced into his expositions modern ideas of his own? . . . We may indeed, in the name of sound scholarship, refuse to call the whole content of these essays by the name "Buddhism." . . . they are a compound of certain ideas of Pali Buddhism with certain ideas of modern origin. But what if the need of the West to-day be just such a compound?[13]

Bikkhu Ananda Metteya might well be accused of not understanding the religion to which he had converted, but it would be clear that he wrestled with the means to communicate what he believed (and what he believed Burmans believed) to his readers. To cite one example, Bikkhu Ananda Metteya tried to explain the way that Buddhism was practiced in Burma and he did so by comparison with Christian practice:

> In this religion there is nothing to correspond to the definite creeds and sacraments familiar to western minds. But there is a formula which—always understanding that in itself there lies no special saving power—has come to be regarded as marking the formal entry of a person into the numbers of lay disciples of The Buddha; the recitation of which thus, in a sense, may be regarded as the equivalent of the Christian baptism, or the public enunciation of one of the various Christian creeds.[14]

The Threefold Refuge, 'I go to the Buddha as my refuge [or as my guide], I go to the Truth as my Refuge, I go to the Order as my Refuge' would be cited at the beginning of any religious function in Burma.[15]

Bikkhu Ananda Metteya would return to Britain, and in 1908 he became one of the founding members of the Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland.[16] Other converts continued to play an active role in Burma: U Silacara would lecture to students at Rangoon on the connections between intoxicants and disease;[17] it would be an Irish convert U Dhammaloka, who reinitiated the 'shoe controversy' in 1901 when he confronted an Indian police officer regarding wearing shoes on the grounds of a pagoda.[18]

The task of understanding Buddhism in Burma

The publication of *Modern Buddhism in Burma* (1914) reflected a long-standing interest that church missions had developed in what was regarded as a competitor.[19] Missionaries had been present in Burma throughout most of the 19th century, but in the new century a good number of mission leaders sought to make a concentrated effort to study Buddhism. To that end, they sent out a questionnaire—of over 60 questions—to both missionaries and Buddhist leaders (the latter answered in both Burmese and English) in which they sought answers about the current status of the religion. The authors, W.C.B. Purser and K.J. Saunders, edited the answers from more than 30 correspondents, which they published as *Modern Buddhism in Burma*. For our purposes, here, this work is useful not only for its answers but for its questions.

These authors were concerned about Buddhism's impact upon children, women, 'the average man' and people of different ages. Some questions focused upon Buddhist education, while others were open-ended: 'In what do you consider the main strength of Modern Buddhism to be?' Not surprisingly, they were also interested in how Buddhists perceived Christianity and some of its theological presuppositions. At the same

time, there were questions about the status and condition of Buddhism in Burma as well as social inequality: 'Is the inequality of suffering a hindrance of the progress of Christianity among Buddhists?' Furthermore, the authors raised enquiries about 'evil spirits' and nat worship in Burma.[20] The questionnaire contained questions of Buddhist doctrines and practices. One question explored Buddhist perceptions of Christianity: 'In what points do Buddhists regard their religion as superior to Christianity?' Another enquired about Ledi Sayadaw (who will be discussed in chapter eight), while one also asked respondents to address the ways in which Buddhism might be meeting needs in the present.[21]

What is striking about the effort, methodology and responses are the presuppositions revealed by the questions. For the authors Buddhism was a formidable force in Burma and one that they did not understand particularly well. However, they believed, as they undoubtedly believed about Christianity, that it had to be modernized to stay relevant in the 20th century. The possibility that Buddhists might themselves have the intellectual doctrines to engage modernity (and with it British rule) does not appear to be worthy of interrogation by correspondence.

Translating Buddhism: Scott and Fielding-Hall

If the encounter with Buddhism produced 'picturesque' memories or in a small number of cases conversions, it was also one of the motivations for Harold Fielding-Hall to write *The Soul of the People*, which attempted to make lived realities of the religion accessible to Western readers. *The Soul of the People* is arguably the best known book written about Buddhism in Burma. Yet, Fielding-Hall was actually following Scott who had published *The Burman* under the pseudonym Shway Yoe, which meant 'Golden Truth' in Burmese. The narrative structure of this work might well have earmarked it as the ultimate Burmaphile achievement. Instead of writing a travel memoir, Shway Yoe presented the life of a Burman from birth to death. This narrative gave him the opportunity to present a nearly comprehensive picture of life in Burma. Consequently, Buddhism was not presented as an 'other' but instead as a basis for ordinary experience. After all, Shway Yoe explained: '[T]he best thing that a Burman can wish for a good Englishman is that in some future existence, as a reward of good works, he may be born a Buddhist and if possible a Burman.'[22] Scott's Buddhism was a living religion as he depicted the struggle between the Sulagandis and the Mahagandis. The former emphasized strict monastic doctrines, while the latter might be charged with 'many laxities'.[23] For Scott, the tensions between these

sects illustrated the vitality of the religion, but also the encroachment of modernity. Yet, for all of its vigour, Buddhism was challenged by the presence of nat worship.

Nonetheless, Shway Yoe ultimately translated Buddhism by domesticating it. Buddhism was not an exotic 'other' but a universal religion which had much in common with the chief religion practiced in Britain, as the 'moral truths of both Christianity and Buddhism are practically the same'.[24] Shway Yoe represented Buddhism as individualistic: 'No one, not even Shin Gautama himself, can help a man in his strivings to lead a holy life. None but the individual in his own person can work out his special salvation, and he tries to do so by setting a splendid ideal before his mind.'[25] In making Buddhism individualistic, Scott was making an argument which would have been attractive to those segments of British society who were influenced by the likes of John Stuart Mill and, more generally, libertarian thought. He extended the individualism to the practice of worship: 'there is no formal service. Every man is responsible to himself for his religious state.'[26] In addition, Buddhism was 'thoroughly democratic' because a man 'is only what he is through his actions in past existences'.[27]

If Scott created a narrative which would challenge the common Western travelogue about Burma, Fielding-Hall wrote to undermine the importance and relevance of academic scholarship about Buddhism. Fielding-Hall spent considerable energy translating Burmese religious practices (including Buddhism) into categories and forms of life which would be recognizable to his contemporaries. In so doing, he was prepared to reject or diminish the significance of the assumptions upon which scholarship about Buddhism rested. In his other works he had challenged the production of knowledge and sought to restore some dignity to the discredited Konbaung Dynasty. In both *The Soul of a People* and *The Inward Light*, he challenged the academic expert writers who had acquired or were in the process of building reputations in the metropolitan world. For the most part, Fielding-Hall did not engage them directly but offered portraits of Buddhism which he offered as immediate and more relevant to those produced by scholarship.

Like many of the other Burmaphiles, Fielding-Hall's authorship might be taken as a sustained polemic against crude 'orientalist' assumptions about Burma and, more generally, all that was meant by 'the East'. Fielding-Hall's period of service came after Burma was unified under British rule and became a singular entity for the first time in nearly three generations. One of the consequences of this development was that Buddhism became even more important to colonial administrators. While

it might be safely regarded as part of the 'picturesque' East, the religion offered both challenges and opportunities for colonial governance. British cultural practices could produce situations which at the least undermined their legitimacy and at the most strengthened the resolve of those opposed to colonial rule or those who fantasized about that possibility. Yet, British administrators could look to Buddhism as an intermediary which might encourage people not to stray into dacoity and criminal activities. Later, this would be extended to substance abuse and the social ills which the British believed accompanied it.

The end of the Konbaung Dynasty produced a wave of new writing about Burma, and this might be easily related to the study of Buddhism. Most notably, Richard Carnac Temple (1850–1931) focused his efforts on Burma's religious history. Temple, like many Britons who wrote while serving as a civil servant, produced some detailed studies which attempted to situate Buddhism against the country's longer history. In particular, he authored *Notes on Antiquities in Ramannadesa: The Talaing Country of Burma* (1894) and eventually *The Thirty-Seven Nats: A Phase of Spirit Worship Prevailing in Burma* (1906). These publications explored the origins, practices and iconography of nat worship. It might be added that Temple's painstaking analysis was built partly upon some of Taw Sein Ko's scholarship.[28]

The interest in Buddhism reflected even broader trends in the study of religion. Buddhism became a recognized field of study in Europe during the 19th century. Philip C. Almond has argued that it was in the 19th century that the Victorian could be said to have discovered Buddhism by imaginatively creating it.[29] This meant that Buddhism emerged as an 'object of discourse' which reflected key Victorian presuppositions.[30] Even though Europeans knew about Gautama and what would later be described as the subsequent religious practices associated with him, it was in the first half of the 19th century the religion might be said to have been 'discovered'.[31] As Almond indicated, it 'becomes an object, is constituted as such; it takes form as an entity that "exists" over and against the various cultures which can now be perceived as instancing it, manifesting it, in an enormous variety of ways'.[32] During the 1850s Buddhism became reified as a 'textual object'.[33] The origins of the religion would then be studied; it would compared with Brahmanism in order to try to fix the time of its beginning and development. This would be followed by a 'search for the historical Buddha' and debates about the significance of its doctrines. In fact, Max Muller remarked that the 'very existence of such a being as Buddha, the son of Suddhodana, King of Kapilavastu, has been doubted'.[34]

Here, attempts to find the historical Buddha might be compared with the work of Brian Houghton Hodgson (1800–1894) who advanced the study for the subject in the West. It would be Hodgson who served as the Assistant Resident for Great Britain at the court of Nepal and who collected Sanskrit manuscripts which formed the basis for subsequent scholarship. Notably, Hodgson sent a large number to Eugene Burnouf, and those documents shaped the latter's *Introduction à l'histoire du Buddhisme indien*. In addition, he collected several hundred manuscripts which were sent to libraries in Oxford, Paris, London and Calcutta.[35] The academic investigation of Buddhism, then, benefitted from the expanding imperial linkages between Asia and Europe. That said, it would be an oversimplification—albeit a tempting one—to see the study of Buddhism as merely another chapter in the march of colonial knowledge. Rather, the process by which Buddhism became understood academically actually mirrors that of Christianity (normally regarded as a Western subject) because it was in the 19th century that scholars sought nothing less than to be able to precisely identify, describe and define the religion's history and key practices. To carry this further, one of the most iconic projects of this avenue of scholarly activity was the search to reconstruct the life of Jesus. In fact, it was a major cultural event when David Friedrich Strauss's *Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (1835) appeared, because it argued that the New Testament writings were mostly mythological.[36] Consequently, perhaps, a great deal of energy was expended by scholars who sought to write a definitive life of Jesus. More important, the quest to understand Jesus as a historical figure led to an explosion of activity, leading scholars to search for evidence in archaeology, literary criticism, history and other disciplines.

The search for the historical Jesus found a ready parallel with the attempts to reconstruct the life of Gautama. These efforts could be readily found in Burma in the work of Bishop Paul Ambrose Bigandet's (1813–1894) biography. This work, *The Life and Legend of Gaudama, the Buddha of the Burmese, with annotations: The ways to neibban, and notice on the phongyies, or Burmese monks* (1866), which would be read by European authors interested in writing about Burma, was essentially the publication of a manuscript that had been translated and made available to an audience who wanted to know more about the religion's 'founder'. It might be noted that the academic exploration of these religions was shaped by a number of historicist assumptions, which was also consistent with the evidence-based positivism that was a feature of the Victorian outlook. Accordingly, the past could be reconstructed and known through careful, often painstaking examination of evidence. World

religions, as they were understood, could be grasped through the patient analysis of the kind of key texts which had been collected by Hodgson and others.

Consequently, the 19th century witnessed what could be regarded as a shift in the basis of expertise: the interpretative authority for the scholarly exploration moved from the enquiring traveler to the academic expert. Interpreting and explaining Buddhism became the province of 'professional Orientalists in the academies in Europe'.[37] Buddhist texts were increasingly available in both Europe and North America, and the analysis of those texts could make accessible Buddhism's practices and manifestations as they existed in Siam, Burma and Ceylon. Even though the source of interpretation of religion became increasingly situated within the metropole, it continued to bear the stamp of colonial knowledge production.[38] At the same time, the 19th century might well be regarded as a kind of golden age for the study of mythologies. Some of the leading intellects in Britain worked on the collection and interpretation of myths. Most prominent of these would be Max Muller whose scholarship made him an internationally recognized authority on myths. Muller was hardly alone: Edward Tylor, Andrew Lang, Sir James George Frazer and Ellen Harrison all built careers recovering and comparing myths.[39] With respect to Burma, Muller, whose work Fielding-Hall had studied, subordinated the origins, meaning and development of Buddhism to the wider patterns of mythological exploration. This made it an Indian subject, which would be the approach taken by T. Rhys Davids, who in 1877 argued that Buddhism was the product of the phases of Indian religion out of which Hinduism later developed.[40]

The Soul of a People was written, almost certainly, in response to the emergence of the academic study of Buddhism. Fielding-Hall sought to portray the religion in Burma from a non-scholarly perspective. In fact, Fielding-Hall was following Scott, but doing so nearly a generation later. To be sure, *The Soul of the People* drew upon modern scholarship as Fielding-Hall acknowledged relying on Bishop Bigandet's work for its translations, but claimed that he was not 'indebted to anyone else'.[41] Fielding-Hall used T. Rhys Davids and Max Muller to reject their significance. Essentially, Fielding-Hall believed that modern scholarship had produced a healthy body of knowledge about Buddhism, but it had not produced writings which were relevant to Burma or to understanding its peoples. His aim, in contrast, would be to comprehend Buddhism as its practitioners in Burma did. Therefore, the basis on which he constructed his arguments was different (and actually superior in many respects) from its academic counterparts:

> that although I know nothing that previous writers have not known, although I cannot bring to the task anything like their knowledge, yet I have something to say that they have not said. For they have written of him as they have learned from books, whereas I want to write of him as I have learned from men. Their knowledge has been taken from the records of the dead past, whereas mine is from the actualities of the living present . . . The Burmese regard the life of the Buddha from quite a different standpoint to that of an outsider, and so it has to them quite a different value, quite a different meaning, to that which it has to the student of history . . . For to the writer who studies the life of the Buddha with a view merely to learn what that life was, and to criticize it, everything is very different to what it is to the Buddhist who studies that life because he loves it and admires it, and because he desires to follow it. To the former the whole detail of every portion of life of the Buddha, every word of his teaching, every act of his ministry, is sought out and compared and considered. Legend is compared with legend, and tradition with tradition, that out of many authorities some clue to the actual fact may be found. But to the Buddhist the important parts in the great teacher's life are those acts, those words, that appeal directly to him, that stand out bravely, lit with light of his own experiences and feelings, that assist him in living his own life. His Buddha is the Buddha he understands, and who understood and sympathized with such as him.[42]

Fielding-Hall's rejection of the knowledge extracted from 'the records of the dead past' in favor of his own observations might be said to anticipate not only some critiques of 'colonial knowledge', but the methodology of the participant observer. Nonetheless, in repudiating many of the conventions of recent academic writing, he was actually well within the parameters laid down by those Victorian writers who assailed the quality of knowledge produced by modern society.

Instead, his writings evinced a perspective which ran at variance not only with scholarship, but with many of the central tenets of cultural exploration and management which could be found in British Burma. Fielding-Hall looked askance at the tendency of imperial governments to focus on the artifacts, archaeological sites and ideas of antiquity. Just as Fielding-Hall rejected the status of history written from a colonial perspective which devalued the recent past, in *The Soul of a People* he challenged the scholarly investigations of Buddhism. Elsewhere, Fielding-Hall laboured to preserve the rapidly disappearing memories of the Konbaung court; understanding Buddhism required a different

approach: his works would elucidate the popular forms of Buddhist practice in order to exhibit what the religion meant to many of Burma's peoples.

Yet, Fielding-Hall's approach was to detach Burmese Buddhism from many of the concerns which faced both British and Burman leaders after the Third Anglo-Burmese War. Fielding-Hall's portrait of Buddhism is powerful—but is fairly simple, offering a nearly monolithic conception of both the country's monks and the practice of monasticism. He does not appear to have been familiar with the agendas of the Sangha—the Parupana-Ekamsika controversy (resolved in the 18th century), the impact of the Sangha on the moral life of rural communities or the persistent challenge inherent in interpreting the Vinaya rules—as it had occurred in Burma before the arrival of the British.[43] His effort to portray the life of monks appears to come from a distance: he either disregarded or was possibly ignorant of the importance of the Shwegyin sect which developed after 1860.[44] It might be argued, as well, that Fielding-Hall missed the opportunity to try to portray positive interactions between Buddhist leaders and British administrators. However, Fielding-Hall's writings were largely free of the hymns of praise—the sudden justifications for British rule which often punctuated the passages of British authors. Fielding-Hall believed in British rule, but he wrote because he sensed that it could easily be accompanied by indifference in British Burma, which might help to compound the ignorance about the country elsewhere.

At the same time, Fielding-Hall could be said to have followed Temple (and others) who believed that nat worship was a defining feature of religious practice in Burma. The correspondents who participated in the making of *Modern Buddhism in Burma* wrestled with the relationship between Buddhism and nat worship. U Shwe Kyu stated that 'Six or more out of every ten nominal Buddhists are not free from Nats-worship.'[45] U Hpay added that 'Animism and Buddhism have been so blended that it is hard to distinguish between them.' He added that a Burman or Karen might be claimed to be a soul with 'two compartments, one of which is devoted to Nats and the other to Buddha'. Tsaw Hla Phroo added that the two modes of worship could 'hardly be distinguished from one another'.[46] For Fielding-Hall, nat worship and Buddhism were not incompatible; and, more interestingly, he dignified the former. There was more than a hint of romantic ideas in many of the Burmaphile writers, and with Fielding-Hall nat worship showed a sensitivity to the natural world absent in the Western world with the advent of modernity. His discussion about nats might well have regarded some

of the medievalist traditions of writing about what had been lost in Britain. More to the point, with echoes of the celebration of the mythological, he began with a declamation of loss worthy of many Romantic thinkers:

> All Romance has died out of our woods and hills in England, all our fairies are dead long ago. Knowledge so far has brought us only death . . . now all is dark. There are no dryads in our trees, no nymphs among the reeds that fringe that river; even our peaks hold for us no guardian spirit, that may take the reckless trespasser and bind him in a rock for ever. And because we have lost our belief in fairies, because we do not now think that that there are goblins in our caves, because there is no spirit in the winds nor voice in the thunder, we have come to think that the trees and the rocks, the flowers and storm, are all dead things. They are made up, we say, of materials that we know, they are governed by laws that we have discovered, and there is no life anywhere in Nature . . . yet this cannot be true. Far truer is it to believe in fairies and in spirits than in nothing at all; for surely there is life all about us. Who that has lived out in the forest, who that has lain upon the hillside and seen the mountains clothe themselves in lustrous shadows shot with crimson when the day dies, who that has heard the sigh come up out of the ravines where the little breezes move, who that has watched the trees sway their leaves to and fro, beckoning to each other with wayward amorous gestures, but has known that these are not dead things? . . . There is no consolation like the consolation of Nature no sympathy like the sympathy of the hills and streams; and sympathy comes from life. There is no sympathy with the dead.[47]

Nat worship did not demonstrate that Buddhism's hold over the population was superficial or weak (as Nisbet suggests), but instead it might be regarded as a practice which illustrated the dignity of life in Burma. That is, he drew upon the traditions of nat worship to denounce the 'cold materialism' of the Western mind.[48] The critique of dead knowledge, which might have ready precedents in the ideas of figures such as Carlyle and Ruskin, also meant that colonial authorities and British persons in Burma might actually be quite limited in their sensitivities to both Burma's peoples and the beauty of their religious life.

Like Shway Yoe before him, Fielding-Hall's homage to Buddhism and nat worship bore the stamp of Victorian cultural criticism. These ideas were extended beyond a Romantic appreciation for nature, but also to

larger questions about the moral life of individuals. In both *The Soul of a People* and *The Inward Light* Fielding-Hall highlighted key Buddhist orientations about the nature of individual life, the connections between humans and society and the external world. These writings would have found sympathy with those in the 19th century who valorized the virtues of the Middle Ages, in order to call attention to the inadequacies of a world increasingly dominated by materialism. Accordingly, a virtual presupposition for Fielding-Hall was the idea that comprehending the beauty and depth of Buddhism required some kind of criticism or partial repudiation of modern individualism. *The Inward Light* could be read as a critique of Western presuppositions; this publication contains a virtual response to 'orientalist' discourses. That is, Fielding-Hall understood that translating Buddhism required not only portraying it in dramatic, if simple, terms, but attempting to challenge the presuppositions of his readers. Again, this desperation to be understood by a broad reading public would have found an antecedent in Ruskin who sought careful readers. More than the better known *The Soul of a People*, *The Inward Light* raised the stakes for the interpretations of things 'East'. Taken together, these works challenged British readers to put aside their presuppositions and engage a series of Buddhist practices which were compatible with nat worship.

It might be usefully pointed out that the romantic conception of eastern religion formed the basis for Fielding-Hall's rejection of Lafcadio Hearn's (1850–1904) interpretations of Buddhism. Fielding-Hall and Hearn make useful study in contrast because their careers and writings suggest some striking affinities. Hearn was born in the Ionian Islands, but moved to the United States where he established his reputation as a crime writer and journalist. In 1890 he went to Japan where he spent the rest of his life. Hearn became known for his writings on Japan as he established his reputation as someone who could interpret the country amidst its transition to modernity. Along the way he taught in several Japanese universities and converted to Buddhism. Ultimately, Hearn was very taken with Japan and he became a Japanese citizen, changing his name to Yakumo Koizumi. Just as Fielding-Hall wrote about Burma engaging many East-West issues, so too did Hearn publish works in a similar vein. Hearn's *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* (1894) and *Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation* (1904) parallel some of Fielding-Hall works; while *Japanese Fairy Tales* (1902) bears similarity to *Burmese Palace Tales*. However, in *The Inward Light* he remarked that even though Hearn had converted to Buddhism he had not really comprehended its impact upon the Japanese world view. Hearn 'supposed

as the West have always done that Buddhism is a faith apart from the facts of life'.[49] Yet, the connection with wider life was critical because it 'is built on the facts of life'.[50] Fundamentally, this was partly a disagreement about the nature of religious life and communal traditions about religious practices. Fielding-Hall understood Burmese Buddhism to be based in all of life—that is, a set of practices which themselves define a person's outlook. Consequently, the religion's doctrines, beliefs and rituals—so prized by some interpreters of Burmese religion—were ultimately of much less significance than the view of life which daily exercise of the religion posits. In other words, Fielding-Hall thought that Hearn had misunderstood the most subtle and yet profoundest impact that Buddhism had upon its practitioners. Instead of highlighting that it meant adopting an outlook as well as beliefs, he argued that Hearn had seen it as a Westerner might see any other religion—making it largely reducible to a set of beliefs, doctrines and rituals. In essence, Fielding-Hall thought that Hearn had not been able to step out of his own Western mind-set. Instead, Fielding-Hall understood Buddhism as a positive 'orientalist' as it reflected the much broader Eastern experience of religion. He wrote pityingly of Hearn: how 'can a child of Europe come into an Eastern nation's life? And if he could not, how could he be a Buddhist? For Buddhism is the wider nationality.'[51] Fielding-Hall's critique of Hearn illustrated the depth of the problem inherent when modern Westerners attempted to interpret Eastern religion.

Alicia Turner's *Saving Buddhism: The Impermanence of Religion in Colonial Burma* (2014) reflects a sensitive exploration of both Burmese and British discourses. She shows how concern about the *sasana* became the basis for the Burmese to re-interpret Buddhism in light of the end of the monarchy, while also providing them with space to challenge British governance. The *sasana* refers to the 'life of the Buddha's teachings' after he has gone.[52] As Turner explains, the teachings are impermanent and the 'sasana is in decline from the moment of the Buddha's enlightenment'.[53] Eventually, it will disappear and its absence will help to prepare the way for the coming of the next Buddha.[54] The sasana has been a central part of Buddhist worldviews, and the Burmese believe that the sasana's decline can be slowed down by proper human efforts. Turner argues that it was in the late 18th and early 19th centuries that the Burmese began to indicate that they saw signs of the deterioration of the sasana.[55] Many Burmese came to believe that they were the protectors of Buddhism, and organized to preserve the sasana. In so doing, they took advantage of the indeterminacy of the moment to challenge the colonial frameworks that were coming to shape their world.[56] Turner's

book is significant because it recovers a major strand—possibly the most important impulse in 19th century Buddhism—of religious practice in Burma that the British seem to have missed or not understood. Even the Burmaphiles such as Scott and Fielding-Hall were at best indifferent to the need to preserve the sasana. Furthermore, as Turner shows, this basic concern would almost certainly have motivated the Burmese without British presence. It could be seen in their attempts to purify monastic behavior, improve Buddhist education and foster better moral life. In addition, it provided the basis for their rejection of the secular assumptions with which the British used to understand religion and Buddhist practices. As we will see in chapter eight, Buddhism would at once furnish resources for resistance to the British and the emergence of a new nationalism.

All of this was well removed from the Burmascape in which British authors tended to regard Buddhism as a picturesque embodiment of the country. Examples can easily be gleaned from the illustrations of books. To cite a few examples, the titles of the pictures from *Burma Painted and Described* are indicative: 'The Pagoda Steps', 'Prayer on the Pagoda Platform—Prome' as well as the pagoda images from the Shwedagon, Mandalay and Pagan. Much of the travel literature provides a brief overview about Buddhism to complement the pictures. The same might be said either for the indifference to or the ignorance of the histories written by the Lower Chindwin monks which were discussed in chapter four. For the Burmaphiles, Buddhism was readily accessible through a range of Victorian priorities: religious belief, ritual practices and daily life. Not surprisingly, perhaps, despite their best efforts to understand Buddhism so that they might translate it for their contemporaries, they appear to have missed the idea that Buddhism needed to be saved. Instead, it existed for them as one of the most obvious and veritable differentiating features of life in Burma.

Ironically, they did eventually understand that the removal of the monarchy (which could easily be regarded by the Burmese as a sign of the deterioration of the sasana) was a problem for the organizational practice of the religion. Hence, the British were keen to appoint a strong *thathanabaing* to help maintain the strength of the religion. To that end, the British actually contemplated approaching the Qing emperor to secure a successor to Thibaw's appointee.[57] This problem would persist as the death of the thathanabaing in 1895 produced a significant division of opinion in the sangha of Upper Burma. In 1903 the British welcomed the appointment of the *thathanabaing* even though they limited his authority to Upper Burma.[58]

As we have seen from Taw Sein Ko's lament in chapter three about crime and moral behavior, the issue of Burma's social fabric was a real one for colonial policy makers. The British believed that Buddhism was useful for the educational instruction as well as its capacity to instill moral behavior. For instance, more than a generation earlier, Arthur Phayre attempted to integrate monastic schools into the government's program for education.[59] However, opposition to teaching secular subjects developed in the last decade of the 19th century. In addition, the British inspectors who traveled to monasteries to ensure that the curriculum was delivered adequately were probably fortunate when they met with indifference.[60] At the same time, a concerted effort to improve Pali scholarship (by introducing examinations) was a priority for Taw Sein Ko. Pali examinations would be held in Rangoon, Mandalay and Moulmein, and after 1899 the popularity of the *patamabyan* was clearly on the rise. Fielding-Hall had to be aware of these developments, but in his repudiation of the 'dead past' (which he associated with academic versions of the subject) he neglected much of what was going on around him.[61]

Buddhism as a progressive force

While the Burmaphiles and those whose views of the land were less positive tried to explain Buddhism to metropolitan audiences, at least one colonial writer understood it as a progressive force. Taw Sein Ko, a devout Buddhist, argued that Buddhism had a fundamental role to play in modernizing Burma. However, he also assumed that Buddhism in Burma was in need of reformation. His voice was one which called for a reanimation of Buddhism so that it might improve the moral life of the Burmese people. It is worth recalling that Taw Sein Ko assumed that Burma did have a significant crime problem. A Buddhist Burma would be one in which its population would be better behaved.

Taw Sein Ko saw the advent of British rule throughout the country as the opportunity for Buddhism in Burma to acquire a better administrative structure. This meant the creation of the thathanabaing, which would be the supreme leader of Buddhism in Upper Burma. He believed that this was a progressive development which accompanied British rule:

> The annexation of Upper Burma has taught us many useful lessons, amongst them the necessity of disarmament and the advantages of village administration. These two measures have led to the

> suppression of crime and the maintenance of peace and order. To these may now be added the recognition of the indigenous ecclesiastical organization, which cannot fail to produce equally beneficial results, conducive alike to the prosperity and contentment of the people, and to the consolidation and stability of British rule.[62]

It might well have required British governance or assistance to improve the administrative structure of Buddhism in Burma, but Taw believed that the religion carried the seeds for nation-building.

Taw Sein Ko's understanding of Buddhism as a national force can be gleaned from his arguments about the need for a new university for Burma. At the heart of his argument was the need to preserve and transmit Burmese culture, which he assumed to be inherently Buddhist.

Taw Sein Ko's efforts to ensure that Burma had its own university had a number of modalities. He was an advocate inside Burma, but he was also conversant with the Indian scene. His efforts before the First World War were considerable, but in reviewing his advocacy it becomes clear that he exploited not only the conflict, but the political dislocations which India was experiencing in the early 20th century. Accordingly, he would begin with an argument based upon the preservation of Burma's cultural heritage and finish by locating the utility of the proposed university in vocational and professional education.

In 1909 Taw Sein Ko devised an argument which might be understood as part of a much larger campaign to separate Burma from India. For our purposes today, this also meant disconnecting Burma from the Indian universities, which had been founded in the 19th century. These universities bore the stamp of Macaulay's now infamous Minute on Indian Education (1835). One of the many legacies of this document was that many of these Indian universities would be charged with producing an 'intelligentsia' of graduates who in essence were so steeped in Western ideas that they were cut off from their own traditions and cultures. That is to say, they had become 'de-nationalised' and were seen by many Indians as less useful and by the British as potentially subversive.

Taw Sein Ko had the fortune to develop post-Macaulay: he would be a leader who would insist on creating new institutions with a more favorable hybrid mix and he would be able to do so when the conditions increasingly favored such developments. To begin with, Taw Sein Ko seized upon a discussion about the study of 'Oriental' subjects at Punjab University to make a number of distinctions between Burma and India clear. He argued that the Punjab University faced the much

larger problems of communitarian interests and multiplicity of spoken languages, and the study of the subject in the Punjab 'does not lead to honour, preferment, or worldly advantage'.[63] In contrast, Taw Sein Ko held that Burma was different because it was not as ethnically diverse and the population professed the same religion and all spoke Burmese. The country's traditions might also support the study of Asian subjects since the Burmese are 'accustomed to lavishly reward the professors of native lore, especially if they have donned the monkish garb'. Furthermore, the basis for a new university, he asserted, was actually Burmese nationality and its potential to create a Burman nation state.[64] Accordingly, Taw Sein Ko presented Burma as a relatively homogenous country and therefore it had the chance to develop a university which could represent the 'national aspirations' of the province's people.[65] More to the point, it was precisely a university which could help foster national development, at least partly because it could become a repository for Burmese culture. The proposed university would be able to 'conserve and promote Burmese literature' which would reflect Buddhist teachings and religious culture.[66]

He deemed this corpus to be critical to national development because it contained that which 'enshrined the past experiences, the philosophy of life, and the hopes and fears of the Burmese race'. In addition, Burmese literature was important because it brought with it the experience of monasticism which was responsible for the fact that Burma has 'become the most literate country in the Indian Empire'.[67]

There was a bigger more important point that Taw Sein Ko meant to make as well: namely, that a university in which Burmese literature might furnish the basis for curriculum would be less likely to produced graduates who were 'denationalized'. That is, Taw Sein Ko was alert to the complaint that Indian universities were accused of producing graduates who were frequently cut off from their own cultural heritage. Accordingly, he argued instead that it would produce a 'revival of native learning' which would impact a greater number of people than 'a system of education through the medium of English'.[68] English education was doubtless valuable, but was not 'only a costly language to acquire, but also accelerates the process of denationalization in the majority of students'.[69] He added that in addition to Burmese instruction (and literary study) it would be critical to also include Pali (as well as Sanskrit) because it was the 'language of Buddhism'. This would mean transferring the Patamabyan examinations to the proposed university (they were held by the Education Department). All told, in 1909 Taw Sein Ko foresaw a Burmese university which would promote literacy and the

preservation of cultural heritage, become a force for national development and underscore the obvious importance of separating the country from the Indian empire.

Maung May Oung: Buddhism as the basis for a new nation: the everyday life of the Burman

Maung May Oung (1880–1926), another member of the colonial establishment, whose interest in daily life and heritage was evident when he delivered the inaugural address of the Burma Research Society, put forth a different picture of Burman culture.[70] Oung spent considerable time in Britain: in May 1904 he went to England to study for the Bar. He took a degree from Cambridge and returned to Burma in 1907. He practiced law (even returning to Cambridge for an L.L.M. in 1922) but became known as an authority on Burmese Buddhist law. In addition, he served as the president of the YMBA and took an active interest in public affairs.[71] As a highly successful colonial figure, he made an attractive choice for Arnold Wright who was compiling *Twentieth Century Impressions of Burma* (1910). May Oung's article entitled the 'Manners and Customs' of the Burmans, provides the third example of an attempt to articulate (and preserve) Burmese culture.

In order to explicate Burmese life, May Oung painted a picture of what might be called 'the daily life' of the Burman. He extended this veritable ideal-type to both sexes and to people at various ages. His purpose was to 'present to non-Burmese a closer view of the inner life of the people than is generally seen' by people outside of the country. To that end, Oung addressed 'Birth and Childhood', 'Marriage', 'Social Life' and 'National Amusements', the headings under which he explicated Burmese life and culture. These headings were supported by a number of photographs, presumably deemed to be representative of common Burman moments and experiences.[72]

Just as Taw Sein Ko's argument for culture and heritage was partly based upon a need to separate Burma from India, May Oung's portrait of 'daily life' reflected the challenges posed by external influences in Burma. In particular, 'Manners and Customs' frequently sought to define and position daily life in Burma against both Indian and Western influences. Many of these would be obvious, but even in its very formulations the author recognized that he was writing for a post-Victorian audience with which the gendered realities of 'domesticity' defined a series of cultural assumptions. At the same time, he informed his readers that Burma was also a place of profound change:

> alien influences began to have an appreciable effect on the lives of the people. Nevertheless, the survival of the Burmese Kingdom in Upper Burma, and the constant intercourse maintained between the two parts of the country, must have gone a long way towards the preservation of national ideals and national modes of life, until barely over two decades ago, when Burma, as a whole, came to be painted red on the map, and the entire population was brought face to face with modern conditions and modern ways of thought. Since then, foreigners of all sorts and conditions have poured into the land in thousands and tens of thousands, and the resources of the country have been exploited and developed with a rapidity that has so amazed the happy, contented and ease-loving Burman that his mental focus is "all out of joint," and it may be some time ere he can recover from that shock. Small wonder then that the ideals, cherished from time immemorial, have been rudely and suddenly shattered, and that the old order is fast giving way, while the new has not had time to settle. And in the confusion that has arisen, there have not been wanting those who predict that the Burman is not fit to survive, that he is too lazy to be able to preserve his national entity, and consequently he must go.[73]

May Oung connected culture and daily life in a number of ways which are worthy of examination.

'Home life' and disappearing customs and 'national amusements' all connected the life of the Burman to a broader cultural heritage. May Oung wrote that the 'Non-Burmese see little or nothing of the home life of the people' which he characterized as a 'very simple and happy life'. The picture he painted was one in which separation from public concerns and private life was complete:

> The Burman cares nothing for politics and newspapers, and the discovery of the North Pole or the deposition of the Shah leaves him quite unconcerned. He rises early, and his ablutions and devotions over, he goes to work in the fields or the shop or the office to perform what is necessary for his livelihood. His wife and daughter administer to his wants, cook the early meal, and, that partaken of, settle down to other domestic matters, sewing, knitting, washing, repairing or weaving; or perhaps there is a stall in front of the house or at the bazaar, which must be attended to because women are better at buying and selling.[74]

May Oung extended this discussion to food consumption: the 'national tit-bit is le-pet (pickled tea leaves), which is frequently eaten in small

quantities mixed with dried prawns, slices of garlic fried in oil, fried bits of cocoanut'.[75] He explained that the use of alcohol and opium accompanied colonialism. Nonetheless, unlike Mrs Ernst Hart (and many other contemporary observers), who had written *Picturesque Burma* a bit earlier, May Oung did not believe that alcoholism or opium use were substantial problems:

> drinking is not general, and probably no Burmese Buddhist household contains a stock, however small, of liquor. Those who do indulge do so in private or at licensed shops; and liquor is never allowed at the family or festive board. Smoking, however, and betel-chewing are universal. Men, women, and even children are freely addicted to them, though nowadays the latter are brought up in a stricter manner.[76]

May Oung took his readers into domestic dwellings by describing the typical Burmese house:

> Except in modern towns, where Western furniture has come into general use, it takes very little to furnish a Burman's dwelling. The house itself is built of rough boards or plaited strips of bamboo, with a similar raised floor, nailed or tied to piles or bamboos driven into the ground, the whole being surmounted by a roof of thatch, or, nowadays, corrugated zinc sheets. For the use of the family there are mats of various kinds, or a woven carpet if it can be had, and, for the bedroom, cotton mattresses and pillows laid on the floor. A stout wooden box to hold clothing and valuables, and the earthenware cooking utensils, complete the necessary outfit. Lamps are now plentiful and cheap, but the small kerosene-oil holder, with a rag immersed in it, is still found everywhere. A convenient hole in the flooring affords an outlet for rubbish and sweepings. Every house, however small, has a front room for guests, and here the greater part of the day is spent. This apartment also contains the household altar at one end—a raised ledge on which is placed the nyaung-yay-oh (an earthenware vase containing flowers and evergreens), and where a small quantity of food is placed in the morning and a candle is burnt at night. There is also a picture or a carved image of the Buddha, and below it the household devotions take place. The presence of this altar explains the origin of the custom which requires Burmese to be unshod within a dwelling-house.[77]

'Manners and Customs' did contain a broad picture of Burmese public life, but the discussion of 'home life' connected the subject to national

culture. That is, in offering an ideal-type of Burman life—defined by common practices, foods, dwellings and interests—May Oung was offering the prospect of people's culture. If Taw Sein Ko held out the prospect of a national culture informed by Buddhist literature and tradition, May Oung underscored the importance of everyday commonality.

At the heart of May Oung's argument was an assumption about what it meant to be Burman. He explained that to comprehend the 'daily life' of a people it was necessary to explore their religious beliefs. With respect to Burma, it meant that to be a Burman one had to be a Buddhist:

> it is hard to conceive of a true Burman without at the same time regarding him as a Buddhist. A Burman is first and foremost a follower of Buddhism, and, although he may and does entertain mistaken notions of some of its doctrines, his conception of life and its duties is none the less based on the teachings of the Light of Asia. [78]

Buddhism was the great national signifier which not only would separate Burma from India, but also was the very basis from which Burmans might be differentiated from peoples who had lived in the country long before British colonization.

As we will see in chapter eight Buddhism could be regarded as a resource by the British (to inhibit social discontent) while also increasingly furnishing resources for dissent. Taw Sein Ko may have envisioned a Burmese nation working within an imperial framework, but for others the national issue meant first separation from India and then independence from British rule. It bears repeating that one of the things which make this particular period of Burmese history compelling is that at the apogee of British imperial rule, the YMBA was born. The point of view articulated by May Oung was actually close to Taw Sein Ko as both regarded Buddhism as the basis for national development. Their visions diverged beyond that, but it was clear that Buddhism was relevant to the daily life of the Burman and that it could become the basis for separation from India.

Conclusion

To translate Buddhism meant to interpret it in a Burmese context, and almost inevitably these acts of comprehension and exposition said as much about the colonial viewpoints as it did the subject matter itself. Nonetheless, Buddhism remained not only a topic of fascination, but critically one which was held to be definitive for Burma. This meant

that it was often portrayed without reference to specific situations, but almost as a caricature or as an ideal-type. The reification of Buddhism, as such, met the needs of those who wished to open the country to tourism, as did the early nationalists. For all of these writers Buddhism was the critical subject from which to unlock Burma's many mysteries. Even when Burmese Buddhism was found to be corrupted or nurtured by nat worship it provided a key to understanding a land which was viewed by the Burmaphiles as a near rural idyll which was being corrupted by the arrival of materialism and international commerce. Translating Buddhism resulted, as well, in one of the key arguments for the development of a distinctive Burmese university. However, it is also clear that much of what constituted Buddhism and its related cultural practices was outside of both the ambit of the Burmascape and the passionate efforts of the Burmaphiles. Nowhere would this general—even friendly—prejudice be borne out in the way these authors regarded the presence of rapidly expanding cities in a country which was and probably ought (at least for many) to remain rural.

6
The City and the Country

Interpreting both the 'end of traditional Burma' and the significance of Buddhism was done against the backdrop of rapid and decisive social transformations. Nothing embodied these changes as much as the development of Rangoon as a major imperial port city. Raymond Williams's *The City and the Country* is admittedly an unlikely organizing inspiration for a study in imperial cultural history, but the division on which his classic work is predicated is indicative of key aspects of the Burmascape.[1] Already in *The Burman*, which was written prior to the unification of the country, Scott deployed Rangoon as a signifier for modernization, commercial development and colonial rule. Yet, this chapter will point to a different trend: namely, that despite the fact that the Burmaphiles, and those who looked askance at much that they found there, all assumed that this backwater province of the Indian empire benefitted from these realities, they were much more interested in the rural and natural aspects of Burma. That is, many sought to represent the country itself as the 'true Burma' even though their writings illustrated that the land was as difficult to traverse as it was diverse. At the same time, their narrative accounts often had the unintended effect of proclaiming the power of British rule over such a challenging and exotic land. In order to pursue these themes in greater depth, this chapter will focus upon some of the ways in which British authors regarded Rangoon and other cities. What should become clear is that they were indifferent to it, except when their agenda was to catalog social problems or ponder the scale of societal transformation underway. This discussion will then trace their fascination with 'the country' which meant rural areas and the peoples who helped to define them. Furthermore, it will be useful to recall that the search for the past—made vivid by the deep commitment to investigate ruins in Burma—helped to confirm a view of the country's natural world, history and the benefits of imperial rule. Finally, the fascination with 'the country' had the effect of helping to shape the even larger question of how to understand Burma's many minorities.

Rangoon as the embodiment of Burma changing under British rule

Rabindranath Tagore visited Rangoon in 1916 and observed 'the city of Rangoon is not a city of Burma, it appears to stand in opposition to the entire country'[2], and again Rangoon was a 'mere visual acquaintance, there is no recognition of Burma in this seeing'.[3] Moreover, colonial writers and globetrotting travelers reported that the city was exciting, cosmopolitan and prosperous; as such it suggested much about the prosperity of the colony under the beneficent rule of the progressive British empire. Positioning Rangoon in Burmese history involves nothing less than making an evaluation about the unity of the country's historical experience. The move of the capital to Naypyidaw in 2005 was actually much more consistent with the country's long term historical trends than many commentators recognized.

At the same time, MP Tristram Hunt's *Cities of Empire: British Colonies and the Creation of the Urban World* (2014) observes that one of the most compelling features of the contemporary world is 'the chain of former colonial cities dotted across the globe'.[4] He added that major 'colonial cities—Bombay, Singapore, Melbourne' were the cultural and economic drivers of empire'[5] in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Hunt has chapters on Boston, Dublin, Bridgetown, Cape Town, Hong Kong, Bombay, Melbourne, New Delhi and Liverpool. This is an interesting argument and one which should have added Rangoon—which is not even mentioned once in 511 pages.

If Rangoon stood in opposition to the rest of Burma, it functioned with the full approval and backing of British authorities, as it certainly belonged in any list of 'cities of empire'. Bird's *Wanderings in Burma* presented Rangoon in relation to its assets. Burma's entry point came with some impressive hotels, consulates, clubs, banks, steamship lines, churches, booksellers, newspapers, photographers, Burmese carving shops, silver- and goldsmiths and a number of sites to visit. These included the Shwedagon Pagoda, Sule Pagoda, Botataung Pagoda, the Royal Lakes and Dalhousie Park and the Cantonment Gardens.[6] The vast array of information contained in *Twentieth Century Impressions of Burma* also proclaimed Rangoon's impressive boom, noting that in 50 years it had developed from 'an unimportant town set in the midst of a swamp into the first town in Burma and fifth town of the Indian Empire'.[7] The work, which drew upon information provided by city officials, government bureaucrats, association officers, club leaders, commercial establishments and even prominent families, proclaimed Rangoon's suitability

for quality of living. In addition to what Bird promised potential travelers to the city, from *Twentieth Century Impressions of Burma*, they also learned that the city had tramways, street lighting, a recently built sewer system, a fire brigade and a trade union association. The work also provided information about the range of commercial establishments and brief biographies of leading Burmese, Chinese and Indians. *Twentieth Century Impressions of Burma* buttressed this information with a large number of photographs, postcard images and portraits.

Rangoon itself represents the British effort to connect a rural, agrarian society with the economies associated with the Indian Ocean. From the start, for the British (and probably the Burmans), the growth and maturation of Rangoon reflected the rise of imperial powers in Burma. Indeed, it has been suggested that the construction of Rangoon was an act of nearly constant creation by 'violent means' in that the city was made and remade as 'it suited the British Indian regime'.[8] That is, Rangoon was frequently rebuilt without reference to the earlier Burmese town, but to the needs of imperial policy. Accordingly, the construction of the impressive buildings which decorated the central business district, 'the monuments to Queen Victoria and other British sovereigns' in the well developed green spaces of the city and the Cantonment all proclaimed colonial power and sophistication.[9]

Ironically, Rangoon had been born out of Burmese success in an earlier imperial struggle. Alaungpaya's defeat of the Mon and his desire to end the significance of Syriam were all preconditions for the beginnings of Rangoon.[10] It is significant that Rangoon was founded in the 18th century in an effort to extend Burma's control of 'Lower Burma' at a time when it might be said that European presence was already becoming manifest in the Indian Ocean. Possibly as ironic, the name literally meant 'end of strife' which signified the end of struggle.[11] However, while Rangoon was immediately a place where Burma could be connected to the Indian Ocean, the most obvious characteristic was its small size. Even by the early 19th century, the most its population would have been was about 10,000. The most important feature of the town of Dagon, as it was called, would have been the presence of the Shwedagon Pagoda. Not only was the structure massive, but it clearly played an important role in Buddhist practice. Otherwise, the town which would be named Rangoon was a small port—not understood to be any different from Moulmein—on the Indian Ocean. The city was surrounded by a wooden stockade in a rural area, where the existence of wild animals, such as tigers, remained a problem for human habitation. The initial British accounts of the city during the First Anglo-Burmese War were

hardly flattering as Rangoon was seen as backward and associated with squalor.[12]

Initial encounters with British power during the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824–1826) increased the significance of Rangoon. British forces faced unexpectedly difficult resistance and used Rangoon and the surrounding area as a base. The British did not annex Rangoon, instead concentrating on taking Tennesserim and Arakan. However, one of the unexpected consequences of the First Anglo-Burmese War was to establish Rangoon as a place where the British and the Burmese might contest the basis of overseas trade. Under Lord Dalhousie, British policy aimed towards territorial expansion: a conflict with the Burmese was the opportunity to seize Lower Burma. More important, when the Second Anglo-Burmese War broke out, the Burmese burned the original town of Rangoon (but not the nearby settlements) because they anticipated that the British would once again try to use the city as a base.[13] The end of the conflict left the British with complete control of Lower Burma, and Rangoon in need of rebuilding. In 1862 Rangoon became the administrative center of British Burma.[14]

The importance of Rangoon in the last decades of the 19th century illustrated the success of British town planning.[15] These aims were clear from the urban planning which began to shape Rangoon into a city without parallel in Burma. The new layout of Rangoon would change it completely. [16] Basically, the city was designed to accommodate a port—Rangoon became a deep water harbor. The road layout—a horizontal grid—was designed with the intention of moving goods to and from the port. In addition, the British foresaw the use of the Irrawaddy's many tidal creeks as the means to ship goods from all over Burma—including those parts of the country which were not yet parts of the colony. The development of a deep sea port was consistent with British imperial policy. Penang, Singapore and Hong Kong all served as precedents to Rangoon. The construction of the new city served to connect not only the port but the interior of Burma with the empire [17]

By the late 19th century, Rangoon had become the nodal point for the Burmese hinterland, with authors noting that it had become one of the most active ports in British India. Therefore, because Rangoon had become a large, cosmopolitan city, British observers were hardly surprised that it could exhibit a range of human activity and, more importantly, social problems. It might be remembered that Burman contact with the worlds of the Indian Ocean was relatively limited before the 19th century. Most of Burmese economic activity was directly related to the Dry Zone. There were a number of ports on the Indian Ocean, but

they could hardly be said to have played a critical role Burma's economic life. Upper Burma was largely isolated from Indian Ocean trade and, more important, the country tended to be rural and inward looking. Burmese conceptions of kingship were drawn from Indian and Buddhist models, but much of the country's foreign relations were dominated by China and Thailand. With respect to trade, the export of rice was forbidden and Burma's long distance trade was minor.

In sum, the 'new Rangoon' would become a place where goods from the interior of Burma could be traded throughout the Indian Ocean and possibly farther. Rangoon (and more broadly the delta region) would embody the surge of economic growth that Burma experienced after 1885. In chapter two, reference was made to the massive increase in Burma's rice production, which began during the second half of the 19th century. At the same time, the country's other resources were becoming more valuable. To generalize, the exploitation of India's teak forests had left them depleted, and Burma's relatively underdeveloped forests became increasingly important. For instance, after the Second Anglo-Burmese War, it would be Rangoon merchants who accelerated the commercial exploitation of south Pegu's forests.[18] Moreover, with the extension of British rule, the perception developed in both metropolitan and colonial settings that Burma's fabled mineral wealth was now available. Last, the discovery of oil which was easy to extract meant that Burma became seen as a source for the Royal Navy, which anticipated moving away from coal-burning ships to those which employed engines which ran on oil. All of these developments had the effect of making Rangoon even more important because many of these products could be moved first down the Irrawaddy and then to points beyond Burma.

Not surprisingly, visitors to Rangoon were impressed with the city's development and general prosperity. Travel writers, such as G.W. Bird, celebrated its achievements and recounted its modernity and importance. They also noted that Rangoon was the beginning of any venture into the hinterland of Burma. Colonial publications (in English and increasingly in Burmese) emphasized not only the progressive nature of the Rangoon society, but also its cosmopolitan character. The progressive quality of Rangoon could be seen in cultural developments such as the formation of the Burma Research Society in 1910 or the arrival of motor cars. The first automobiles came to Burma in 1905 and Rangoon had buses by 1913.[19] Modern colonial Rangoon, as such, was made up of many different ethnic groups, and some writers believed that these differences made the city's commercial markets 'picturesque'. However, perceptive writers recognized that beneath the triumphalist façade of

modernity and prosperity lurked deep and growing tensions between different ethnic and religious groups.

Rangoon: myth and reality

Rangoon's advocates had no difficulty exhibiting its growth and achievements; however, there were aspects of life in the city that did not make it into *Wanderings in Burma* or *Twentieth Century Impressions of Burma*. A significant number of residents lived in grinding poverty, while crime and public health problems were facts of life. One of the most obvious features of daily life was a problem with sanitation. The issue of sanitation—which was a common problem in British cities as they industrialized—reflected other basic urban living patterns. Aside from the issues presented by water supply and drainage (from conditions created in the wet season), sanitation arose as a problem because of squalid living conditions. While colonial administrators were keen to help advance the city's commercial development, they were less active in highlighting the extent to which much of Rangoon's population lived in unclean and overcrowded conditions.[20]

Even before 'the Rangoon Outrage' (which was examined in chapter three) it is probably also the case that it had a reputation as one of the 'red light' spots in South Asia.[21] This remains an underexplored subject, but in James Warren's magisterial *Ah Ku and Karayuki-San: Prostitution in Singapore 1870–1940*, Burma is identified as part of a network for trafficking young girls from China and Japan. Rangoon was one of the destinations which had a demand for Japanese prostitutes,[22] but it is likely that they may have been 'trafficked' to other urban areas.[23] O'Connor made reference to prostitution as just one of the city's vices: 'Outside the little houses that flank the more secluded streets there sit the painted demimonde, the women of half the world, from Paris to Japan; and they drift here by successive stages of decline, raking up here the very lees of life.'[24] However, behind O'Connor's observation lay a sustained struggled to contain prostitution. By 1901 Rangoon had adopted a policy of segregation whereby brothels could only operate in prescribed areas. The residential segregation of brothels followed the Rangoon Police Act of 1899, which contained provisions which limited the ability of police to inhibit prostitution in areas other than main streets. By 1914 the Commissioner of Police was empowered to close brothels at his discretion.[25] In Rangoon could be found 'the haunts of the opium smoker, where men lie as in a shambles, forgetful of time; the inner parlor of the Ah-Sin club, where fan is played, and little cards are heaped with money on the tables'.[26]

Students of both imperial history and Burma will also recognize the efforts of John Cowen, who worked hard to abolish or at least curb prostitution in Rangoon. The problems associated with prostitution were perceived to be so widespread that one college principal had told Cowen that most of the Burmans whom he had taught who were over the age of 15 had already contracted venereal disease. Cowen also called attention to high-ranking colonial officials who practiced of 'concubinage'.[27] Cowen's largely unsuccessful efforts underscored the fact that the city had a reputation for possessing a large red light district. Yet, the more basic problem would have been recognized by Furnivall: namely, ethnic and religious divisions.

Rangoon: cosmopolitan and divided

The prosperity of modern Rangoon was punctured by the communal riot which broke out in 1893. This event flew in the face of the official statements about the city's advancements. Yet, the ethnic tensions which fueled the riot in 1893 had been increasing for more than a decade. Immigration—mostly Indians coming to work in Burma—had transformed the city's identity. At one point in the 19th century, Rangoon received more immigrants than New York City.[28] In addition, many Burmese migrated to Rangoon after the Third Anglo-Burmese War enabled them to do so. Both the migration from Burma and immigration from South Asia (which involved a larger number of men and women) had far-reaching effects on the city.

The overall impact of Indian immigration was to change the character of Rangoon. As many observers such as Tagore came to believe (and despite Burmese migration into Rangoon), in the last decades of the 19th century it became an 'Indian city'. Census reports confirmed that the South Asian population outnumbered the Burmese. In 1881 Rangoon had a total population of 134,176 of which 64,948 were Burmese and 66,077 were classified as either Hindus or Muslims. By 1901 the city's population had increased to 248,060 out of which 77,825 were Burmese and nearly half were either Hindus (77,444) or Muslims (41,846).[29] The census returns confirmed what many already believed—namely, that the Burmans were becoming a minority inside Rangoon. Before the Third Anglo-Burmese War this might have mattered less, but with the fall of Mandalay, Rangoon's political importance became much greater.

Indian dominance was reflected not only in demographic returns, but in economic power. That is, not all Indian immigrants were labourers. Instead, Indian business initiatives provided the capital to play a decisive

role in many industries. South Asian commercial leadership often had contacts in India and other places in the Indian Ocean. The census also shows that as Rangoon prospered, it became home to a smaller—but quite prosperous—Chinese business community. The census recorded roughly 3700 Chinese in 1881 and some 11,018 in 1901. Visitors to Rangoon noted the prominence of both Indian and Chinese businesses, and British travel writers at times highlighted the 'cosmopolitan' character of Rangoon—and Burma.

Tagore's observations might well have been matched by O'Connor. *The Silken East* did not disregard Rangoon, but addressed it directly. More than most British writers, O'Connor's portrait of Rangoon was that of a fractured city. He reminded his readers of the 1893 riots, remarking that Hindu-Muslim tensions now were part of the city's past and present. O'Connor took his readers to Mogul Street where the 'latent forces of ancient hate' were present because it is a 'living bit of India. Except as a wayfarer, no Burman occupies it.'[30] Rangoon was about the future—he asserted that unlike so many cities in Asia there was no sense of the past.[31]

Rangoon's communal identities were reinforced by spatial realities. The South Asian population (both Muslim and Hindu) was concentrated in the central parts of the city. They might also be found south of the Royal Lake. Chinese could be found west of the Indian parts of the central business district (in what is today Latha and Lanmadaw townships). Within the Chinese area 'Chinatown', wealth and ethnic difference continued to be defined along territorial lines: the more prosperous Hokkien lived apart from the poorer Cantonese. Last, the Burmese increasingly lived away from the central areas. The Burmese area ran 'along the east bank of the Hlaing/Rangoon River from north of Kemmendine, which could be considered the center of Burmese (or Burman) settlement in colonial Rangoon, to where the Rangoon River turns eastward, northwest of downtown'.[32]

Therefore, to see Rangoon at the turn of the century was to view a complicated set of realities. From mid-century onwards, the British used the city as a gateway to Burma. Rangoon was a representation of all the British chose to see: it was cosmopolitan, picturesque, progressive and to their minds prosperous. In other words, the British view of Rangoon was a city which proclaimed the modernity and beneficent rule of the empire. Yet, we have seen that, in fact, Rangoon was also a place where the economic revolution which had occurred in Lower Burma might be evinced. Its 'cosmopolitan' character was based upon ethnic and communal division; its 'picturesque' qualities could probably only be attained

by poverty and inequalities of wealth; the 'progressive' side to the city meant that growing numbers of its inhabitants worried about the fate of Burma and its peoples.

Rangoon was not only the most common entry point into Burma, but it was also the place of departure for much of Burma. The railway could connect travelers to many parts of the country, while the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company possessed the means to bring men and women to many parts of Burma. In *Wanderings in Burma*, Bird provided 24 travel routes, and 19 of them involved travel out of Rangoon. Leaving Rangoon for these destinations implied seeing parts of the country and discovering why it was challenging to govern and important for the British empire. In addition to producing a large crop of rice, rural Burma yielded oil, gems, teak and other forest products. The officially sanctioned observers visited many of the places where these items were produced or managed; for the Burmaphiles, deeper passions ensured that they would travel to see those sites and experience the inviting, but formidable countryside. Accordingly, both the officially sanctioned observers and the Burmaphiles will point to the jungle as the embodiment of Burma's land, explore the economic development of the country and point to the ways that the ruins of places such as Pagan suggested that the Burmans were at heart a rural people.

From jungle to 'country'

British attitudes toward the country in Burma were established early in the 19th century. The war narratives from the First Anglo-Burmese War tended to depict the jungle as an unknown and exotic entity. British reactions to governing the country were built upon this assumption and were compounded by the fact that they discovered almost immediately that Burma presented a challenging environment. Yet, this conclusion could simultaneously support the assumption that the country possessed a vibrant and exotic landscape. It could be appropriated romantically (the fascination with nat worship might be understood in this light) or it could appeal aesthetically as picturesque. Again, the response might be conditioned by the appetite for economic development. Burma's minerals, oil, and teak forests all offered not only abundant potential, but an important way to conceptualize many rural areas. The more alert would recognize that they also offered sites for the critical reflection about societal transformation. All of that said, possibly the biggest common assumption that British observers had about rural areas was that they formed an essential component of the landscape which itself

was a prerequisite for understanding the Burman character. Despite the fact that Burmans were increasingly involved in many industries, they remained identified as a rural people who were comfortable with proximity to the jungle. The title of E.D. Cuming's novel *With the Jungle Folk* reflected this kind of presupposition, which might be easily extended to ethnic minorities because they were often viewed in relation to particular places. Taken together, it would not have been too much for British observers to accept that rural Burma was the 'real Burma' (as Enriquez would have it)—the developments in Mandalay, Rangoon and the ruins of the ancient cities notwithstanding.

Romantic fascinations

The fascination with Burma was ultimately a deep interest in its multiple environments. One of the signifiers of the challenges which came with living in Burma was the mosquito net. The author of *Dog's Life* understood the importance of mosquito nets for travel throughout the country. The note of satire here reflected the impossibility of overcoming mosquitos in Burma. O'Connor defined Maubin in terms of its mosquitos; he observed that living in the town (and other places in the Delta) posed a challenge.[33] With a mixture of respect and satire, O'Connor explained that those who lived in Maubin were under constant siege from mosquitos, leaving them almost certainly changed for life.[34]

One of the most basic features of the romantic connection with Burma's landscapes began with the disassociation of 'jungle' from the negative connotations that it could carry. At one end, the process of setting up camp while in the process of hunting in the jungle gave pleasure to W.S. Thom.[35] For Thom and Pollock the jungle was much more than an obstacle or a danger, as it was the place in which their passion for hunting might be realized. Yet, more typically, the jungle could be a place where one might be bored, be attacked by mosquitos, get lost or even suffer from fever. This hardly had to be explained to metropolitan or even colonial readers for whom the jungle was exotic, but also dangerous. Gwendolen Trench Gascoigne admitted to great admiration for the verdant quality of Burma. She referred to its flowers, trees and other fauna, but expressed a decided bias in favor of domestication. She noted that tea could be grown in the Upper Chindwin as long as it was 'kept from jungle'.[36]

Beyond the narratives associated with the Burmascape authors, O'Connor's *The Silken East* rests as a monumental tribute to Burmese landscapes. His depictions were Ruskinian—he used paintings, photographs and word pictures to communicate in elegiac prose a reverence

for the many faces of Burma. It bears repeating that his narration of the many difficulties he experienced traversing the land constituted a part of the portrait of a majestic environment. The encyclopedic impulse that seems to have driven O'Connor would be easily recognized by Victorians, and it ensured that *The Silken East* would be two substantial volumes. O'Connor's vision was a broad and sensitive one, as he was alert to the social cost of both British rule and modernization. Nonetheless, his impulse to search for what had been 'lost' was actually greater in *Mandalay and Cities of the Past* than in *The Silken East*. Ultimately, the natural world would triumph over human folly and endeavor: O'Connor remained confident that despite the ruby mining, oil production, logging and expansion of transportation facilities (to capitalize on these commercial developments), Burma's prohibitive and formidable environments would endure.

O'Connor's penchant for a combination of visual illustrations was matched by a number of authors, including R. Talbot Kelly, who offered Burma as an opportunity for picturesque consumption. *Burma Painted and Described* aims a bit more deliberately at the same audience as Bird's *Wanderings in Burma*. Mass tourism would open up this remote country and, unlike O'Connor, Kelly worried about its durability. Kelly, who was a landscape painter, produced a book based upon his excursions in the country and his choice to illustrate—the ostensible subject of the book—shows how reproducible image and consumption might become easily intertwined. Kelly was more than this: his reflections indicate that he saw much more than appeared on his canvases.

For Enriquez, Burma could almost appear to be a state of mind as well as a physical place. The very titles of his books betray a set of emotional responses: *A Burmese Loneliness*, *A Burmese Enchantment* and *A Burmese Wonderland* all signify a kind of 'pathetic fallacy' which Enriquez had when trying to come to terms with his own experiences in Burma. That is, Enriquez brought to his encounters with Burma a pattern of beholding which virtually guaranteed that he would deem sacred what he had seen and experienced. Predictably, perhaps, he did not equate the 'real Burma' with the province's boundaries. He could wax eloquent about his journeys to the China border, but he made it clear that in doing so, he had moved away from authentic Burmese experience. In fact, there was a melancholic tone to Enriquez's musings as he defined the condition of being a civil servant at an outpost:

> I suppose the principal attraction of out-post life is the Frontier itself, with all its problems and conflicts. Some of the conflicts are real.

> Others seem unreal . . . All this affords interest and relieves monotony. The great burden of the Burmese frontier is *Loneliness*, which is often enough not merely abstract, but develops into solid reality as months slip by. *Loneliness* is perhaps the most perplexing problem of any we are called upon to face. All are influenced by it one way or another. It develops power in this man, and destroys it in that. It forces some minds into narrow groves, while others are deepened and widened by silent communion with the hills. Strange friendships with Burmese and Chinamen are forced upon us and ripen; our affections are won by manliness or tenderness in unexpected places. I have seen a British Officer weep for his dead Chinaman. We are taught the comradeship of animals, which rejoice or suffer as we do ourselves. And we are made conscious of the presence of Fairies of forest glades, of Nats of peak and pine, and of the God (the Chinese say He is divine) who weaves the enchantment of books.[37]

Unlike O'Connor and Enriquez, the authors of *Wild Sports of Burma and Assam* also regarded Burma's landscapes with affection. Their passion for hunting, which was shared by many other Britons in the empire, meant that they acquired a detailed understanding of the land's climate, rivers and jungles. Pollock rejected the idea that Burma was a place where 'it has often been asserted that there was no sport to be had'.[38] These authors regarded rural Burma in positive terms because it might become an ideal place in which to hunt.

Economic development defines rural areas

The concerns shared by Enriquez, Kelly, O'Connor and Burmaphiles, more generally, were the exception to the more common perception that Burma was the land for future economic development. Pollock foresaw a future for Burma in which economic development might make the quality of hunting even more robust. He explained that Burma is

> now one of our principal Provinces, and it has a great future . . . Rich people might do far worse than go to the East for a two years' shooting-trip . . . The climate is not pestilential like that of parts of the Dark Continent, and since the rinderpest, our possession in Eastern Africa has lost two-thirds of its game . . . I far prefer, having tried them all, our Eastern possessions beyond the Bay of Bengal; the people, too, are so much nicer. You can obtain anything and everything you want in Burma.[39]

Even in the case of Enriquez, who could find the fairies and nats in Burma's jungle, the promise of economic development was irresistible. In *A Burmese Loneliness*, which was written amidst developments in the First World War, he sought to sell Burma's potential:

> Burma is the largest province of our Indian Empire. Its forests are the most extensive and valuable. It is the richest undeveloped mineral area in the world. Yet its wealth is still chiefly agricultural! Its roads are practically non-existent. Its railways are wholly inadequate. Its population is hardly more than 12 millions. It is clear that the money spent on communications, technical education, irrigation, and colonization will give quick returns. Burma, in fact, is a 'paying proposition'. It only suffers from lethargy, neglect, poverty, and time-worn prejudices . . . There is simply no end to the profit to be derived from developing Burma.[40]

Enriquez worried that the cost of the war would make economic investment in Burma much less likely, but in making the case for development, he was rehashing an old argument. The idea that Burma represented a kind of promised land for investors was an old and varied one; in fact, many of those who might be said to subscribe to its central tenets had never been to the country. However, it was too obvious that the explosion of economic activity which took place at the end of the 19th century meant that these assumptions would not be challenged. All told, the work in the forests, the birth and expansion of the petroleum industry, the 'ruby rush' and the prospect of even more economic development virtually ensured that the country would be understood more for its potential than as a source for romantic aspirations. As Donald Smeaton promised, Burma was 'destined to rule the commerce between Western and Eastern Asia'.[41]

Jungle to forests

In his attempt to see Burma, Kelly was sent to Kokogon—the heart of the forests, which were being managed by the Bombay-Burmah Trading Corporation. Kelly could be a discerning critic, but in his encounter with the forests of Burma, he tended to be rather pious about both the corporation's treatment of its workers and what others would later call deforestation. Kelly noted that pay compensation disputes always were settled in favor of the workers:

> [I]t has its reward in the friendly relationship existing between the 'jungle wallah' and his subordinates. I one day heard a native remark

> to a stranger, "We *have* to shikoh to the Government official who eats our money, but we like to shikoh to the Bombay-Burmah Thakins whose money we eat," and I may say that, during the weeks I spent in riding through the forest I had frequent demonstrations of the esteem and respect in which the Corporation and their agents were held by natives of all classes.[42]

The commercial development of the forestry impressed Kelly, but he was almost certainly not able to understand its overall context. The experiences in and around Kokogon provided him with the opportunity to populate his narrative with encounters with snakes (including the deadly Russell Viper) and the work of elephants in supporting the forest industry.

Even if Kelly was an officially sanctioned observer, he might have been easily forgiven for underestimating the significance of the forest for India and Burma. By the time he visited, the innovations which characterized the management of Indian forests were well on their way to practicing professional forestry. The development of 'empire forestry' in India had wide implications: as Gregory A. Barton has demonstrated, it was almost certainly a necessary precondition for the development of environmentalism. Barton showed that it would be in the Napoleonic Wars that the fate of forests (because the wood produced from forests had been used for ship construction and other war-related objectives) became a priority for imperial security.[43] Other concerns included a belief that the deforestation of India's forests negatively affected its climate. Consequently, the British administration in India, under Lord Dalhousie, decided to intervene against the free market exploitation of the country's forests. Barton argued that the primary innovation of Indian forestry involved that situating a legal precedent 'for the state to acquire property rights as absolute as private property over large areas of previously unsettled land'.[44] At the same time, German-trained scientists improved the management of forest lands, in order to prevent deforestation.[45] All of this meant that forests came to be regarded as undervalued, a development which was underscored by the development of the railway. The rapid expansion of the railways—something which helped to define new century Burma—came from a number of factors including the demand for both sleeper ties and fuel for the steam boilers. Since rail travel substantially increased the commercial development of a number of products, forests became 'increasingly available for marketing'.[46]

With respect to Burma, the history of forestry took a different, but relatable course. The exploitation of teak, which took place under royal

fiat, long predated British colonization. However, after the conclusion of the First Anglo-Burmese War, the British sent Dr. Wallich to take inventories of the teak forests of Tenasserim, and he duly reported that they were unrivaled by any other part of India. Yet, these forests were not protected and they began to be harvested, until the inventories ran low. In 1841 the directors appointed Captain Tremenheere as the superintendent of the forests of Burma in order to manage these dwindling resources. However, he was not immediately successful in preventing the further exploitation of these forests.[47] We have also seen in chapter two that after the Second Anglo-Burmese War, the British established Pegu's northern border to secure additional teak forests. These forests would ultimately benefit from Dalhousie's Charter of Indian Forestry. Last, it would be a dispute that the Bombay-Burmah Trading Corporation had with the monarchy which helped to trigger the Third Anglo-Burmese War.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, the last decades of the 19th century saw a rapid expansion of forest under managed cultivation. 'Internal territorialization' became the principal means by which the Forest Service asserted its control over the country's forests.[48] Most of the expansion took place in what had been Upper Burma. For instance, in 1892–1893 the reserves in Upper Burma accounted for 28% of the total reserve; by 1898–1899, they amounted to 51%.[49] More broadly, the Forest Service's expanding suzerainty over the area reflected a trend which had begun in India: by 1900 8% of the entire land area of greater India came under the control of the Forest Department.[50] These figures were supported by the systematic cartographic efforts to survey and map these forested areas. In 1878 some 1,284 square miles of forest had been mapped; by 1899 some 41,021 had been mapped, with roughly 2,000 miles mapped per annum.[51]

The main priority of the Forest Service in Burma after 1902 was the commercial development of Burma's forests.[52] This may have reflected frustration on the part of the Burma Forest Service because it sought in vain to have significant penalties affixed on the Bombay-Burmah Trading Corporation when it was discovered in 1898 that it had cut unseasoned teak trees.[53] In any event, by the beginning of the First World War, most of the reserves in the Chindwin Reserve and the Pegu Yoma had been covered.[54]

Management of forests also implied better control of rural areas. During the pacification the British were challenged by dacoits who could hide in the dense forests. For instance, the Pegu Yoma and the outer hills were regarded as a paradise for rebels.[55] Additionally, the conditions of

pacification produced less obvious problems. The practice of keeping remote villagers in stockades tended to reduce the amount of available manpower for fire-protection duties. Other potential workers simply became afraid to work in the forests.[56] R. Talbot Kelly was impressed with his sojourn amongst the foresters, but he might not have suspected the degree to which it was emblematic of the development of new century Burma. Nor was he likely to guess that the policies developed in India and Burma had impacts and echoes in colonial situations in Nigeria, Canada, Kashmir or British Guiana.[57]

Oil in Burma

Like the forest products, the production of oil in Burma predated the British, but was expanded to meet the needs of empire. 'Earth Oil' had been present at Yenangyeung for generations.[58] The ownership of these wells—which had been hand operated—was in the hands of a number of Burmese families whose interest in them was hereditary.[59] However, the desire to bring this industry into British hands (with the prospect of making it a global industry) may well have contributed to the Third Anglo-Burmese War.[60] For our purposes, the prospect of oil—like that of forestry and minerals—helped to define the way in which the British conceptualized rural Burma.

The production of oil had become a key interest for British Burma. However, in the new century, it had become not only an important industry, but one that had significant potential for most British interests. Between 1902 and 1905 the Admiralty classified Burma's oilfields as a matter 'of great importance'.[61] This followed from a decision in 1904 by the Admiralty to require all new battleships and cruisers to be able to burn oil as an auxiliary to coal. Consequently, the British were forced to find a supplier of oil and Burmah Oil was seen as the most likely supplier. It was critical for the Admiralty that the oil be produced by a British supplier.[62] After all, it might be remembered that Burma was a minor world oil producer (especially compared with the US or Russia), but it had double the oil production of any other country in the British Empire.[63] However, Burmah Oil had to build a new refinery and there was anxiety that the amount of oil needed to supply the Royal Navy would detract from what was necessary to produce kerosene. Ultimately, Burmah Oil would gain the contract from the Royal Navy at the end of 1905, which stipulated an amount to be delivered during times of both peace and war.[64] All of this meant that between the end of the Third Anglo-Burmese War and 1914, the commercial activity around Yenangyeung had reached unprecedented proportions.

Those who might romanticize the forest (and the operations associated with the commercial exploitation of it) proved to be less sympathetic to oil. Enriquez, a true Burmaphile, shared his disdain for Yenangyeung, which was famous as the place where oil came up through the sands near the river. It was at Yenangyeung that much of Burmah Oil's work was carried out. Enriquez portrayed it as a site of alternative pollutions:

> The quiet peace of the voyage is always rudely disturbed at Yenangyaung and the mind offended by the unsightliness of the place. It is dirty and forlorn and quite different from the rest of Burma . . . The word Yenangyaung means "oil streams". A greasy coast of oil floats upon the river . . . The drillers who sink the wells are all Americans who keep the business exclusively in their own hands . . . Everything is done for their convenience. Unfortunately, they are often very troublesome, truculent fellows, ready to take full advantage of their strong position . . . the Yenangyaung call is nevertheless different to any other. The Indian coolies who swarm on board are displeasing to look upon, after the happy chattering Burmese crowds of other river-side ports. Idle drillers and prostitutes lounge on the jetty to welcome new arrivals with encouraging yells in the Yankee language. An army of their servants come with them against whom it is wise to lock cabin-doors . . . You might pick up a dozen novel cuss words in the saloon in five minutes if you felt your own stock inadequate . . . "White coolies" is what the Burmese contemptuously call them.[65]

The production of oil, then, resulted in environmental and human pollution. Enriquez actually followed O'Connor's more in-depth look at the oil industry in Burma. The complaint against Americans probably reflected British anxieties about the possibility that Britain was behind the US and other countries in the production of oil. Writing more than a decade earlier, this had not been a concern of O'Connor, though he had looked askance at the Americans he met there:

> The most prominent feature in the landscape, as I approach the wells, are the lofty, spider-like derricks which crown the knolls and make strange patterns against the sky, as if they were skeletons of some extinct settlement. Under these, and scarcely visible above the soil, are the primitive works of the Burmans. Each well is marked by a splash of dark stained earth made by the refuse and wastage of the oil. These, and the patches of the purple croton, give the hill-slopes a singular blistered look, that is in harmony with their arid character

> of thatched huts in which the work-people live, the wider roofs of the European houses, the dark tapering spires of a monastery, and the cupola of a white pagoda complete the picture . . . The superintendent, an American, with clear blue eyes, a soft lazy drawl, and a loud, frank, explosive laugh, shows me round. "Wal," he says, "thar ain't much to see around here; but I guess you're welcome to see what thar is."[66]

The American and his brutal indifference were key features of the landscape. O'Connor's careful eye was mostly reserved for the Burmese; in the production of oil he observed poverty, traditions, flirtations and, ultimately, the dehumanization of the labourers. To begin with, he distinguished the traditional Burmese mode of production from that of the contemporary oil industry.

In contrast to the contemporary methods of pumping oil, O'Connor noted that the Burmese method was much simpler, but it did not produce sentimental commentary from him. The Burmese dug a well of a 'depth about 200 to 300 feet, and oil is extracted from a bucket tied to rope, making it human labour from start to finish'.[67] The young girls who are involved in this work 'get fourpence a day for their toil, and they prefer the hard labour of it to more lucrative employment' because as O'Connor's unnamed source put it, they 'flirt here all day long'.[68] He explained further, quoting his source: 'Only girls in search of husbands go to Yenan-Gyaung' was the envious comment of the women along the river, to whom such opportunities were denied.[69] O'Connor explains that the production of oil had proceeded in this manner for at least four generations. However, the *twinsa* were under severe financial pressure—because of the debt that they had acquired. Equally important, O'Connor emphasized that between the debt and value of the oil (outside Burma) a situation was created in which all of the workers—including the management—were dehumanized:

> [I]t is at the receiving station, where the Burmese output of oil is measured and taken over by the company's agents, that the bizarre character of Yenan-Gyaung becomes intense. The inner space, where these operations are gone through, is surrounded by a wide circle of black, greasy pitch, an amalgam of oil and mud, stamped with footprints and the hoof-marks of men and cattle, and crowded with carts full of glistening jars of oil . . . I find myself within the inner circle, set round with lofty sheds with face inwards, like the seats of

> an amphitheatre. The platforms of the sheds are crowded with the strenuous naked figures of men employed in pouring oil from jars into iron reservoirs. The oil pours in a green, glutinous stream; the sun glints on the polished muscles of the toilers; above in long rows on the topmost tiers set the Indian supervisors and tally-clerks, in white robes, silent and taciturn. The stairs of the platforms are slippery with oil, and all the arena is alive with moving figures of the oil-bearers, hastening up their quota. They look like demons from some under-world, rather than human beings; they look least of all like the happy people of the soil who elsewhere go to and fro in the silken shirts to worship at some golden pagoda, lifted high above a world of beauty. Some strange metamorphosis has overtaken them here . . . I am reminded of the pictures that prophetic writers draw of the Industrial Future . . . here are the debased workers, unhuman in appearance; supervisors over them of another race, silent but ready to intervene should a scuffle or riot take place among them; and over all the shadow of the Colossus of Capital, into whose maw the toil of the under-workers runs . . . Capital and cool intellect have been busy these years amongst the ancient owners of the wells; judicious loans have swept nearly all of them into the Capitalists' grip, and the Twin-sa, the hereditary "Well-Eater", trembles under his little finger, because he knows that his mortgages are overdue and foreclosure must crush him. He is glad enough to get the company's price for his oil.[70]

O'Connor's word picture reveals itself a discerning eye. Careful readers of *The Silken East* might well come to understand that ecological damage done at Yenangyeung was itself only a superficial reflection of a larger problem. Rather, the system of international capitalism which made oil increasingly valuable was despoiling human relationships in Burma. O'Connor almost certainly could not have known that as he wrote, some in the Admiralty were working with the assumption that oil—especially produced in Burma, the empire's best oil producer in the new century—would only become more valuable. The Americans, the *twinsa*, the Indian managers, the engineers all laboured, however unwittingly, in the larger service of both commercial and imperial interests. Early in the new century, then, Burma's oilfields had become an important asset for both the country and the empire. Unfortunately, the oil boom was not sustainable and the massive expansion of the industry in the early 20th century made this promising venture into a veritable footnote in the economic history of Burma.

The ruby rush

As late as 1918 Enriquez noted that Burma's 'extraordinary mineral wealth is still almost unexploited'.[71] The rush to mine rubies and other precious stones in Burma remains an understudied and possibly underchronicled subject. British interest in the development of mining rubies and other gems seems to have begun in earnest immediately after the formal conclusion of the Third Anglo-Burmese War.[72] The mines in Mogok were the property of the king, and the British moved swiftly to retain them under imperial administration.[73] Between 1886 and 1900 the British faced a number of challenges increasing ruby extraction. They had to import machinery, devise a licensing system, accommodate laborers frustrated with their new owners and improve the roads. Nisbet related that the environment around Mogok was challenging as the road passed through 'heavy jungle, pestilential with malaria from the time showers of rain fall in May until the soil dries up the following year'.[74] Ultimately, the operation became more profitable as equipment was used to wash ruby gravel more efficiently and to supply enough power so that the process might go on during both day and night. Nisbet explained that 'the chance of reaping a rich harvest of the precious stones is directly proportional to the quantity of ruby gravel washed and examined'.[75]

O'Connor was one of the few (the anonymous author of *A Dog's Life in Burma, Told By the Dog* appears to have followed him) that grasped what was at once a human story, possibly worthy of Rabelais, and an ecological disaster. Even more, it also afforded him the opportunity to portray the migration of peoples into north Burma. For example, O'Connor took the opportunity to explain that it was in Mogok that he had met Panthays—including some who were loyal subjects of the empire and tried to keep abreast of its developments by reading newspapers from Hong Kong.[76] Beholding the human landscape was just as important to seeing Burma as were its jungles, defiles and mountains. He made his point clear by articulating the realities of the *The Silken East* as they were manifest in and around Mogok. He actually began the discussion at Kyatpin, which had once been the center of the rush for rubies, but was now nearly deserted. O'Connor noted that the drive for rubies attracted an interesting crowd:

> [S]trange people drift here from far corners of the world. Beach-combers and adventurers; Australians, who have failed on Thursday Island; discharged soldiers, who have fought over half the empire, or say they have; voluble half-castes, with restless eyes. The drift here are

> drawn by the spell of the ruby, and are undeterred by the company's typewritten warning in all the rest-houses on the way to the mines, that "by going to Mogok, they are undertaking a tiresome journey to no purpose."[77]

O'Connor was not simply interested in depicting the various servants of empire. His vision of human experience was broad and he also exhibited the assemblage of indigenous people who congregated on market day.

> It is the day of the big bazaar, and the market-place is astir, and quick with traffic. Along the yellow road, all hammered matrix of rubies, sit the market-women, with great hats on their heads, and the produce of their gardens spread before them . . . It is the East, the indubitable East; but clean, neat, and prosperous; the Far Silken East of the little-known peoples . . . some are clad in blue and red, in breast-cloth, coat, stomacher, and leggings; with crescent silver necklets, big again as the moon, about their throats. Some are of the Shan, flat of nose—'tis the failing of these people—fair of skin, with even a rosy flush in their cheeks, plump, waddling, comely comfortable. All are over-topped by the great hat, symbol of the Far East. Here and there in the crowd is a Burmese damsel, in silk, velvet, pearls, and a yellow translucent parasol, the comforter of some ruby king or European adventurer.[78]

In exploring Mogok, O'Connor went beyond word pictures—he painted images which amounted to a more detailed look at the impact of ruby mining on Burma's populations. O'Connor followed a tradition of Victorian writing—embodied by John Ruskin—of allowing the vivid description to be at once a result and explanation. Ruskin had done this in Venice (and elsewhere) but it was a technique well known to those such as Mayhew who chronicled the often desperate conditions (and variability) of the urban poor. In addition, the juxtaposition of images—'Diggers', 'Gentlemen Sorters', 'Under Supervision', 'Left to Themselves'—illustrated the profound disparities between those interests that controlled the operations and those who laboured long hours in the hopes of achieving something more than limited financial gain.[79]

The sorting process revealed as much about social conditions as it did the value of the rubies:

> As the gravel pours out of the machines it is taken away in trays and flung in a heap upon a table. The sorter then, with a sweep of

> his arm, spreads out the dark red mass in a thin layer. With his iron blade he separates this layer still further, and rapidly picks out the little pink stones, the palpable rubies, which lie gleaming in the mass. With another swift movement, he sends the surviving gravel flying into a truck by his side. When this is full it is taken away and its contents are subjected to a slower and more patient scrutiny by native assistants. Many rubies are picked out by them; but there should be none in this second sorting of any size or value. There is yet a third stage. In the outer yard wait the *khanezimas*, women whose hereditary privilege it is to buy this refuse, and search it for what it may contain. No man is permitted to share in this perquisite of the women of Mogok. It is here—where the gentlemen sorters sit, at the mouths of the grinding machines, swiftly reaping their precious harvests; and where their wild assistants pore over the refuse spread before them in the sun; and khanezimas in strange attire scratch like hens amidst the debris—that the human interest again becomes uppermost. Their place, at least, can never be taken by any machinery.[80]

Exploring Mogok meant also trying to communicate how rubies were extracted. O'Connor was also impressed with technological advances, and reference to these developments punctuate his narration as well. Of greater importance, however, was the effort to reveal the extent of the miners' poverty and to depict the kinds of humiliation which they must have experienced from the surveillance under which they laboured. O'Connor was capable of using his travels to supply cautionary tales. The first came from his description of U Hmat, 'the ruby king', who appeared to be the one Burman who had gained wealth from mining.

> He is not a foreigner like the big Chetti and the little man from Amritsar; but a native of the soil. He lives some distance from the marketplace in a rambling wooden house on piles, surrounded by limes and pomegranates. At one end he has built himself a strong-room of brick, in which lie hidden, according to popular tradition, rubies of extraordinary value. U Hmat is seldom seen abroad. He goes, it is said, in terror of his life; and his courtyard is thronged with retainers, who make for him a personal bodyguard. But in bygone days he travelled every year to Mandalay with a present of rubies, and was received in audience by the king. He is the builder of many monasteries and pagodas; but is said to be less lavish in this respect than most of his compatriots in Burma. He is believed accordingly by his European

> neighbours to have "his head screwed on the right way" . . . it is a commonplace of opinion that he is the only Burman at the mines who is not a fool.[81]

He was not portrayed as a Smilesian success story, but as someone corrupted by not only his newfound wealth, but also the fact that he required constant protection. U Hmat was pathetic and pitiable even if wealthy. U Hmat complemented the picture of the successful Indian trader which O'Connor included in his portrait of the ruby industry:

> Father and son are Hindus of Amritsar, small-headed, mean-looking, insignificant of figure, as you would think they were of brain. There is little in the circuit of their own small occupation you could teach them. While the son is hidden here in the throng of miners, his father sits, clad in an English shooting-coat, behind the iron-barred doorway of his house, a tray of purchased rubies on his knees. A few years ago, he came here a poor man. Money adhered to his fingers. In a little while he began to lend it at usurious interest, on the security of gold and rubies. Then he took to the ruby trade; and now he exports his rubies to London, to Paris, and to Delhi, this fishy little man, with the face of a rat, and fathomless eyes. His house reveals his character. Its forefront bears ostentatious testimony to his wealth. Its dark interior, its bolted trap-doors, and narrow tortuous stairs, exhibit the quality of his mind; and the stone walls, and the iron bars, strong as those of a tiger's cage, speak plainly of his caution, his cowardice, his rooted doubt in the stability of any power.[82]

O'Connor also told the tale of the arrogant assumptions which governed the decisions behind the commercial development of Mogok. It might be added that his references to mining in South Africa (which he understood to inspire the business leaders in Mogok) reflect his awareness that Burma was impacted not only by British (and Indian) governance, but also by international practices. He related his conversation with a mining official:

> Little as the company may seem to shareholders in England, and to many who live in their sheltered parishes, in the shadow of old-world steeples, never having heard, it may be, of this little fraction of their mighty empires, the company *in situ,* in the valley of Mogok, is something of a power. It stands in a measure for the supremacy of the

> white man; for the colossus of capital; for the State. The company's agent is a potentate in his own right. Elsewhere, in nearly every other district of the province, there is only one great man, only one big house, only one repository of power. But at Mogok there are two; the head of the district and the company's agent. And there are some who would like to see an extension of the company's authority. One morning, as I rode over the mines with one of its officers, a fearless elemental kind of man, he propounded to me a scheme for the rearrangement of matters at Mogok. There should be, he said, a great fence made about the company's territories, and with this fence the company should be supreme. No one else should have a word to say in the matter. "Do you think, now," he continued, "that Coolgardie, Kimberley, or Klondyke could be run on the lines of these ruby mines? No, sir! They manage their own affairs, with no Government of India to interfere with them." . . . "My dear sir," I said, "there will never be a Coolgardie, or a Kimberley, or a Klondyke in the Indian Empire, and I am afraid you will not get that fence."[83]

Coolgardie in a southern location in Western Australia had attracted miners and others seeking their fortune during the 1890s. The Kimberley mines in South Africa were well known. The Klondike precedent, in which possibly 100,000 people rushed to a remote part of Canada in search of gold, was public knowledge by the time O'Connor wrote *The Silken East*. O'Connor showed that the human experience in these places was relevant to Mogok and possibly more than the international business practices. O'Connor seems to have barely managed to contain his glee when he narrated the difficulties which the company had in turning a profit:

> [I]t is one thing to know that there are rubies of great price stored in the interior of a mountain in front of you; it is quite another to find them. The company, in short, embarked on a policy of adventure . . . meanwhile anxious shareholders waited for a dividend that never came; an anxious Government, prone to the prompt collection of its dues, waited for its rent; and hope, delusive, receded farther and farther away as the company's capital approached extinction. The value of its shares dropped down . . . When it was all but too late the company turned to the obvious remedy: it recalled its enterprising battalions, and began washing for rubies in the soft soil of the valley. It soon became apparent that the prosperity of the company had now become a simple little matter of arithmetic. It found that in every truck of earth sent up from the alluvial pits there was on average a

> certain percentage of rubies. The company's object became to produce each truck at a cost less than the value of rubies it contained, and to produce as many trucks as possible.[84]

These failures and their recalculations created a situation in which the mining of rubies was done by diggers—many hereditary—whose experiences were the opposite of U Hmat's. O'Connor made the experience of the individual who made a living out of digging central to this narrative. The average or individual digger, he explained, was dependent upon the 'the paternal care of the State' which demanded that he have a license.

> Equipped with his license he proceeds to dig a well in the manner already described, and the excavated mud, quickly washed is his harvest. When the well begins to tumble in, or to get flooded with water, he quits it, and proceeds to dig another. The company excavates on a larger scale. It begins by taking a slice of several acres off the surface of the valley. It calls this 'top-stripping,' . . . The ruby-bearing soil, known as *byon,* is then attacked by an army of diggers. Day by day the pit grows wider and deeper; and, in its essence, all this is no more than if navies were at work digging up earth for a railway embankment. There is nothing at the ruby mines more calculated to provoke astonishment in a spectator expecting advanced methods. For it is still all sheer, primitive labour—the labour of the pick-axe, the crowbar, and the spade.[85]

In essence, O' Connor also sought to get his readers to see the systemic relationship between British colonialism, international business and the exploitation of poor people in the wider worlds of Asia.

O'Connor's gaze was a discerning one: just as he described the environmental degradation associated with oil production, he was able through these descriptions and photographs to depict the destructive impact of mining on the land itself. O'Connor waxed eloquent about the glories he associated with the natural beauty of Burma and he was alert to the ways in which the country's rural areas were threatened by unwise or excessive development. But it bears mentioning here that the ultimate dangers which these landscapes held were for the various peoples who populated them. Nonetheless, in the final passage of *The Silken East* O'Connor exhibited his faith in both Burma and the Burmans:

> It is a little valley, shut in by lofty mountains, and greatly cut off from the world; and those who go to live in it grow very tired of each other,

> very weary of looking at the blue-green hills, and the shadows of the restless clouds. They have an article of faith that the only fools in Mogok are the Burmese, who finding rubies, give them away again in pious works for the sake of a vague and far-away Nirvana; and down there in the midst of the turmoil of the trucks and engines, in the heart of the pits where the diggers toil, in the crowded market-place where the rubies gleam on brazen trays, in the maelstrom of the little mining town where thousands, from the untutored Meingtha digger to the cultivated English gentleman, labour, giving all their time and their zeal and great part of their lives to the digging, the buying, and selling of the little red stones, it seems very foolish indeed to give them away again, to so shadowy an end as the accumulation of merit. Yet here is the truth: that almost the only note of the spiritual life, in the midst of this Babel of materialism, is struck by the Burman fool. One cannot resist this conviction here, on the mountain slopes, where the little villages slumber, and dark spires of monasteries climb toward the illuminate heavens.[86]

O'Connor's view was a serene one: Burma would experience modernization, malaria might be cured, mosquitos managed and oil useful, but the majesty of the land—its forests, mountains, rivers, climates and minerals would nonetheless endure.

Conclusion

The city and the country—at once regretted and cherished by Victorians—in their various ways reflected many of the realities of turn-of-the-century Burma. Tagore had pointed to the disconnection between Burma and Rangoon—the bustling metropolis where the economic development and patterns of modernization proclaimed the country's future and yielded immediate social tensions. It might not be too much to claim that for the Burmaphiles, cities did belong to Burma's landscapes—but they existed as reminders that they had an ancient and significant past. The presence not only of Pagan, but other sites as well, exhibited not only previous achievement, but also collapse and decay. To a lesser extent, this applied to Mandalay as well, which fascinated Britons (and others) as a relic of the recent past. More important, perhaps, the use of the past possible after the unification of the country meant that these ruins fit more conveniently into one national landscape. The country—from jungle to forests and agriculture—became progressively valued by British policy makers, and in the early 20th century it was

sufficiently untamed to provide the stimulus for romantic reflection and tourists aimed at apprehending things picturesque. Yet, the country was also the place of the village and headmen, which together signified the potential for crime, particularly dacoity. However, new century Burma was sufficiently pacified to make the rural areas available for romantic consumption instead of being unsafe places defined by criminality. As we observed in chapter four O'Connor reminded his various readers, as well, that Burma had had cities, but their desolation and ruin signified the present as much as their architecture did the past. Rangoon, Pagan, the jungle and the other spots were ultimately landscapes which begged interpretation and elaboration. Ultimately, the ethnic Burmans would be identified as being much closer to 'jungle folk', as the title of E.D. Cuming's novel implied. In trying to understand the different ethnicities in the country, many British writers almost certainly believed that they had a kind of key to comprehending what happened in Burma.

7
Engaging Ethnicity

Attempts to understand Burma under colonialism have often relied upon John Furnivall's now classic discussion of the 'plural society'. It is worth repeating Furnivall's influential passage:

> [T]he western superstructure is only one aspect of a distinctive character, common to all tropical dependencies, that cannot fail to impress even the most casual observer: the many-coloured pattern of the population. In Burma, as in Java, probably the first thing that strikes the visitor is the medley of peoples—European, Chinese, Indian and native. It is in the strictest sense a medley, for they mix but do not combine. Each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. As individuals they meet, but only in the market-place, in buying and selling. There is a plural society, with different sections of the community living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit. Even in the economic sphere there is a division of labour along racial lines. Natives, Chinese, Indians and Europeans all have different functions, and within each group subsections have particular occupations. There is, as it were, a caste system, but without the religious basis that incorporates caste in social life in India. One finds similar conditions all over the Tropical Far East—The obvious and outstanding result of contact between East and West has been the evidence of a plural society.[1]

For new century Burma, the issues involved in ethnic pluralism would have been evident in many places—especially, but not exclusively, urban areas. Taw Sein Ko would later describe Burma as an 'ethnological museum'. As we saw in the previous chapter, Burma's enticing landscapes produced varied responses, but the most important were the identity and relationships between its many peoples. Understanding the land—city and country—meant comprehending the peoples attached to it. In British Burma this implied at least three situations: (1) recognizing

the number and status of recent immigrant groups (mainly Indian and Chinese); (2) comprehending the identities of the many ethnic groups which existed inside the country; (3) finally, understanding the Burmans who were the dominant population group. Taken together, this would be a vast ethnographic agenda and few could be said to have attempted it. Nonetheless, most inhabitants of British Burma made assessments and decisions about these realities. Of course, for the indigenous populations the task of comprehending the British, Westerners, and immigrants would have been at least as daunting. Perhaps the most explosive issue had to do with the status of newly arrived immigrants. This was hardly an issue for the British who tended to see them as an asset. However, the task of understanding the Burmans was the one which was paramount, and it produced a spectrum of conclusions. The Burman would be defined in terms of their recent history (as the British understood it) and also with respect to their patterns of behavior. However, many candid British assessments came out in relation to trying to solve social problems. Last, one of the most stereotypical charges leveled at the British (and other imperial powers) is that they practiced 'divide and rule' policies, and in exploring the ways in which they engaged ethnicities it is possible to construct a basis to support some of these accusations.

Immigration: the plural society and its limits

Immigration into Burma did not begin with British rule, but grew steadily under imperial governance. By the new century, Indian immigration had reshaped parts of the country, especially urban areas. Rangoon's population of Burmans was not as large as its Indian counterpart. It must be remembered that when Indians immigrated to Burma they were still within the Indian empire. More important, South Asian immigrants came to Burma for many reasons, and a good number of them proved to be temporary or even seasonal (depending on their occupations). Since many came as coolies, most were male, and a significant number lived in abject poverty. Indian immigration also meant that some men and women were born as second- and third-generation immigrants. One more point: in select instances some Indians were very successful and upwardly mobile, or came to Burma through existing commercial networks. These Indians flourished in Burma under British rule and collectively they made up a significant portion of the country's wealth. Chakravarti claimed that it was Indian financial capital that actually paved the way for the building of Rangoon.

Yet, Indian capital acquired a bad if not poisonous reputation. By the beginning of the new century many Burmans, who had initially benefitted from the economic activity which occurred after the country was united under British rule, found themselves in significant debt. These debts were held by the Chettiyars, a very specific group of Indian bankers. All of that meant that Burman nationalism developed first with a grievance against Indian immigrants and for that matter the country's inclusion in the Indian empire.

Chinese immigration did not produce such strong reactions, partly because Burma was not part of India. Yet, the true Burmaphiles such as O'Connor recognized their importance and economic power in Rangoon and other places. No less important, the numbers of Chinese were significantly smaller. That said, Burmans were certainly aware that Chinese commercial interests were wide-ranging and important. In Rangoon it might well have been recognized that Chinese immigration was neither confined to Burma nor monolithic. The movements of people out of China extended in many directions; Burma received Chinese in the northern borderlands. To cite one obvious example, the Panthays came to Burma as Chinese Muslims who arrived as refugees. Their experience shared little with those who came to Rangoon as part of pre-existing business networks.

Taw Sein Ko was a product of British Burma. His family immigrated prior to his birth and he almost certainly spoke Burmese and English as much as he did Chinese. For Taw Sein Ko, cosmopolitanism was one of the pillars on which a modernized Burma might be built. As we have seen, his vision of a modern Burma was predicated on the possibility of a Buddhist Burmese dominance. That is, the language could be Burmese, the culture shaped by Buddhism, and it would also draw upon Chinese and Indian influences. It would be a modern Asian nation which might comfortably function within the ambit of the British empire.

Taw Sein Ko possessed a liberal and progressive understanding of ethnicity in Burma, but it could not be said to be a dominant position. The Burmaphiles were not inherently antagonistic towards South Asians or Chinese. However, O'Connor and Fielding-Hall worried about the growing dominance of Indian influences. O'Connor identified with the Burmans as much as Maung May Oung did in seeing Indian economic and cultural power as a problem for Burma. O'Connor, more than Maung May Oung, asserted that Indians were vulgar and inferior. As we saw in the previous chapter, O'Connor's contempt for Indians in Rangoon was clear. Fielding-Hall's polemic was less toxic, but he was as apprehensive about the fate of Burmans in their own country.

Exploring the ethnic minorities

British writing about Burma's many ethnic minorities was normally a reflection not only of time spent in the country, but the ability to see and encounter these peoples directly. Tracing this body of literature is as complicated as it is diverse; however, it is possible to delineate key features to much of this writing. The discussions about the Shan, the Karen and the Kachin were the most numerous and best documented. The more ambitious writers sought to include the many different types of 'hill peoples' in their writing about Burma. For our purposes, the treatment of the Karen, the Shan and the Wa illustrate that British discourses followed the descriptive pattern typical of Victorian authors.

From the British point of view, the Karen sat at the top of ethnic food chain. They represented what might be called a 'model minority', and it is clear that the British regarded them differently. The virtues for the Karen were easy to name: they were 'loyal'; they could be counted on to supply soldiers; they converted to Christianity in significant numbers and they seemed to prove the least difficult people in the country to modernize.

Donald Smeaton's *The Loyal Karens* of Burma is arguably one of the most iconic books produced in British Burma. Smeaton did the almost ritual duty which came with discussions of ethnic groups: he discussed their ancient cosmology and their family practices, and provided descriptions of their appearances. However, the book was written with a very different agenda: Smeaton wrote during the pacification of Burma and he clearly sought to document that the Karen had remained steadfast supporters of British rule, even in the darkest days of the crisis. Smeaton's treatment of the subject was based largely on quotes which exhibited Karen loyalty, bravery and efficiency. In his view, the rebellion which began in Upper Burma might well have been successful in Lower Burma if it had not been for the Karen.

Missionary writers also portrayed the Karen in the most favorable light. Unlike so many of the Burmans, the Karen had been receptive to their work, with many of them converting and building churches. Missionary authors chronicle their achievements with the Karen, which might now be read as something of a success story. O'Connor thought that the mass conversion to Christianity provided them with an 'impetus to civilization'.[2]

For the reasons mentioned above, the Karen were well regarded in British Burma. Colonial authors made no secret of their affection and

utility in this far province of the Indian Empire. To cite one prominent example, Mrs Hart described the recruitment of Karen women into the nursing profession in Burma. More broadly, the Karen signified a group which might come to embrace British rule as they modernized. In fact, O'Connor labeled them as among the chief beneficiaries of *Pax Britannica*.[3] What was obvious, but usually unstated, was that they formed a nice reserve of support which might be mobilized to support British rule if it were ever again challenged.

If the Karen were loyal and hardworking, the Shan were much more remote, but it would be Leslie Milne's *Shans at Home* which would constitute something of a landmark for early 20th century ethnographic study. U Chit Hlaing has observed that before the middle of the 20th century, the academic study of anthropology did not exist in Burma.[4] He did situate Milne in the wider stream of ethnographic research.[5] Milne's study of the Shan was beyond what writers such as O'Connor or Scott could offer. To be sure, *Shans at Home* did begin with scenes from domestic life, but it was based not upon brief observations and conversations, but living at Namkham for 15 months. Milne want to Namkham for what would later be called 'field work' and during those 15 months she was 'the only white person in the valley'.[6] *Shans at Home* reflects the understanding of the Shan which was the fruit of this extensive and brave enterprise.

Shans at Home portrayed a rural society which might well have appealed to the Burmaphiles or other romantic readers. Milne provided a detailed look at Shan society, which began (like so many books on Burma) with a brief history of the Shan, locating their origins (as had Scott) in a migration of Tsu tribes out of central and western China. In this she followed the work of the sinologist E.H. Parker. Placing the history and ethnicity of the Shan was critical for Milne, but the strength of her work came from the intimate contact with the people that she experienced.

Milne may have been influenced by *The Burman* as she began her portrait with a look at the births of the Shan. She described the processes by which the babies are washed and first given clothes, the games they played as children and the methods of instruction into Buddhism. Like the Burmese, tattooing was an important signifier of maturation. Shan men were considered to have reached manhood when they received their tattoos.[7] She noted that 'plucky boys' might receive their tattoos as early as 12, but normally this would occur at 14.[8] Milne thought that they had acquired this custom from the Burmese and she described the process by which they acquired their tattoos:

> Shan men are always tattooed; occasionally only one leg has its blue decorations, but the rule is to tattoo both legs from waist to knee, the thighs being completely covered with an elaborate design in dark blue. This ornamentation does not always end at the knees, but may be continued to ankles . . . the pain of the tattooing process is less trying than the intolerable itching that follows, and their friends sit in a circle around them, giving the wretched boy such advice as this: "If you scratch yourself you will spoil the beautiful patterns of your legs." "You wriggle too much, people will think that you are only a little boy." "Remember that if you spoil that tattooing no girls will admire you." [9]

Milne was hardly trying to portray a lost Arcadia, but her accounts of many aspects of the lives of young male and female Shan might well have been attractive to the generation of Britons who believed that modernization had come with the loss of rural experience. For example, she was impressed by the Shan's ability to hear the sounds of the forest:

> The young folks are very merry; laughter ripples up and down the line; there is seldom a pause in the conversation. Shans have such acute hearing that a young man can easily be heard by a girl at some distance behind; no one talks of private affairs, as the conversation may be heard by all, but in these long walks the young people are excellent friends and comrades . . . They sit in groups on the ground; betel-boxes, filled with areca-nut and spices, are handed round, while men smoke. Shan women do not often smoke, unless they have acquired the habit in Burma.[10]

The courtship patterns could have only added to the appeal of life in the Shan state because Milne represented these practices as unforced and flexible. Daughters were rarely forced to marry men to whom they objected.[11] The Shan had a practice to ensure that elopements turned out favorably for the village. Milne related that if the parents did not give their consent to a prospective groom a small house would be built in the jungle. Since bamboo was plentiful this could be done easily:

> [T]he young man chooses a quiet spot near a stream and far from a village; there he builds a temporary home for himself and his bride. A new bamboo house is delightfully pretty; it is green all over, inside and out. The upright posts are green, and mat walls are green also . . . Sufficient food for some days is provided; then to the green

> home, hidden in the jungle, he brings his bride. A runaway marriage is considered no disgrace . . . Young people are soon forgiven, they return to the village to a new home, and the romantic little house is abandoned.[12]

Milne provided detailed descriptions of the marriage ceremony, focusing on the dress of the participants. With respect to the course of the marriage, itself, she observed many Shan unions did not endure. However, she explained that since the 'women are very independent' they often left their husbands.[13] These women were also free to marry again. Yet, she also noted that the Shan men often took a second wife and the first normally accepts this change.[14]

As we have seen, for O'Connor the market was the place to demonstrate the diversity of Burma's peoples and to exhibit the impact of corrosive economic development on them; Milne also drew upon the market to convey some of the complex realities of the Shan states. Each village had its own market day scheduled so as not to clash with its counterparts.[15] If O'Connor wanted to depict greed and hubris, Milne stressed the subtle behavior differences between ethnic groups. The market brought not only people from other Shan villages, but also the Kachins, who could speak the Shan language.[16] Milne explained that

> a hill woman may be distinguished at a distance from a lowlander, as she carries only one basket; it rests on her back, suspended from a band which crosses the head immediately above the forehead. Kachin men carry their baskets in the same manner as Shans. The dress of the men of both races is alike, though the Kachins often wear turbans of a brilliant scarlet shade—a colour never worn by Shans. Kachin women weave gaily coloured bags of elaborate designs; the patterns are different from those ornamenting Shan cloth, but both races sprinkle their designs with svastikas; indeed, some of the bags are completely covered by this emblem, repeated again and again . . . Palaung men wear jackets and trousers of similar cut to the dress of the Shans and Kachin, but the costume of their women is more like Kachin and Shan . . . In their woven designs Palaungs apparently never use the svastika. They are a well-conducted set of people, living according to the teachings of the Buddhist Scriptures. Like the greater number of Shans, they drink no intoxicating liquors, unlike their neighbours of the hilltops, who not only drink, but often get exceedingly drunk.[17]

Milne observed that in addition to dress, body language was an important signifier in the Shan states. She added that it was possible to distinguish these peoples by the manner in which they walked. Both the Kachins and Palaungs 'swing the arms from the side to the front across the body, in a semicircular movement'.[18] In contrast, the Shans swing 'their arms in a straight line, and do not bring them in front of the body'.[19]

Despite the fact that Milne observed that 'many old customs are dying out' she did not report on the Shan as if they were a people which would soon be challenged by modernization or economic competition.[20] Nonetheless, she was not indifferent to larger external issues which could impact Shan communities. To begin with, Milne saw British rule as guaranteeing peaceful conditions because prior to colonization the Shan suffered from Kachin raids. These slaving expeditions had been a perennial problem, leading Shan mothers to scare their children with 'Hush! The Kachins will hear you and come to take you away!'[21] She argued that if British rule were withdrawn, the wars between the Shan and Kachin would immediately resume. At the same time, the Shan did come into contact with some of Burma's newer immigrants. Moneylenders, often Indians (especially Pathans) were despised by the Shan.[22] Milne could not resist also commenting on the penetration of German industrial goods in the Shan states. Describing a Shan market, she complained that there are 'practically no articles of British manufacture' in the country districts.[23] Instead, all 'other goods that are not of native workmanship are "Made in Germany"'.[24] While she made a plea for British market share, Milne noted that one of the biggest complaints about colonial administration was the poor condition of the roads.[25] This point would be noticed by Thirkrell White in his memoir as well. In fact, she argued that if roads were improved, commerce would improve. Milne was a careful student of her environment, but she hardly saw a contradiction in hoping for more commerce and yet maintaining the pristine or authentic condition of the villages. In short, *Shans at Home* hardly presents a picture of inevitable change or social transformation.

Milne also addressed some of the legal issues inherent in British governance. Possibly following the example of Scott who in the *Gazetteer* had described the Burman use of trial by ordeal, Milne provided examples of the practice in the Shan States. In addition, she explained how different the use of torture looked to the Shan:

> Although torture is strictly prohibited, undesirable methods are occasionally practiced by headmen and other native officials, in

> out-of-the-way districts, in order to extract confessions from unwilling witnesses. Shans, like other Eastern nations, approve a certain amount of torture, and think it strange that the English should condemn what, to them, is a most sensible way of discovering the truth. A Shan once said to me, "If I knew that a man committed murder, how could I witness against him unless I am compelled to speak? If pain made me confess, no one could be angry with me, but if I told the truth without being forced to do so, the murderer and his whole family would become my enemies.[26]

For Milne, British governance was an indisputable good, but she, better than most, understood its limitations in Burma.

One final set of considerations remains the many hill peoples of Burma. British writers were particularly interested in the Wa and the Wild Wa. These discussions involved depicting tribal practices, the most notable of which was cannibalism. It would be this practice which separated the Wa from the Wild Wa. Understanding these groups could hardly have been of interest to the globetrotters—who doubtless enjoyed reading about them as a remote and exotic people—but they could interest the determined Burmaphile. The encyclopedic impulse, which was itself something of a Victorian cultural convention, meant that some of these authors took pains to distinguish these groups from one another. It should be added that they were often portrayed as the victims of Burman domination as well.

To draw this all together, the British compared the Burmans with the Karen, Shan, Kachin, Chin and the various hill peoples. In addition, these engagements with minorities may have had two much longer consequences: first, the conceptualization of the minority groups was based mostly on language and ethnicity; second, they tended to promote a narrative in which the Burmans were understood to be oppressors. In *The Burman*, Scott had said that the main ethnic group was a 'sad bully'. These efforts might well be exhibited as early examples of anthropological discourse or as characteristic of 'colonial knowledge'. Yet, they would have a very different and unforeseen effect: they would show who belonged to Burma. These groups all made up Burma, which meant that it would be a country with one dominant group and an unusual range of minorities. Mostly absent from these representations were the immigrants (possibly because they were not terribly interesting and seen as foreign) and groups based upon religious differences. Burma might have a significant number of Muslims or Christians, but taken together they did not constitute a minority group.

Defining the Burmans

One of the most iconic assessments of British perceptions of Burma was Harold Fielding-Hall's *A People at School*. The premise of this work—that the Burman required British tutelage in order to function effectively in the modern world—has been remembered much longer than its explicit discussions of Burman life. *A People at School* actually reflected the contradictions which were often not far from many of the Burmaphiles strongest impulses: they were committed to the basic mission of imperial rule (even if they did not like all of its actors) and, at the same time, there were facets of Burman experience that might be seen to be wise or even superior to what might be found in the modern West. More generally, by 1900 British perceptions of the Burmans were grounded in considerable experience. The combination of the armed conflicts which produced British rule and some of the problems which the British encountered in governance produced a number of assumptions about Burman character and behavior. These racial assumptions and stereotypes were gendered as well. Burmans—especially the males—were frequently regarded as inferior, prone towards many forms of criminality, and lazy and immature. To trace these views, it is necessary to see how the British understood the ethnic and historical origins of the Burmans, their cultures and behavior, their experiences with social problems and, ultimately, their vision of what the future held for them.

Assumed origins

It is a cliché that physical descriptions of ethnic groups formed a basic component of late 19th and early 20th century discourses which engaged ethnicity. The peoples of Burma provided as rich a source for these discussions and descriptions as its physical terrain did for landscape painters. Scott, for instance, referred to the 'very marked Mongoloid characteristics' which included 'high cheek bones, heavy jaws, narrowed eyes' with a nose that is 'too much developed in the nostrils and too little in the bridge, so that the eyebrows are almost flush in the face'.[27] He added that the women were 'sturdy and well-built, with very good chest and leg development'.[28]

A significant number of British writers sought to provide an explanation for the ethnic origin of the Burmans. The genealogies of these ideas are relatively easy to establish because for most authors this was regarded as a racial question. Scott addressed this in his *Handbook of Practical Information* (1906) in which he was probably deliberately vague about the

ultimate origin of the Burmans. He had no doubt that they had migrated from somewhere in central Asia and quite possibly by way of India. Scott was no less clear that they might be classified as 'Tibeto-Burmans'; Scott traced this migratory pattern and compared it with two other groups, 'Siamese-Chinese Subfamily' and the 'Mon-Khmer Subfamily'.[29]

Domestic life of a rural people

The fascination with the domestic life of the peoples of the empire was clearly evident in the pages of British publications devoted to Burma. In describing domestic life, these writers were exhibiting a Victorian and Edwardian cultural habit which itself might be considered exhibitive: namely, the detailed depictions of how people were living their daily lives. This trend referred to in chapter one meant that when British writers came to Burma, it was natural for them to try to trace the ordinary lives of the peoples that they met or saw—even those that they saw at great distances.

Just as Milne focused on the domestic customs of the Shan, Scott described the typical house and its contents which he characterized as 'most flimsy'.[30] These bamboo houses had been constructed in accordance with the sumptuary law which had been a part of 'native rule' and 'the Burman is too slow-moving to alter his habits'.[31] He believed that houses were gradually becoming more 'substantial'.[32] With respect to the interior, household furniture was not needed because it 'is the national custom to sit, eat, and sleep on the floor, so that chairs, tables, and beds are not needed'.[33] Scott explained that lamps were unnecessary because the rural population followed the sun and went to sleep at the end of the day.[34] Scott's description of Burman domestic life may well have been based upon the experience of decades in the country, but it was actually pedestrian for 19th century writers.

National character: active Burmese women define the men

Scott was confident that he had a firm grasp on the Burmese 'national character'. He argued that they were the 'most engaging race in Asia'[35] and he compared them to the Japanese, noting the similarities in their manners:

> [T]he Burman is open and frank, and withal courteous, the Japanese carries his politeness beyond the bounds of simplicity. The Burman is genuinely inartificial and ingratiating; the Japanese is polished to a

> degree which gets on the nerves, and in the end lies under the suspicion of being a mere mannerist. Except the South Sea Islanders, there is no Oriental race which is so winning, and the South Sea Islanders have not backbone. Both the Japanese and the Burmese have that in addition to the charm of demeanour . . . Both adapt themselves to those who make advance to them, and a very great deal depends upon the character of the observer.[36]

It is worth noting that despite the attempts to locate the history of migration into Burma, the sympathetic voice managed to connect the Burmans to the larger category of 'Oriental'. Like so many British observers, his assessment of Burman life reflected a fascination with Burmese females. In this instance, the comparison with the Japanese continued:

> [T]he Burman is a thoroughly unbusiness-like person, and the Japanese is nothing if not business-like, even in the sweetness of his disposition. For this reason it is undeniable that the Japanese ladies are more fascinating than the Burmese. Both are frank, and unaffected, and have a charming artlessness, but the Burmese woman is far ahead of her lord in the matter of business capacity, and the Japanese woman is equally far behind. The Japanese wife is not only supposed to obey her husband, but actually does so. The Burmese wife shows her capacity by the way in which she rules the household without outwardly seeming to exercise her authority. The Japanese wife treats her husband as an idol, the Burmese as a comrade. Both have the power of beauty without the possession of it, both have a dangerous power of witchery; but the Japanese *musume* is more piquante and winsome, the Burmese *meinkale* more prim and practical. There are not wanting people who believe that the Burmese and the Japanese in far back ages lived in the same Himalayan home.[37]

British writers explored the activity of Burmese women and contrasted them not only with Japanese counterparts, but with those in Britain. However, much more stress was placed upon showing how the virtues of the Burmese women stood in relation to the inferior behavior of their sons and husbands.

Burman behaviours that define British perceptions

Scott did not mince words in describing what he believed to be Burmese faults, which he believed were clear both from the experience of

governance and from earlier conflicts. What he perceived to be some of the positive features of the Burman character might be said to have other implications:

> [T]hough the Burman has many good points he has also many disappointing faults. He has a courtesy of manner and natural good breeding which make him conspicuous even among Orientals, but he has great pride of race and self-reliance, and, these, when he is clad with a little brief authority, too often develop into arrogance. The race is probably the most light-hearted in existence . . . The love of laughter is born with them . . . but they are lamentably wanting in self-control, sometimes passing into wild outbursts of brutality . . . They are keen judges of character, as many a nickname given to their rulers, native and British, can testify, but they will allow themselves to be imposed upon by any glib or solemn charlatan with charms . . . Like most Orientals, they are ingrained gamblers, and they have far more passive courage than most Europeans. In former times they were notable warriors . . . Yet now they cannot be made into soldiers, and are not in the least disconcerted by the fact.[38]

Scott is making reference to the panic which Calcutta experienced during the early days of the Anglo-Burmese War, when the Burmans experienced some early successes. The more recognizable points at the turn of the century could in the hands of less sympathetic Britons easily degenerate into racist stereotypes.

Some of the basic and repeated stereotypes could be found in Scott's *Practical Handbook*: the Burmese were lighthearted (which meant that they were lazy); the Burman was violent (which easily fit discussions about dacoits); Burmans were indifferent to British rule (which meant that they were distant and possibly hard to trust) and arrogant. Additionally, the Burmans were prone towards criminal activities and aggression. The surprising omission is a reference to elevated engagement with alcohol and opium—but Scott did not miss connecting them to gambling. All of these stereotypes would feature prominently in British writing—here, in the words of a Burmaphile—and these characterizations would be evident among the OSO, satirists, missionaries and modernizers. Interestingly, the globetrotters, with the least experience in Burma, almost certainly relied more on these stereotypes than did the others. All of this implied that to see the 'real Burma' meant to assume in some fashion the veracity of these racial and cultural stereotypes.

While these often habitual explanations could help to account for many types of Burman behavior, it remains the case that they were often separated from direct discussions of racial stereotypes. Instead, recalling the detailed descriptions of Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, these authors simply furnished detailed descriptions (often accompanied by photographs) of Burmese forms of life. British readers might expect to see images of tattooing, pwes, and scenes from domestic life because they were frequently featured.

Scott assumed that the Burmans were basically a rural people, whose livelihood came from different forms of agricultural production.[39] More important, it helped to furnish a possible explanation for the perception that the Burmese could not compete with South Asians. Scott explained that the Burman race is 'undoubtedly incorrigibly lazy, and takes most kindly to the work that implies least trouble and least constant attention. The country abets him. The soil of Burma has merely to be tickled with a hoe to laugh with a harvest, and there is a superabundance of land available.'[40]

Scott drew upon the 1901 census to document the extent to which the population lived in rural areas. Rangoon formed an effective contrast, where most of the population was 'largely alien rather than Burmese'.[41] Scott believed that internal immigration could bring out the worst features of Burmese life because it made many who had moved to the Delta temporarily prosperous. Again, claiming that they were 'incorrigibly lazy' he explained that they could not handle their newfound prosperity because 'he has no idea whatever of being provident'.[42] Instead, Scott added 'he is spendthrift to the point of extravagance'.[43] Scott drew from his own experiences in the country:

> [W]henever he has money in hand he spends it on a *pwe*, an elastic word which covers every sort of festival from a purely family entertainment, through a dramatic performance offered gratis to the neighbourhood, up to a religious ceremonial. The young Burman spends his earnings on boat races, pony-racing, cock-fights, and boxing matches; the middle aged man does the same with profuse hospitality to the whole neighbourhood and half the surrounding villages, and all strangers thrown in; the old man builds works of merit, bridges, rest-houses, monasteries, and pagodas.[44]

The virtues of the Burmese women served to inform, rather than define the assessment of Burmans. Scott elaborated that only the females exercised financial prudence and that they represented the best hopes

for the Burman's future: 'if the Burman is to be preserved from losing his country to the industrious and copy-book-maxim-virtuous Chinaman, or native of India, it will be due to his womenkind'.[45] Nonetheless, he also noted that Burmese women often married men from these new immigrant groups. Scott explained that a 'Chinaman is rather a catch' while Indians (especially those from Madras) were 'rather looked down upon as inferior'.[46] Scott would hardly be the first to notice the prevalence of interracial marriages, as there 'is a very large half-breed population growing up'. In dispensing practical information Scott was confident that the results of these marriages could be broken down in greater detail: 'The boy born of a Burmese mother and a Chinese father dresses and considers himself a Chinaman, and is usually a very capable person.'[47] At the same time, the 'half Mahommedan calls himself a Zerbaddi, and is most unpleasant, and occasionally a dangerous member of society.'[48] Those South Asians of half Hindu parentage 'are usually contemptible, and frequently useless'.[49] Scott's mean sense of humor almost underscored the regard with which many of the people were held:

> The Chinaman's daughters dress as Burmese, and most commonly are plump enough to please a Zulu. The Zerbaddi girls are often extremely pretty, with dangerously fine eyes, which not unseldom are responsible for much violent crime. The half Madrassi, half Bengali, half Burman females are mere hussies.[50]

Scott predicted intermarriage would be the fate of many—if not most—Burmans who lived in urban areas, which would not be 'to the advantage of the towns'.[51]

Again, with the near protective instinct characteristic of the Burmaphile, Scott thought that the future of the Burman lay in the countryside. He explained that the 'pure Burmese'[52] is fundamentally 'pleasure-loving':

> [B]ut it is not the pleasures of the towns that he loves, and if he does, they usually land him in his grave or gaol. The Burmese will, in no great time seemingly, become a purely rural population, living peacefully and contentedly on their small farms, or little townships far from the greedy, bustling world. There are practically no rich Burmese men, but on the other hand, there is probably no place in the world where the population is so generally well off as in rural Burma.[53]

Scott's assessment bordered on being a plea for racial segregation, and one that might well fit under the larger rubric of *A People at School*.

Nisbet was skeptical that racial integration could ever be successful. or at least without controversy. Like Scott, he described the types of people provided by the union of different ethnic groups. Nisbet's discussion assumed both the veracity of racial characteristics and his own powers of social observation. He noted that because it was easy for Burman women to marry men from different ethnic groups, the country would probably experience the 'fusion of races'.[54]

> To the Chinaman, her fellow Mongolian, she brings an industry well suited to his own great characteristic; while in grasping greed and love of money she is thoroughly qualified to be the mate of the rapacious Hindu or the Mohammedan from any part of India . . . To be married to a Chinaman is for a Burmese girl rather like drawing a prize in the matrimonial lottery. The Chinese consider themselves, and are considered, as belonging to a race superior to the Burmese: and they are frugal, industrious, and affectionate. The fruits of such mixed marriages result, as might be expected, in a finer breed of children than the issue of unions between Burmese women and men of non-Mongolian race. Of the former, known among the Burmese as *Baba* or *Bawa* (a corruption of the Malay word Wawa, meaning "half-breed") and among the Chinese as *Shipyittem*, the boys are brought up dressed, and taught to jealously consider themselves as Chinamen, while the girls are usually made to adopt the dress, language, customs, and religion of their Burmese mothers.[55]

Nisbet observed that the children of Shan and Burman had a long history, which included a race which called itself 'Kadu' and had is own language and customs.[56] With respect to the children born from Burman mothers and Indian fathers, he, like Scott, did not mince words, noting their 'remarkable beauty, with lovely eyes', but 'as they grow up they are apt to develop traits of character of a very unpleasing nature'.[57]

However, the most significant difference between Scott and Nisbet's treatment about this subject was that the latter explored the taboo subject of children who had European fathers and Burmese mothers. Nisbet rejected the utility of discussing the 'morality or immorality' of what was a common practice in British Burma. He observed that the practice was understood differently by the British and the Burmese:

> So far as the Burmese girl is concerned, the union is not degrading to her. From her point of view she is married to the European; and she knows quite well that in perhaps more than nineteen cases out of every twenty the time must come when there will be a separation—that is to say, a divorce—desired by the husband.[58]

Nisbet explained these women had a status which was unique. They would not be considered 'married formally under the national custom of eating together from the same dish' but it did carry some advantages.[59]

> [She raises] herself to a position where she receives many marks of outward attention and homage, and she not infrequently utilizes this position to her own advantage in respect of the supposed influence she has with him whom she addresses as *Shin*, "lord and master".[60]

Nisbet was not afraid to write that this was a sensitive subject because he showed how difficult it was for British policy makers to address it. He referred to the succession of circulars from 1872 onwards which had failed to satisfactorily meet the challenges that interracial relationships between European (mainly British) men and Burmese might produce. For instance, according to Nisbet one such circular announced that these illicit relationships would have affected the promotion of colonial civil servants. This announcement was met with several marriages which were 'registered under English law, between members of the Indian Civil Service and young Burmese women already living with them'.[61] The circular was retracted.[62] Nisbet offered a more general observation about not only the practice, but service in Burma itself:

> This is not a very savoury topic of discussion. But the great majority of those who may perhaps feel themselves called upon to preach on this subject cannot know what they are talking about unless they have personally experienced the depressing effects of the climate and the dismal, soul-deadening solitude of residence in a small outstation, where for weeks and weeks, often for months, the young European either enjoys not companionship at all with his own fellow countrymen or at best only occasionally sees one or two, who are for the greater part of their time touring the jungle. Taking into due consideration the several influences of climate, environment, human nature, and the facts of medical science, one can quite understand the position taken with regard to such connubial relation with a

> daughter of the land that it is perhaps the least pernicious of all vices in its immediate and its ultimate effects on the noblest of temples, the human body which enshrines the soul, the image of God.[63]

Nisbet had his biases, but unlike many British authors, he was unflinching in his assessment of one of the brutal realities of British Burma. The children of these relationships concerned Nisbet, who noted that some were brought up as Europeans and some as Burmese. His assessment reflected on the challenges posed by Western notions of racial hierarchies:

> If they dress and class themselves as Burmese, it is really best in many ways. The absence of caste prejudice, the tolerance of Buddhism, and the prestige of their admixture of European blood, are all more favourable for the growth of self-respect among such half-breeds; whereas the social, religious, and political position of those who are brought up to consider themselves and to be considered as of degraded European origin is full of sadness and misery.[64]

Nisbet understood that the legal ramifications of these relationships had yet to be fully tested or understood. Far beyond circulars, he predicted that the High Court of Burma would have to determine the extent of property rights that these children would obtain upon the death of their male parent. Again, he explained that from the Burmese point of view it looked different:

> For the Burmese, Min Gadaw, the temporary wife of a European is in her own eyes, and in the eyes of her fellow countrymen, truly and honourably united to her husband pro tempore. The relationship thus created is not a degrading one for her; and after its dissolution she frequently marries well, without a taint of immorality besmirching her reputation on account of such a previous union.[65]

Fielding-Hall marshalled a number of arguments to counter the perception that the Burmans were lazy or not competitive with Indian and Chinese immigrants. The argument in *The Soul of a People* reversed the assumptions about work, efficiency and productivity. Fielding-Hall created what might be termed 'the Burman's Gaze' as a way to challenge the presuppositions behind some of the prejudices which flourished in colonial circles. In describing 'Happiness' Fielding-Hall challenged

many of the broader presuppositions of many men and women in the 19th century:

> The Burman does not care for a big house, for there are always great trees and open spaces by the village. It is far pleasanter to sit out of doors than indoors . . . We think differently. We are content with cheerless days, with the absence of love, of beauty, of all that is valuable to the heart, if we can but put away a little money, we can enlarge our business, if we can make a bigger figure in the world . . . we go beyond this: we believe that work, that drudgery, is a beautiful thing in itself, that perpetual toil and effort is admirable.[66]

For Fielding-Hall the answer to the ethnic slur was a religious argument. That is, economic competitiveness was not a concern for the Burmans because their cultural habits were shaped, if not determined, by their religious life. Like O'Connor, Fielding-Hall's characterization of Western values stood in contrast to those of Buddhist Burma. He was impressed by the Burman's spiritual depth:

> Happiness is the aim he seeks. Work and power and money are but the means by which he will arrive at the leisure to teach his own soul. First the body, then the spirit; but with us it is surely first the body, and then the body again.[67]

Fielding-Hall 's 'Burman Gaze' made the British (and other Westerners) the issue. In Fielding-Hall's mind, the Burmese were clearing watching the British:

> He often watches us with surprise. He sees us work and work and work; he sees us grow old quickly, and our minds get weary; he sees our sympathies grow very narrow, our ideas bent into one groove, our whole souls destroyed for a little money, a little fame, a little promotion, till we go home, and do not know what to do with ourselves, because we have no work and no sympathy with anything; and at last we die, and take down with us our souls—souls fit for nothing but to be driven for ever with a goad behind and a golden fruit in front.[68]

Fielding-Hall was writing to defend the Burmans, but his polemic raised the issues to a new height. In *The Soul of a People*, he would articulate positions which were not common in the 19th century because he suggested that the colonial life (and the capitalist system) were damaging for both the Burmans and the British. In this sense, *The Soul of a People*

was an anticipation of Orwell's *Burmese Days* which depicted not only the exploitation of the country and its peoples, but the dehumanizing effects that colonialism had on the colonizers. The satirist had hinted at this as well, highlighting the absurd character of a number of British mores, but also their brutal indifference to the well-being of the peoples of Burma.

John Nisbet also went to considerable lengths to examine the Burman character. Like the Burmaphiles, he believed that both the country and its peoples might be misunderstood. With that, Nisbet believed that he was offering a fair assessment, noting that the Burmese were frequently called the 'Irish of the East'.[69] He believed that they were 'naturally lazy' but tended to be well behaved because they were law abiding.[70] However, Nisbet thought that while the Burmese were 'decidedly truthful' they were hardly 'truth-loving'.[71] Instead, Nisbet explained why a 'man or a woman would just as soon tell a lie as the truth'.[72] Nisbet distinguished the Burmans from Bengalis from Chittagong, whom he referred to as 'habitual liars'.[73] Instead, Burmans tended to lie for specific reasons and if they were found out they could feel shame. However, Nisbet added:

> When a Burman does lie, which is not infrequently the case, he lies somewhat more boldly and comprehensively than judiciously and discreetly; hence detection is comparatively easy. According to their code of honour the use of falsehood is quite justifiable in escaping from the snares of the deceitful. If there is ill blood between two villages and one trumps up a false charge of having lent money before witnesses whom he produced, the opponent will not attempt the difficult task of trying to prove a negative; he will bring witnesses in equal terms or larger numbers to prove that he paid the money back again. And the friends of each party who come as false witnesses will not see anything particularly wrong about their friendly procedure.[74]

Nisbet adduced that for the Burmans 'sincerity is not a leading characteristic'.[75] For Nisbet this made trying legal cases in Burma quite problematic. He could not fail to remark that in spite of

> the freedom of intercourse between young lads and lasses there is comparatively little immorality. Cases do however occur, and if found *in flagranti delicto* the girl will often sacrifice her lover by bringing a charge of rape against him. So much is this the case that rape charges in general tax to the utmost the discriminative powers in the magistracy.[76]

Nisbet also commented on Burmese superstitions, which was a theme which fascinated British writers. Again, it could be said that he used the virtues of the Burmese females to exhibit the worst features of their male counterparts. The men 'are easy-going and fond of idleness' while the women are 'energetic' and aggressive in money matters.[77] Nisbet was more in line with British writers, when he observed that in addition to having a propensity to gamble, Burmans were vulnerable to excessive consumption of alcohol and opium. Noting that the problems associated with substance abuse could be tied to the 'advent of western civilization and British administration', Nisbet underscored that gambling was a problem which preceded colonial rule.[78] Nisbet contrasted the Burmese with the Chinese, arguing that the former were significantly more vulnerable because 'they have less control over themselves . . . are not infrequently reduced to utter poverty though this vice'.[79] Nisbet combined the stereotypes with the general perception that the Burmans were behind in their own country as he predicted that the future would not be a kind one:

> These traits of the national character, and more especially those of the male Burmese, are hardly such as can reasonably be expected to maintain the race in the competition, now commencing and soon likely to assume vast proportions, between them and Chinamen, Shans, and natives of India; and the consequence must be that, even although Burmese may remain the language of the country, the population which will be found throughout the province a century hence will most likely be of an exceedingly mixed character. The Burmese hold the country at present, but their vis inertia, strengthened by the heredity of generation after generation, is so great that it seems improbable they can continue to maintain this advantage . . . Burma will be a much less desirable place to live in than it hitherto has been, when once the present happy, careless, casual incarnation of "lotus eaters" has given place to a more industrious, a more thrifty, and a more calculating race of people.[80]

These authors were sympathetic, but they believed that the Burmans faced a significant set of hurdles to become successful in a country which they perceived would develop into a modern and ethnically pluralistic society.

More important, perhaps, it is evident that prejudices about the Burman character had explanatory power in understanding social developments. Reading the sources in relation to what might be found 'within

the archival grain' illustrates that concerns about the Burman character were widespread. The 1918 debate about the origin of crime in Burma yields some striking examples of the ways in which colonial authorities assessed the Burmese character. The commissioner of Pegu believed that many young Burmans committed crimes out of 'sheer exuberance of energy and love of adventure'. Above all, he believed that the Burman lacks 'self-control':

> The Burman gives way far too readily to the impulse of the moment and when he has started does not know how or when to stop. If he takes opium, or gambling, or drink, he carries this to excess, not only at the time, but also as a habit. If he wishes to take revenge he does not stop at merely injuring but tries to kill the person against whom he has a real or fancied grievance. If asked to join in committing an offence he yields readily. When he has to earn his living, if there is difficulty in earning it honestly, he follows what appears to be the easiest path for the moment and tries to get something dishonestly . . . It is not enough merely to forbid the Burman to take opium. Every effort must be made to see that it's not put in his way by loafers. So also with drink.[81]

The district magistrate from Bassein added that he believed that the 'rise in the standard of living and the impact of Western ideas' were difficult for the Burman 'on whom they have a particularly unsettling effect'.[82] U Po Hla, the district magistrate from Pyapon complained about gambling. His assessment was consistent with his colleagues and he observed that gambling could be especially destructive because it rendered some Burmans poor and 'on the verge of starvation'.[83] Mr Cooke, the commissioner from the Sagaing, also thought that the Burman was vulnerable to 'sudden gusts of passion'. More interesting, he may have been influenced by Fielding-Hall when he explained that crime resulted from the 'childishness of the Burman character' and only 'education can mend matters and that will take several generations'.[84]

These candid assessments of the cause of crime in Burma were indicative of the racial prejudices with which many—possibly most—British civil administrators regarded the Burmans. What is striking is not only the unanimity of these perspectives, but the ways in which they were easily and comfortably articulated. The Burmaphiles had not put things so drastically and they had tried to represent things from the Burman point of view, but, that said, they shared some of the assumptions of the police leaders.

Conclusion: testing the new Burma

Furnivall's idea of the 'plural society', in which different ethnic groups 'mix but do not combine', would almost certainly have resonated with many people in new century Burma. The British were aware that Burma was indeed an 'ethnological museum', in which many different peoples existed, co-existed and struggled—often to cope with the changes brought about by colonization and the arrival of modernity. The basic tension in engaging this subject came from the realization that if it was a 'museum', it was a highly dynamic one. The ethnic composition of British Burma was being altered with respect not only to the percentages of peoples in the country, but to their locations and status. Burma experienced immigrant entry into the country as well as indigenous peoples who migrated within its boundaries. British observers were also fascinated by those peoples living in remote places who had seemingly been little affected by modernization and the practices of British administration. Without a doubt, however, those who wrote about Burma were concerned about the fate of the 'People at School'. Fielding-Hall was hardly alone in wondering how the Burmans would ultimately be affected by the waves of immigration and economic competition which accompanied modernization. The more reflective observers wondered, as well, what British governance and economic development (and social transformation) would lead to in Burma. As early as 1887 the candid Smeaton had raised the question about British India in 1986. Referring to British insensitivity to local cultures, he predicted that in 1986

> [one would,] I fear, find the millions of India not one whit more able to govern themselves than they are now. We have nowhere fostered the growth of real national life. We are endeavouring to create a New English India. The product will not be much to our credit.[85]

What would Burma and its peoples look like in the new century and beyond? These answers (and others) would become evident in the new century. As we will see in chapter eight, Burman nationalism would emerge and possibly illustrate or refute the idea that the Burmans required tutelage. However, it will also be evident that the tensions which were often implicit at the turn of the century would become increasingly explicit.

8
Dacoits and Dissent

The previous chapters exhibit British self-confidence in governing Burma. This attitude, perhaps best personified by Viceroy Curzon's grandiose ambitions and assumptions ('It has now passed for ever into our hands'), ran through the heart of British writing about Burma. Curzon was actually referring to preserving Burma's historical artifacts, but he assumed that Britain would rule the country for a long time.[1] The British, after all, were confident that Burma was an important place with its own history and cultures which, though distinct from India, would remain within the ambit and protection of the Indian empire, and which they could govern while recovering its past and reshaping its future. They assumed as well that while it was exotic, its religious life could be either used or translated into something respectable, and many believed that the immigration into Burma would probably reshape and reorient the country towards the broader streams of Indian Ocean commerce. Many of those in business and government continued to believe that Burma would provide almost magic access to the enormous southwestern China market. It might be recalled that actual episodes of rebellion or insurrection in new century Burma were comparatively rare and short-lived. The minor uprisings (largely isolated incidents) in 1906 and 1914 generated neither obvious popular support nor anxiety in the governing authorities. Yet, there was inevitably a kind of disconnect between these assumptions and aspirations and British experience. That is, these writers were all too aware that the completion of the pacification was recent (and many had lived through it), and they could almost as easily recall the events of the 'Indian Mutiny' which began in 1857. For those who lived in Burma, these issues were often compartmentalized neatly under the heading of 'dacoits'. However, this chapter will not only address the fascination with dacoits, but explore the other modalities of dissent which were available to the Burmese and other peoples who wished to resist, or at least not support, British rule. To be sure, a number of inherent difficulties exist in both trying to recover the extent and depth of

the opposition to colonialism and determining the extent to which people were unwillingly co-opted into resistance movements. Nonetheless, it will be useful to examine passive resistance, forms of non-compliance, intercommunal violence and hints of early nationalism in order to try to depict the extent of opposition to all that came with being a province of the Indian empire.

'This campaign against disorder'

It is instructive to examine Charles Crosthwaite's *The Pacification of Burma* in some detail because his narrative points to many assumptions which the British developed about the peoples that they were governing. Despite the fact that Crosthwaite regarded the annexation of Upper Burma as something of a blunder, the subsequent pacification produced a progressive conquest narrative. As Major General Ruxton MacMahon put it in *Far Cathay and Farther India*, brigandage could 'be said to have been normal in Upper Burma'.[2] Accordingly, perhaps, the most basic presupposition that turn-of-the-century Britons had about Burma was that their arrival and rule was an obvious and permanently altering change for the good of the country's subject populations. This meant that they could assume that British governance would produce loyalty, which might be readily made evident. The basic narrative emphasized that British administration ensured the rule of law, the freedom from crime (including the activities of dacoits) and more broadly, economic progress.

Crosthwaite regarded the annexation of Upper Burma as a difficult challenge, which in many ways was more difficult than annexing the Punjab had been.[3] To successfully annex Upper Burma the British were required to restore order, defeat multiple insurgencies and inspire the confidence of the peoples who came under colonial administration. They also had to be sensitive to establishing the borders with China, Siam and French Indochina. These issues required balancing political accountability to both Britain and India while dealing with a local situation for which there was hardly precedent in Burma. Trying to bring the hill country under British rule produced special challenges as well. Despite the significant differences between Lower and Upper Burma (and the British experience in them respectively), Crosthwaite told the story of bringing multiple resources to ensure the establishment of law (as well as consistent, unified governance) to the areas formerly controlled by the Kingdom of Burma.

Crosthwaite explained that one of the challenges was knowing when to request the assistance of villages. At the heart of his narrative was the idea that dacoits were normally criminal gangs, but after 1886 many became the means to resist British rule. Dacoits were fighting a guerilla war against the advance of British power, but at their most basic, they were ruffians or members of criminal gangs, whose numbers had now swelled. Crosthwaite assumed that while many villagers (and even villages) might resent the removal of the monarchy, and while many might have sympathies for the insurgencies, most would prefer the rule of law. It might be noted that he rejected the views of Fielding-Hall, whom he quoted at length to exhibit someone who understood the country's future differently.[4] This presupposition reflected a common view that much of the countryside had been lawless under Thibaw, which meant that villagers were accustomed to being preyed upon by brigands. Consequently, the establishment of British rule meant liberation from significant criminal activity.

At the same time, Crosthwaite depicted some of the cruelties attributed to the dacoits. This included the murder of headmen sympathetic to the British,[5] the abuse of select females,[6] and the compulsory joining of dacoit gangs which some villages experienced. It seems clear that dacoits did inspire terror in many villagers—especially as they were credited with burning 45 out of 122 villages in the district of Western Myedu alone.[7] In addition, with many of the hill peoples, Crosthwaite offered the prospect of slaving expeditions as a permanent feature of their existence. Therefore the success of British arms—however difficult to achieve—meant the victory over rural terror.

The challenge of understanding the depth of both support and resistance from the local populace was difficult—if not impossible.[8] Crosthwaite's narrative explores some of the practical difficulties of trying to gain support from the local populations.[9] He quoted Sir George White to show the challenges that dacoits could cause in rural areas:

> These bands are freebooters . . . but usually reserving the refinement of their cruelty for those who have taken office under us or part with us. Flying columns arrive too late to save the village. The villagers, having cause to recognize that we are too far off to protect them, lose confidence in our power and throw in their lot with the insurgents. They make terms with the leaders and baffle pursuit of those leaders by roundabout guidance or systematic silence. In a country itself one vast military obstacle, the seizure of the leaders of the rebellion,

> though of paramount importance, thus becomes a source of greatest difficulty.[10]

Crosthwaite cited other issues which rendered British forces ineffective in Upper Burma. One of the least obvious was the import of judicial practices from Lower Burma. He complained that the judicial commissioner whose job was to preside over the Chief Appellate and Revising Court for the interior of the province was selected by the government of India from ICS, for a province of India with little experience in Burma.[11] The application of the Indian legal code could produce misunderstandings as well:

> There was a tendency to forget that an act—for example, shooting a thief or burglar at sight—which in a quiet and settled country may be a crime, may be excusable in a state of society where plunder and murder by armed robbers are everyday occurrences . . . neither the police nor the people knew how far they might go in defending themselves or in effecting the capture of criminals, and circulars were issued explaining the law which would have puzzled the Chief Justice. A Burman peasant before he fired his gun had to consider whether all the conditions justified him; and a frontier guard had to pause his finger on the trigger while he recalled the words of the last circular on the use of firearms. The result was that the police and the people were nervous and demoralized. It was better to let the dacoit pass or to run away than to run the risk of a trial for murder.[12]

He came to believe that the Burmans should not be given arms, because the firearms would only end up in the possession of the dacoits. Again, the precedents established in the governance of Lower Burma proved challenging in bringing order to Upper Burma. Crosthwaite blamed the 'freedom with which licenses to possess firearms' had been granted in Lower Burma as a cause for having to battle armed dacoits.[13] He rejected the idea that the Burmans should be given arms to enable them to defeat the dacoits:

> Every day's experience proved that to arm the villagers was to arm the dacoits. Burmans are incredibly careless. Even the Burman constables, who were to some extent trained and disciplined, constantly allowed their guns to be taken. A half-hearted measure had been in force in Lower Burma, which required that a village must have at least

> five guns, as it was thought that with that number they could defend themselves. Like most half-measures, it was of no use.[14]

Crosthwaite explained that confiscation of firearms was a difficult task to complete. Even though the withdrawal of firearms from the villagers had been one of the first orders issued by Sir Charles Bernard, it took a number of years to realize. He claimed that only in 1888 could the orders be put 'fully in force'. Crosthwaite believed that it did much 'to pacify the country and put down dacoity'.[15] He added that the disarmament of Lower Burma should have taken place much earlier:

> It is a pity that the disarmament of Lower Burma had not been enforced many years before. But no accumulation of facts are enough to destroy a prejudice, and for a long time my action was violently, I might say virulently, denounced in the Press and in Parliament. The wisdom and necessity of this measure has come, I think, to be admitted by most people and was never doubted by my successors, who wisely disarmed the Chins at the cost of a serious rising and a hill campaign.[16]

The scale of the disarmament was significant because the number of firearms taken from the villagers in 1888 and 1889 ran into the thousands.[17] Many of these arms were very 'antiquated and fit for a museum of ancient weapons' but they were the basic weaponry of the 'Burman brigand, and not a few good men, British and Indian died by them'.[18]

Another problem came from the lack of knowledge about local conditions. For example, dacoit activities in Sagaing illustrated that local officials could often be quite ignorant of what was going on around them.[19] Less dramatic, the hostile climate meant that many soldiers became ill.[20] More broadly, the establishment of law also meant bringing in military police, most of which were recruited from India. However, Crosthwaite explained that it was important to build a police force which was made up of many Burmans. However, this proved to be difficult.[21]

Crosthwaite acknowledged that the British had little idea of how difficult it would be to secure their rule over the entire province. Much of *The Pacification of Burma* covers the exacting task of extending British governance to the furthest borders which might be predicated on Konbaung rule. This could mean 'peaceful persuasion'[22] or that some entities 'had been brought to reason' in the Shan States.[23] He did not refer to 'secondary colonization', but among the tasks which faced the establishment of British administration was learning how to govern peoples that

had already been colonized. In fact, the British were adept at reconstituting these relationships, which facilitated bringing the Shan States under colonial administration.

Ultimately, several factors brought about the complete pacification of Upper Burma. Possibly the most important of these involved empowering the headmen in Upper Burma (and subsequently in Lower Burma). Crosthwaite happily recounted his advocacy of these policies by relating that even before the Third Anglo-Burmese War he had been troubled by the legal problems associated with persecuting the sympathizers of dacoits. Crosthwaite explained that the village system, if it were properly developed, might be a 'powerful instrument' which could help establish British authority.[24] He believed, as well, that the post of headman needed to be 'sought after or at least willingly accepted by respectable persons'.[25] Crosthwaite ultimately took credit for developing the Village Act of 1887:

> It established on a legal basis the ancient and still existing constitution of Upper Burma. While emphasizing the responsibility of the village headman, it gave him sufficient powers and the support of the law. It also enacted the joint responsibility of the village in the case of certain crimes; the duty of all to resist the attacks of gangs of robbers and to take measures to protect their villages against such attacks. In the case of stolen cattle which were traced to a village, it placed on it the duty of carrying on the tracks of paying for the cattle. It gave the district officer the power to remove from a village, and cause to reside elsewhere, persons who were aiding and abetting dacoits and criminals. This enactment . . . was framed in accordance with the old customary law and with the feelings of the people. It strengthened our hands more and gave us a tighter grip on the country than anything else could have done. Without the military police no law could have done much. Without the Village Regulation, the military police would have been like a ship without a rudder.[26]

Crosthwaite certainly believed that the Village Act reflected a combination of traditional Burman life with the benefit of British supervision. Accordingly, *The Pacification of Burma* illustrates that securing Upper Burma (and to a lesser extent Lower Burma) was a multifaceted enterprise which required strengthening the headman (made possible by the Village Act of 1887), the expansion of military and civilian police forces, military occupation and building of roads (and later railways) to make British forces mobile.[27] In short, Crosthwaite's narrative emphasized the

victory of the many forces of empire over disorder, difficult terrain, illness and many manifestations of savagery.

It also told the story of peace (and law) coming to Upper Burma, after many generations of strife and conflict. *The Pacification of Burma* represented British rule as a decisive change which would almost certainly improve Burma and its many peoples. Even though he disagreed with Fielding-Hall's assessment in *The Soul of a People*, Crosthwaite's narrative was actually consistent with the governing image of *A People at School*. The Burmans were backward but would benefit from British rule for the foreseeable future. He ended by quoting Milne on the decisive difference that British rule had made in the Shan States. To sum up, *The Pacification of Burma* might be said to have offered a picture of tranquility coming to a massive province of the Indian empire.

Truly pacified or pacified for now

More than a generation before the publication of *The Pacification of Burma*, Donald Smeaton articulated a number of concerns about both the decision to remove the monarchy and the future viability of British rule. In the *The Loyal Karens of Burma,* Smeaton, a man of considerable experience in Burma, raised the possibility that loyalty to British rule was not as deep as many Britons wanted to believe. To be sure, Smeaton's comments were written around the time that the British were surprised about the guerilla war which faced them after what they perceived to be the end of the Third Anglo-Burmese War. Smeaton's book is remembered for its unequivocal support for the Karen, but its value here is his candor:

> The Mandalay campaign was undertaken with a light heart, in the belief that the people of Upper Burma would welcome us with open arms. Events have proved how ill-founded this belief was . . . The people did not want us any more than they did thirty years ago. They rose to throw off our yoke, and they are still carrying on a guerilla warfare against us.[28]

Smeaton explained that the termination of the event was a decisive mistake because British rule was not yet secure:

> They winced under the pinching and squeezing of the king's officers, but none the less they loved the king. He was the head of their nation, the fountain of all the honours they cared for, and the defender of

> the Buddhist faith. It has been frequently been said that there is no patriotism, no national sentiment, among the Burmese. Those who know the country best, will, I am convinced, hesitate to admit this. The inhabitants of Lower Burma have undoubtedly prospered under our government during the last thirty years. They have had good harvests, growing markets, and brisk trade. All this they readily allow; but they never bargained for the overthrow of their ancient monarchy . . . the Burmese people bitterly resent the overthrow of their monarchy. It has also been urged that the war has no religious aspect whatever. This assertion, like many others, is misleading. The Burman cannot conceive of a religion without a Defender of the Faith—a king who appoints and rules the Buddhist hierarchy. The extinction of the monarchy left the nation, according to the people's notions, without a religion. We have overthrown the king and destroyed all traces of the kingly rule. Naturally they look upon this as destruction of their nationality.[29]

Smeaton's words were his own, but he was by this point an experienced administrator, and recognized that British policy had been at best questionable. He added that the task of pacifying the country would be challenging because the British were now left with the prospect of governing 'a turbulent people inhabiting a vast territory of hills and plains, forests, jungle, and swamp, impassable to troops during more than half the year'.[30] Most important, Smeaton's assessment pointed to a larger concern about the durability of colonial rule. To put it differently, had the achievements of British rule produced a loyal population, or had the events of the pacification (especially with some of the events in Lower Burma) demonstrated that Britain's hold on the province was only a bit more than tenuous? In 1887 Smeaton had his doubts; by the turn of the century it seems at least plausible that these fears were still present for many Britons in Burma. Nonetheless, Thirkell White confidently referred to the 'thoroughness of the disarmament' during the pacification of the country.[31]

Depoliticizing and domesticating the dacoits

In new century Burma, the term dacoit came increasingly to refer to criminal gangs who, while a challenge for villages and police, did not directly threaten British governance. Control of dacoits meant the possibility of ensuring the rule of law in the country. Crosthwaite's narrative indicates that what the British failed to do was to make a distinction

between dacoit and 'guerilla warrior', or find some other term which would have covered those instances in which the criminalized activity was not the end, but a means to challenge government.

Few concepts were more indicative of the blinding effect of secondary colonization (on the colonizer's perceptions) than the use of dacoit to describe a Burmese phenomenon. The term 'dacoit' was appropriated from British experience in India. The history of this development in Burma had yet to be written, but it is clear that dacoits were understood to be a part of the country long before the Third Anglo-Burmese War and the subsequent campaign of pacification. In addition, it would have to explore the history of the Thugee and Dacoity Acts which were passed in and for India from 1836–1848. For our purposes, it is instructive to offer a thumbnail genealogy, which was attempted in the 19th century. Captain J.P. Briggs's memoir *Heathen and Holy Lands* (1859) provided a sustained account of the author's experiences in dealing with dacoits. In this little known text, Briggs acknowledged that the concept was, in fact, borrowed from India as it was a 'Hindustanee word', but that did not bother him because it was endemic to the country: the 'Burmans under their native government were notorious dacoits; their war was a series of dacoities on a larger scale'.[32] Dacoits for Briggs were 'armed bands of marauders', who 'plunder by force, and hold in contempt the robber who steals by cunning'.[33] Briggs identified dacoits with a wide range of crime in Burma—this included 'cattle lifting', robbery (by assault) and slavery.

Briggs was involved, as well, in helping to organize local resistance against dacoits. In particular he worked to employ groups of Karen in a campaign to stamp out dacoit activity. His narrative contains an example of the process by which dacoits were caught, convicted (without trial) and summarily executed—and then hung for public display. In short, Briggs regarded dacoits as criminal gangs, but he did not consider them to be a form of resistance to British rule or legitimacy.

The situation after the Third Anglo-Burmese War (1885) was different. Parimal Ghosh has argued that the British delineated three sources of violence which they had to address: (1) traditional long outstanding feuds between villages, which became more acute due to the transitional nature of the times; (2) the ordinary dacoity associated with Thibaw's reign (this meant corrupt officials who feared the transition to British rule); (3) the 'pretenders' to the throne.[34] This last category included the Myinzaing Prince, who was the younger son of King Mindon by a lesser wife, who briefly came to dominate some of the country east of Mandalay. Given his lineage, the British regarded him as a potential threat

because they imagined that he could be a rallying point for united opposition to the annexation. He occupied Zibingyi (about 20 miles from Mandalay) but would be driven out in 1887. Once the British established a post at Kyaukse, he fled to the border state of Ywangan, where he died not long thereafter.[35] Nonetheless, as students of the region's history (including Smeaton) know, the British were very slow to recognize that in the aftermath of the official conflict—in which the monarchy was terminated and removed—they faced a powerful insurgency. Instead of grasping the fact that the resistance to them was a response to their conquest of Upper Burma, the British believed that they were facing significant difficulties with dacoits, who had already been challenging Thibaw's rule. General Prendergast was among those observers who sensed that the British were having trouble understanding their foes, as he thought that it was 'absurd and unjust to class whole divisions of troops in the field as dacoits'.[36] Military commanders believed that their civilian critics did not understand the complexity of the dacoit problem. They complained that civilian authorities were too lenient in the manner in which they dealt with dacoits.[37] These political officials required some 'evidence of actual dacoity with firearms' and as one contemporary observed 'for a theft a flogging is inflicted instead of death'.[38] He added that taking 'prisoners is therefore regarded as a mistake, and dacoits are in most cases shot out of hand when taken'.[39] In this sense the treatment of dacoits was probably no different than that which had been administered by Captain Briggs nearly a generation earlier.

Grattan Geary also noted that this was problematic, because he believed that British policies were actually making Burmans sympathetic to the dacoits. He cited the instance of a village north of Pagan where the 'great bulk of the dacoits now consist of ordinary village population—were mixed up. The villagers explained that had they not paid a dacoit leader they would have been looted. What else were they to do, they asked, for there was now no government to apply to for protection.' General MacMahon, who had served at the court of Ava, explained that the motivations for joining dacoits could be varied, but generally resulted from the decomposition of order in rural areas:

> Dacoity, or gang-robbery, was the natural result of revolution and anarchy. In its initial stage, and probably in its subsequent development, it never assumed a strictly political tendency. Many who, under ordinary circumstances, were law-abiding people took to the nefarious calling for the mere love of excitement, or to be considered men of spirit by their sweethearts; others adopted it to escape starvation.

> Thus inoculated, they became more or less reckless and demoralized, and in organized gangs even ventured to confront our troops. At last it came to such a pass that they found they must either make it their regular business to rob others, or be robbed themselves, for, excepting at our widely separated posts on the river Irrawadi, there was neither law nor dominant authority in the country. They were between the Scylla and Charybdis, for they were prey to professional dacoits on the one hand, and if found with arms required for protection they were harassed by our troops on the other.[40]

MacMahon echoed Geary in claiming that aggressive military responses to rural disorder actually made the problem worse:

> Overzealous efforts to stamp out dacoity by shooting and flogging men and burning villages, coupled with a want of readiness to pardon offenders who repented the evil of their ways, hardened men of this stamp and aggravated the difficulty.[41]

MacMahon offered the conclusion that problems associated with rural disorder could easily escalate into larger forms of protest and disobedience. One of the consequences of the pacification was the assumption that governing Burma required the systematic policing of the countryside.

These conclusions followed not only British experiences in India, but also the lessons that they took away from their encounters in Lower Burma. The experiences of British administrators in Lower Burma, particularly after the Second Anglo-Burmese War, were made relevant after 1885. From this point of view, the presence of dacoits was something approaching a default condition for Burma. This was especially the case when the monarch was weak. Thibaw's reign might be regarded a case in point, as many British leaders believed that order had collapsed in Upper Burma prior to the annexation.[42] The presence of dacoit bands in 1884 was well known to British officials who believed that the Burmans had a 'traditional and deep-rooted love of desultory fighting, raiding, gang-robbery and similar kinds of excitement'. Consequently, a Burman male might well be a dacoit for a year or two without having his reputation diminished. In fact, only when a strong king reigned (unlike Thibaw) would the land have a period of comparative peace. As one British administrator noted, 'Many of the robber chiefs who are now creating disturbances were already in arms against Thebaw long before our advance.'[43]

Yet, Taw Sein Ko understood the problem differently. As we have seen, he believed that modern education had produced behavior which might easily tend towards criminality, but he also assumed that criminal dacoit activities were deeply rooted in Burma's history. Not long after the conclusion of the First World War, Taw Sein Ko complained that Burma had a long established reputation for criminality, which he believed to be deeply rooted in the country's past. He explained that

> rightly or wrongly, Burma has, through her swollen criminal statistics, earned the sobriquet of being the "most criminal Province in the Indian Empire" . . . Some ascribe the abnormal criminality of Burma to the absence of public opinion, and of moral training at home or school, while others attribute it to economic causes, the disturbance of the social system and loosening of moral and religious restraints by the introduction of British rule and to the impulsive, reckless and passionate nature of the Burmans. All these learned discourses, however, fail in one particular: they omit references to the three tenses, the Past, the Present, and the Future. These three tenses are indissolubly connected with one another; out of the Past has grown the Present, and out of the Present will grow the Future . . . the Burmans have turned dacoity into a "national industry".[44]

Taw Sein Ko showed that dacoity had extensive roots in Burma's past as monarchs made use of dacoits and, yet, at other times found their kingdoms plagued by their power. However, Taw Sein Ko was sensitive not only to history, but to the country's reputation. By the early 20th century, Burma had acquired a reputation for criminality.

By 1900—if not earlier—the term dacoit could be employed to cover a range of a gang-related activities, all of which were criminal and difficult for local populations to tolerate; some of these actions might also have had political ends. Given the spectrum of activity associated with dacoity it is not surprising that the colonial state highlighted its dangers. The term, dacoit, then, was a fluid one: it could be invoked to depict a criminal gang or it could be used to identify those groups or organizations that were primarily aimed at challenging colonial authorities.

It might be added that making dacoits into largely non-political actors almost certainly underestimated the extent to which opposition to the British after the Third Anglo-Burmese War was also religiously driven. In fact, the motivations to oppose British rule were actually quite varied and they certainly included Buddhism; those who joined dacoit bands for religious reasons believed that in restoring the monarchy,

they were protecting Buddhism.[45] Furthermore, the support which the many ethnic groups gave to the rebellion—with the notable exception of the Karens, many of whom had converted to Christianity—suggests that the motivation to protect the religion was a real one. Alicia Turner's study *Saving Buddhism* does not deal directly with the events associated with the pacification, but the emphasis which she places upon the need to protect *sasana* would be consistent with the idea that the end of the monarchy promoted the idea that Burma's main religion was under assault. Crosthwaite had emphasized that Buddhism was a positive force (it might reduce the desire for opium consumption among the Burmans) which might support British authority, but he profoundly underestimated the extent to which the dacoits drew support from religious motivations.

In essence, dacoits could be 'domesticated' for colonial consumption: once shorn from their potential political and religious ramifications, they could be just as usefully deployed to support narratives about the necessity of British governance in a country which would be otherwise dominated by crime. It might be pointed out that the reporting of dacoity and crime were almost certainly interrelated. The presence of large numbers of dacoits in a particular area was more likely to be represented as a 'rebellion' or at least resistance to British rule. However, once these larger dacoit bands were successfully suppressed, the reporting of 'crime' in the same area tended to increase. Indeed, some British observers could assume that the presence of 'sporadic dacoity' meant that the larger groups had dispersed; accordingly, these bands would not be regarded as any kind of national resistance movement.[46] Nonetheless, dacoits were deemed to be a part of Burma's past and present: they could be said to be essential to any definition of a Burmascape because they at once provided definition to the country's history, while providing justification for the massive investment in different types of police. By implication, it also meant that the need for indigenous intermediaries was critical.

The search for indigenous intermediaries

British efforts to find credible intermediaries evinced their concern for the stability of the colonial order. It is worth recalling that in the case of headmen, the British were interested in their capacity to provide both security and surveillance. We have already seen in chapter three the colonial state charged a range of its officials with surveillance responsibilities. In this section, the discussion returns to the headmen in order to trace their obligations for social oversight.

Investing in the headman

As we saw in chapter three, headmen were absolutely critical to the maintenance of British rule. Crosthwaite understood the Village Act of 1887 to be one of the decisive steps taken to guarantee the restoration of order in rural areas.[47] The discussions about the headmen represented the flip side of that of the dacoits: they could be seen as the key figures in the narratives about the support of local populations for imperial governance; equally, they could be readily blamed when problems broke out in rural areas or when other problems occurred. More important here, the issue of whether the headman's deficiencies were connected to political aspirations or were simply a reflection of bad character or 'laziness' could be useful to the construction of narratives which supported or legitimated colonial rule. Furthermore, Jonathan Saba's useful work underscores the possibility that it was in the very effort of performing police oversight of possible episodes of corruption that the colonial state gained legitimacy. That is, in policing corruption the colonial state demonstrated its presence and utility. The ritual pursuit of corruption (the same might well be said for smuggling), then, might also be said to enhance narratives about the need for British governance.

It might be remembered that one of the key functions of the headman was surveillance. The headman would work with a hierarchy of colonial officials to provide information about his area or environment. Much of this surveillance could be directed at ordinary forms of criminality, but it was also a means to assess the possible threats from dacoit activity. Gathering information was also the fundamental responsibility of the beat cops who worked in conjunction with the headman. In the *Burma Police Manual* (1913) the section on Rural Beat Duty made clear the importance assigned not only to the collection of information, but the attention given to gangs:

> The primary duty of the beat constable is to collect information and to keep his eyes and ears open to all that goes on in his villages. Every beat constable will be supplied with a note-book by the officer in charge of the station or outpost, in which he will record the villages he visited and information of importance discovered by him.[48]

The *Burma Police Manual* contained instructions which were envisioned to ensure that even poorly educated or illiterate beat cops would still provide sufficient information: 'If the beat constable is illiterate, he must trust to his memory, and his report shall be entered in the note-book

on his return.'[49] These instructions also provided broad latitude for rural beat cops (and headmen) to track the movement of people in and around their areas:

> Beat constables should get to know by sight and name as many as possible of the residents in their beat, making a note of any persons suspected by the villagers of being bad characters, though not registered as such, and should enquire about and report the arrival of all newcomers, with the place from whence they came and the alleged reason of their migration. They should note the presence of any wandering gangs, endeavouring to find out who they are, what their occupation, the place they came from, and their destination. They should visit all camping-grounds and *zayats,* especially at night, and take note of the persons found there, but without interfering with them or harassing them in any way. They should attend any festivals, fairs or *pwes* that may be going on and note the persons present, especially noting if there are any known bad characters among them. They should report on the prevalence of gambling in their beats and the existence of gaming-houses and gaming-*waings*, but they must be careful to avoid illegal and improper raids on private houses and enclosed places where gambling is carried on. They must confine themselves to reporting the existence of such places.[50]

Priority was placed upon the development of a system of information-collecting. The *Burma Police Manual* stressed that the work of beat policemen was to deter or at least prevent crime. Nevertheless, the work of these police was to develop a detailed picture of their environment as their main duty was 'to collect information and to report it'.[51]

While the *Burma Police Manual* acknowledged the importance of the privacy of well-behaved villagers, it is clear that constables were being given latitude to develop 'local knowledge'. Developing a sensitivity towards local conditions might require time and guidance:

> Beat constables should be allowed to remain on the same beat sufficiently long to become thoroughly acquainted with the villages and residents within their beats and utilize their knowledge.[52]

It is worth remembering that Crosthwaite had complained about the inability of officials in the case of Sagaing (and elsewhere) to comprehend local conditions. Furthermore, the headman was empowered to enlist the support of the people of his village or area to join in these efforts.

Arguably one response to the deficiency of sensitivity to local conditions was to develop a massive police force (especially when it might be supplemented by village auxiliaries) to collect and refine information about various locales. Even though the British were concerned with dacoits in mostly rural areas, these guidelines could easily be applied to towns. The *Burma Police Manual* added:

> It is the duty of the beat constable to watch the streets, thoroughfares, and by-ways, and maintain order and be on the alert for the prevention of crime, the arrest or pursuit of criminals, etc. He should keep an eye on the liquor and drug shops and on the houses of suspected receivers of stolen property, and note the persons who enter them. He must prevent nuisances and obstructions of the public ways . . . He must observe all crowds and disperse them if they cause disorder of obstruction to traffic. He must protect public property and prevent commission of offences. He must report at once to the state or outpost nearest to his beat any threatened breach of the public peace, with which he cannot cope unaided.[53]

Constables had diverse functions, not least of which was surveillance. The assessment and classification of the information was grounded in procedures which connected the beat constable to the much larger policing structures.

The guidelines set forth in The *Burma Police Manual* had the effect of making the beat constables perform activities which would have been easily recognizable to tourists. They observed, collected information and then reported it. To be sure, they did these as tasks and not as consumers, but both realities may well have been predicated on a larger set of assumptions—some 'orientalist'—that Burma was a difficult place to know and understand. Consequently, a premium was placed on collecting and interpreting the widest range of information. This impulse may also help to explain why so many of the British writers went out of their way to attack the globetrotters who were merely passing through. Above all, it is possible if not likely that the reality of being outsiders ensured that collection of information (and its interpretation) were central to the daily life of British Burma. It might be added that in performing like tourists and in building something approaching an 'information regime', the colonial state may well have been adapting to local circumstances, but it was also consistent with many of the developing social and political practices in 19th century Britain. In fact, a case might well be made that at the heart of the

Victorian experience was the impulse to see, collect, report, analyze and sort.

These policing mechanisms were ultimately dependent upon both the loyalty and competence of the headman. The integrity of the headman needed to be absolute and so it is hardly surprising to find that these individuals were given many incentives to perform at the highest standards. All told, the British wished to believe and usually did believe that the headman succeeded in providing useful information about potentially dangerous activity.

Appropriating Buddhism as an intermediary means of support

Buddhism, many colonial administrators believed, furnished the second indigenous resource for intermediary support. After all, the annexation of Upper Burma had been accepted by many in the upper echelons of the Sangha. Moreover, the *thathanabaing* had lobbied to get his nephews admitted to an English missionary school within six months of the annexation. In addition, in 1887 he was active in trying to secure the surrender of the rebels by using local pongyis to distribute the Amnesty Proclamation written by the deputy commissioners.[54] At the same time, we have seen that British authorities appropriated Buddhism to provide basic education to primary-school-age children. Furthermore, it should be evident that crime was perceived as a problem: if dacoity was reduced to a minimum, there remained the fact that the abuse of opium, alcohol and gambling could produce significant problems (especially, the British believed, for Burmans) in their own right. Accordingly, the British found themselves increasingly turning to Buddhism to provide a moral compass to Burma's peoples.

Perhaps the best example of British support for active Buddhism reform (as they understood it) can be gleaned with their relationship with Ledi Sayadaw, who was the most successful Buddhist preacher in new century Burma. Ledi Sayadaw was best known as a distinguished Pali scholar, who was the founder of lay meditation movements and made Abhidhamma concepts comprehensible to larger audiences.[55] However, he was a compelling public speaker, frequently drawing large crowds when he spoke. British observers followed him with interest. The correspondents who supplied the material for *Modern Buddhism in Burma* were asked about the basis of his popularity. The Christian observers mentioned his 'eloquence' and his ability to speak plainly. Professor Ross of Rangoon College thought '[t]he fact that he has not had a Western education, but is in touch with the native Burmese mind'

made him compelling. Burmese respondents cited the use of 'Pareik' ceremonies in the face of the plague (instead of killing rats). Tsaw Hla Pyu was impressed with his refusal to accept alms. U Hpay agreed and added that Ledi Sayadaw 'prints and distributes tracts' and makes use of 'simple homely illustrations'.[56]

Alicia Turner has connected Sayadaw's efforts to a 'concern about the contemporary status of the *sasana*'.[57] She analyzes a sermon delivered in Myaungmya in April 1908 where Sayadaw inveighed against intoxicants, showing how he connected it to the Buddhist doctrines. The negative karmic consequences which might follow from intoxication could well have been understood in relation to natural disasters (such as plague and cholera). Above all, Sayadaw called for moral reform which the British supported. However, Turner suggests that in the larger Buddhist campaign against intoxicants, 'disease operated as a reference to the decline perceived in the colonial condition'.[58]

British authorities almost had faith that Sayadaw's preaching could overcome the defects in their own efforts with the local population. *The Report on the Excise Administration In Burma for the Year 1907–1908* made reference to Sayadaw's efforts and impact:

> It is for the people themselves to stop the spread of the use of drugs and intoxicants . . . The efforts of all officers who are brought into contact with the people and of all officers and others engaged in educational work should be devoted to the creation and encouragement of a healthy public opinion in this matter. It is believed that much good has been done by the preaching of the Ledi Sayadaw, a Buddhist ecclesiastic whose moral teachings have received the full approval of Government. It is hoped that Buddhist and other teachers will persevere on the same line.[59]

Furthermore, the British were happy to encourage the efforts of other Buddhist preachers to support moral reform. Finally, as we saw in chapter three, Taw Sein Ko connected the increase in crime to the condition of Buddhism after 1885. Taw Sein Ko was at once an active and devout Buddhist who believed that his religion could energize Burma's peoples and help the country achieve modernization, within the ambit of the British empire.

Modalities of dissent and resistance

Understanding the nature and depth of either support or dissent is complicated in any society. What is clear is that new century Burma was a

colonized society, with its critics, but there were few overt challenges to British rule. Given the visibility of colonial authority it would hardly be surprising that recovering forms of resistance would prove challenging. Consequently, there is warrant for attempting to determine the means of dissent and resistance which were available. Nonetheless, while the degree of opposition to British rule will always remain an open question, it is possible to delineate passive resistance, direct protest, the development of new civic and religious organizations, and intercommunal violence as modalities of protest.

Passive resistance

British writers were aware that passive resistance could be a form of protest. For example, John Nisbet remarked in *Burma Under British Rule—and Before* that the Burmans could be 'aggravating by their passive resistance when it is desired to get work out of them'.[60] This was noticed by the anonymous author of *A Dog's Life, Told by the Dog*:

> This Mem Sahib did not ride, but was carried in a sort of hammock slung on poles, which was called "dandy." It was carried by four men, and every fifteen minutes the "bearers", as they were called, were changed, so they were not very hard worked. They sang all the time they walked along. This Mem Sahib said "how nice it was to hear them so gay", but I wondered what she would have said if she had understood the words. They were something like this—The best singer would begin "Oh what a great big mem Sahib this is", then the others would join in as chorus "Oo, Hoo o What a lot of ghee (butter) she must eat to make her so fat. Oo Hoo o o, I hope she will give us plenty 'pice' for carrying such a load, Oo Hoo o o, But I think she looks very mean. Oo Hoo o o", and so on all the time![61]

New century Burma would certainly have found many who believed what would later be identified as the 'myth of the lazy native'. In *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, Syed Hussein Alatas focused on Filipinos, Malays and Javanese living under European empires, arguing that this idea was a fundamental part of a 'colonial ideology'. Another way to think about it is to credit the British in Burma with a bit more accurate observation to draw a very different conclusion: namely, that in performing as 'lazy' they were deploying a form of resistance to colonial governance. Therefore, one of the most significant issues to come out of these observations was whether they should be understood as a mode of passive resistance.

The lazy Burman would actually be deploying one of the 'weapons of the weak' against the colonial state.[62]

Given the breadth of the colonial state, Burmese resistance or indifference to British instruction could take many forms. In *State of Vaccination: the Fight Against Smallpox in Colonial Burma*, Atsuko Naono chronicled British frustrations about the resistance which they encountered in trying to introduce vaccination to Burma. Naono observes that the scholars have credited Burmese antipathy to vaccination as an indication of 'anti-colonial nationalism'. However, she argues that a better explanation was the 'lack of communication between the colonial medical establishment and the Burmese population, especially indigenous doctors'.[63] In some instances, the British medical establishment did try to recruit local doctors for support, but this also proved ineffective.[64] Ultimately, it would be in the 1920s that the British would succeed in recruiting Burmese doctors to advocate successfully for vaccination.[65] In other words, British mismanagement may well have contributed to Burmese behavior which might be regarded as 'resistance'. At the same time, this relationship might well have been symbiotic in that it helped furnish the colonizers with justifications for both governing and policies which promoted modernization.

The practice and evolving outlook of Burmese Buddhism provided another opportunity for passive resistance to colonial governance. For example, Alicia Turner cites monastic resistance to government educational policy, which they increasingly sought to contest. She refers to two patterns: monks that did not directly challenge government directives, but refused to comply with them; alternatively, some organized their efforts around a discourse which identified these educational initiatives as 'harmful to Buddhism'.[66] In the second instance, resistance was organized by the Pakhan Sayadaw, who was an influential abbot in Mandalay. He was an influential scholar, and many Burmese believed that he was more important than the *thathanabaing*. Between 1885 and 1895 he might be regarded as the de facto *thathanabaing* of Buddhism in the country, after the death of Taungdaw Sayadaw (who had been appointed by Thibaw). Because of his opposition to British educational policy, the British refused to take up the issue of appointing a new *thathanabaing* until Pakhan Sayadaw died in 1900.[67]

Direct protest

A third way in which opposition to colonial authority was exhibited came from symbolic and direct protest. Both the Shikho and the Shoes

in the pagoda are famous in Burmese history because they provide early indications that British rule was not being passively accepted.[68] The Shikho issue arose in 1903 over a requirement introduced by John Van Somern Pope, Director of Public Instruction of Burma, that students perform a daily salute to their teachers. Burmese students interpreted this to mean that they must *shikho* (a bow in which they must be prostrate) to their teachers, which they believed to be inappropriate. The negative reactions to the shikho provided the basis for Burmese to mobilize public opinion against colonial educational policy. The success of the protest could be measured by the resignation of John Van Somern Pope.[69]

The 'second shoe controversy' proved to be a more formative event for protest against colonial rule. The insistence of the British on wearing footwear had long caused bad relations with the Burmese. For instance, in 1830 the British envoy Henry Burney complained about the requirement to remove footwear in the presence of the Konbaung monarch. More than a generation later in 1875, the British envoy in Mandalay was ordered not to comply with the practice and King Mindon Min refused to meet him.[70] Subsequently, the British created an exemption for Europeans who would be allowed to wear footwear when visiting pagodas. This practice, which doubtless made many Western visitors and tourists comfortable when exploring pagodas, continued to produce resentment among the Burmese.[71]

In 1916 Thein Maung, a Burmese lawyer, challenged the law which he saw posted in Prome that enabled Europeans to wear shoes on the grounds of a pagoda. This complaint was quickly supported throughout Burma, with the *thathanabaing* refusing to intervene to diffuse the situation. Thein Maung brought this complaint before the YMBA, which eventually passed two resolutions. The first protested the use of the image of the Buddha by foreign companies in their trade and brand markings. The second rejected the wearing of footwear and encouraged its members to place signs against the practice at religious sites.[72] This 'second shoe controversy' challenged the British during wartime and represented an unprecedented political commitment on the part of the YMBA.[73] The trustees of the Shwedagon Pagoda were reluctant to remove the exemption for Europeans, but they were soon savaged in the newly emerging Burmese press.[74] Eventually, the exemption was removed throughout most of Burma, which proved to be a humiliating defeat for colonial administration and, ultimately, a moral victory for a 'new generation of Burmese activists.'[75]

The growth of Buddhist and Burmese organizations

The founding of the YMBA was an early instance of the development of a nationalist movement which would eventually challenge the British. Historians have tended to focus on the YMBA because it represented the heart of the nascent nationalism which would shape Burma by the 1920s—if not before. However, it is clear that the birth and development of the YMBA took place in a broader context in which a number of Buddhist and Burmese organizations were established. For instance, in 1902 and 1904 the Asoka Society and the Rangoon College Buddhist Associated were formed respectively. Beginning in 1905 Ledi Sayadaw inaugurated a number of Buddhist associations. These included Abidhamma Samkhit Athin, Nainggan Gya Buddha Sasananpyu Athin and Sasanahita Athin.[76] Many of these came into existence over educational issues.[77] Alicia Turner has documented that many of these organizations were devoted to the defense of Buddhism, which had been a motivating factor in the creation of the YMBA. As we saw in chapter four, the founding of the Burma Research Society was done with full British support, but it would be another voice which could contribute to nationalist aspirations.

Intercommunal protest and violence

The ethnic tensions which began to intensify near the end of the 19th century between Burmans and Indians (and to a lesser extent Chinese) might well be regarded as a form of protest against the realities of British colonization. Additionally, the violence between Burmans and Indians is not normally associated with a modality of resistance. However, it is important to bear in mind that Burma was in many ways (and not in all places) the product of secondary colonization. Intercommunal violence need not have been directed against British interests (narrowly defined) for it to have been a threat to the colonial order. O'Connor clearly understood that the resistance against Indian presence and Burmese self-assertion were easily related. May Oung's essay on national customs could almost be read as the first part of a manifesto in which the target was Indian interests. The second, unwritten text, might well subsequently be directed against British rule. It might be remembered that it would be in 1906 that the YMBA was founded, and while it would play a role in making Burma independent not only from India, but British rule, many of its earliest energies were directed against the perception of Indian domination. Yet, probably all of the colonial authors, including

the Burmaphiles, could not foresee a situation in which Indians would leave Burma. To protest against their presence might be justified and laudable (for O'Connor or Fielding-Hall), but it was not a realistic challenge to the conditions of British rule.

Burmaphiles and officially sanctioned observers

British writing about possible opposition appears to be slender for a number of reasons, many of which were obvious. These authors may not have wanted to legitimate opposition, but just as likely preferred not to see when it presented itself. Maung May Oung's piece is ostensibly a description of Burmese custom, but the last sentence tactfully contested not only the Indian presence in Burma, but the vision that the colonizer (he may well have had Scott in mind) had of Burmans. The Burmascape writers engaged the subject by suggesting that dissent and criminal activity had been successfully suppressed, but was still latent. The modernizers such as Taw Sein Ko assumed much the same, and for these authors it was impossible to imagine discussing contemporary Burma without reference to the subject of dacoits. Taw Sein Ko conveniently separated discussions about Buddhism from those of dacoits and crime. As a Buddhist and a modernizer he was comfortable with the idea that his religion might thrive under colonial rule.

Reading the Burmaphiles 'outside the grain' yields an interesting observation. These writers—who knew Burmese and spent the most time in the country—were relatively uninterested in dacoits. In fact, with the exception of Scott, who covered topics which virtually required their inclusion, these writers did not make dacoits a basic feature of their representation of Burma. Given the ample discussions of this subject (which are hardly confined to the archive), it appears that they consciously sought to resist identifying Burma with the full spectrum of associations which the term dacoit might imply. As we saw in chapter six, O'Connor was a good observer of human behavior; his portrait of the market at Mogok bordered on 'carnivalesque' trope. That is, in both *The Silken East* and *Mandalay and Other Cities of the Past in Burma*, O'Connor demonstrated that he was a good observer of human folly and social divisions. It might be remembered, as well, that Crosthwaite had engaged Fielding-Hall's discordant suggestions about Burma's future, because in *The Soul of a People*, the dominant colonizing narrative was called into question. To be sure, the author of *A People At School* assumed much which would have been recognizable to Crosthwaite, but his view of the country's future diverged sharply from many of his contemporaries. Both

O'Connor and Fielding-Hall believed in Empire, but they also distanced themselves from much of what might be regarded as its colonial project. In all probability, they assumed that British rule would endure for the foreseeable future and that Burma would be forever changed. Their critical voices should not have been considered opposition or resistance, but they did provide discursive space for others to conceptualize Burma in alternative terms.

Conclusion

In the new century, British attitudes towards dissent in Burma were diverse. Some Britons assumed that not only was the newly unified Burma a part of the British empire, but that it had been decisively and positively changed by imperial governance. Burma would become modern, progressive and prosperous, with its peoples benefitting in so many ways from British rule. The view put forward by Curzon was an extreme and arrogant formulation, but many Britons in Burma accepted the trajectory which it represented. It might be added that many Britons could live in the country for years without picking up any direct challenges to their authorities. New century Burma was a place where British power was evident in many ways and, as we have seen, the indigenous populations were being challenged by immigration, economic development and social transformation.

Yet, the doubts raised by Smeaton much earlier almost certainly were not far from the British mindset. Crosthwaite had admitted that 'we are outsiders' and the need for police was not inevitably reducible to the persistence of crime.[78] It might be true that Upper Burma was now pacified and increasingly integrated with its counterpart, but there remained a reluctance to create a large Burman levy. The memories of the insurrections in 1885 and 1886 remained, and the lessons learned from the shock of the events surrounding the Indian Mutiny were undoubtedly well regarded. To be sure, many British Burmans worried more about external powers—the rise of Japan, Chinese power and European rivals (especially the French) and even the presence of Americans—than they did about indigenous forms of discontent.

However, the discontent was evident but signified in ways which were at variance from the expectations which had been developed after 1857. The perceptive Briton might well have wondered whether there was more to the issue of Burman `laziness' than met the eye. Passive resistance was not part of the British vocabulary in the new century, but it might be argued that it was abundantly available to see for those who

knew how to look. At the same time, intercommunal violence was not a standard feature of British Burma but it was present, and might well be regarded as one of the modalities of dissent available to a people that experienced multiple facets of colonization. After all, new century Burma would appear to be relatively pacified, but its rapid alteration after the Great War suggests that the triumphant notes sung by its acolytes may have been misplaced.

9
Conclusion

A Burmese Loneliness reveals C.M. Enriquez's attempts to make sense of his experiences in British Burma. Writing with the hope that the Great War would end soon, he was clear that Burma had a good future, and like so many others he believed that this required sustained British tutelage. He referred to a 'new way' for Burma; his concept included education in all senses—moral, professional and institutional:

> [W]e wish to lead our younger Burman brother . . . The Burmese have to learn all about geology, engineering, forestry, and chemistry. They have to bring a University and High Courts into existence. They have to establish and extend the powers of their 'Archbishop' the *Thathana Baing*, lest Buddhism and the monks as a whole fall into disrepute for lack of control. They have to learn too, how inestimably valuable their old lore and literature is, and they must retain everything good that they have evolved.[1]

Enriquez's agenda was hardly novel, but it was also Taw Sein Ko's. In this instance, they had shared the vision of Burma independent from India, functioning in the British Empire, thoroughly modernized, cosmopolitan and tempered by the wisdom they associated with Buddhism.

The events which made up some of the more dramatic events in Burma after 1918 might well have suggested that the people had been at school as so many authors had suggested. Enriquez witnessed the opening of the University of Rangoon. This project, many years in the making, represented at once a triumph for Taw Sein Ko and a step in the emancipation of Burma from India. However, it would famously be greeted almost instantly by student protest. The student activists led the charge at the University of Rangoon. Less dramatic, the generation of Burmans that grew up with access to mass media increasingly expressed themselves and their disenchantments in a range of publications. Burmese women, in particular, embraced modernity, but did so on their own terms.[2] The

fundamental point was that those such as Enriquez who might have thought the end of the war would bring beneficent change to Burma were badly mistaken. Instead, the world of new century Burma was left behind. British rule would be contested in many ways in the 1920s; the Saya San Rebellion would be a greater challenge in the next decade.

The globetrotters, modernizers, the officially sanctioned observers and the Burmaphiles were each determined to explain the country to the world. They wanted to communicate its wonders and usually discredit both bigoted imperialists and obvious racists. In addition, their views were relatable, but they tended to set forth what they perceived to be their own 'real Burma'. In every case, they had explored facets of the country which proved to be relevant to its future. More important, perhaps, many aspects of Burma and its peoples remained almost shielded from their vision. The inability—or even the unwillingness—to see things which are so striking within a generation is one of the strangely compelling features of these discourses.

The globetrotters, frequently derided by the other writers, had observed things in Burma as they made their way around the world. To be in Rangoon was to have been in Calcutta, Singapore, Hong Kong and Yokohama. When they wrote about Rangoon or Mandalay it reflected brief assessments of experiences within the 'tourist bubble'. The more experienced Burma hands rejected them instinctively and even labeled them collectively as 'Yanks'. Yet the globetrotters understood that Rangoon (and with it Burma) belonged not merely to India, but to an international network. The 'tourist gaze' which they brought to the things they encountered in Burma reveals more about the networks which were bringing not only travelers to the country, but an increasing range of international polices, procedures and sets of expectations.

The officially sanctioned observers recognized that the globetrotters had never really seen Burma. They had visited many of its sites, but they had not engaged its peoples. For those whose experience might be said to be that of the Burmascape, this meant meeting indigenous people and assessing the experience of the colonizers. Even with their manifest connections to the colonial establishment, some were not afraid to be critical of what they had seen: Mrs Hart took a lively interest in social problems, and R. Talbot Kelly wondered out loud about Burma's future. However, there were definite constraints upon their vision as well. It was hard for them to actually imagine a different Burma. That is, precisely because their travel was well connected and prefabricated, it is possible, if not probable, that they had no sense that the peoples they met or studied (or even painted) had any real agency. The peoples that they met

and wrote about were not only atypical, but interesting because of what they signified about Burma before British colonization. How different their narratives might have been, for instance, had they been taken to meet some of the young activists associated with the YMBA.

The modernizers also wrote with a sense of urgency. They wanted to direct Burma's development or even save it from further upheaval. These writers could envision what Burma might look like: it would be cosmopolitan, prosperous, and exciting and it might well be a regional leader. The march of historical events from the 1920s onwards suggests that these voices had vastly underestimated the extent to which the country had changed. More important, their modernity was a conservative one; the subsequent modernization of Burma would be forged by global conflict and violent opposition to British colonialism.

The Burmaphiles would have had much in the country without its rapid or savage modernizations. Their Burma was a mixture of piety about the peoples and the land. They had spent years in Burma and their fascination with the country was born of significant experience. They were not indifferent to the fact that many Burmans were poor or obvious victims of racial hierarchies, but their writings show a mark reverence for the country which had made claims upon them. Yet, for all of their immense sympathies, the Burmaphiles could not sense both the extent to which the country had already changed as they lived in it and the degree to which their sympathies would quickly become irrelevant. In a sense, these writers had spent a good amount of their lives learning many of Burma's less obvious secrets. As they became masters of this fine, but specialized knowledge, Burma changed. It is quite possible to read these authors and realize that in some ways they were already out of date by the time they published.

Taken together, these discourses reflect some of the realities between the gargantuan task which confronted Burma as it faced both British colonialism and modernization. These narratives testify to both the destructive impact of British rule and the challenges which faced colonial administrators in governing a complex country. These voices may have been sophisticated and often well-meaning, but they were almost certainly at variance from those of the indigenous populations. However, they also exhibited the scale of change—in respect to modernization and colonialism—which Burma experienced between 1895 and 1918. Therefore, in reading British assessments and interpretations of Burma, it becomes possible to witness not only the challenges which faced Burma, but the development of a new nation. The British writers had to explain the borders, laws, peoples, governance, educational

policies, public health, trade policies, past and future of an entity which they had played a decisive role in creating. These writers also made the case that Burma should be independent from India and they envisioned it playing a significant role in the Indian Ocean economy.

These efforts bring up a related point: this body of British thought is worthy of sustained scholarly exploration. Burma after 1885 was a complicated and fascinating place, and these men and women embraced the challenge of understanding it. In all probability, they may well have even helped to form opinions about Burma which carried freight for a range of policymakers. That is to say that their ideas mattered. Since many of the Burmaphiles spent significant time in the country, their experiences should probably be taken quite seriously not only by students of British history, but by regional and national specialists. It is quite possible that the knowledge base that they had for apprehending the subject has yet to be surpassed.

Yet, all of these writers flew the flag of the now degraded 'colonial knowledge'. It might be remembered that leading 19th century intellectuals had issues with the kinds of knowledge which were produced in Britain itself. Dickens, Ruskin and Carlyle—to name just a few—made their discontent with this subject well known. However, it would also have to be said that the critics who reject 'colonial knowledge' instinctively or even emotionally rather than empirically would do well to first take account of the graphimania which flourished in late 19th and early 20th century Britain. The vast outpouring of blue books, studies, diagrams, notebooks, scholarly studies and other forms of analysis may well exhibit their limitations, but it is possible that their ability to take notes, analyze and classify virtually every phenomenon has never been surpassed. To disregard 'colonial knowledge' in this case is to reject some of the most detailed information about Burma which has ever been collected.

Last, this study has attempted to recover an impressive but lost strata of colonial writing, while using it to portray British Burma between the end of the Third Anglo-Burmese War and the Great War. This discussion seeks to open a series of conversations which would be bigger and richer than this author could ever hope to develop in a single book or series of articles. Publications about Myanmar now abound, and the future for the study of this Southeast Asian nation looks much more promising than even a decade ago. Nonetheless, the interest of those who would narrate the development of modern Myanmar has tended to downplay these materials. This book has aimed to exhibit their vitality and relevance. These writers had their limitations (which can make

them quite interesting), but seeking to engage the subject of modern Myanmar without taking this corpus of literature seriously is akin to the worst British writers going to Burma and refusing or being unable to see it. When O'Connor explained the significance of the Shwedagon Pagoda—arguably the most famous or iconic structure in Burma—he observed it had not 'been sufficiently appraised'.[3] He elaborated that assessing such a rich subject was beyond his capacity—but then added a series of word pictures which conveyed the importance of the pagoda in people's daily lives. O'Connor understood that it was the activity at the Shwedagon rather than the descriptions of it, no matter how detailed and impressive, that mattered. He began noting that people's contributions to the pagoda were both significant and indicative of a wise and beautiful attitude:

> The life that animates it to-day is of more interest, and it is true that if all else in Burma were destroyed, only the Shway Dagon with its life were preserved, there would remain enough to tell the world of all that is best in the idiosyncrasy of the Burmese race . . . Its spire of gold, touched by the flaming sun, is the first object upon which the eyes of the world-traveller rest as he approaches Rangoon, and it is the last of the city he looks upon when his steamer is bearing him away . . . It is covered with pure gold from base to summit; and once in every generation this gold is completely renewed by public subscription. Yet throughout the interval the process of regilding goes on perpetually. Pious people who seek in this way to express their veneration and to add to their store of spiritual merit, climb up daily with little fluttering packets of gold leaf, which they fasten on some fraction of its great surface; and there is no more picturesque sight offered by me than the group of silken worshippers outlined high against its gold, in the act of contributing their small quota to its splendor.[4]

This passage, with its fascination with what the traveler sees as he or she approaches Rangoon, has clear echoes of Ruskin. Like Ruskin, who used the Ducal Palace to interpret Venice's history, O'Connor used the acts of Buddhist piety to make a broader point about both Burma and the East:

> It is in such episodes as these that the fundamental democracy of Eastern life is most happily revealed. For the East, especially the East about which this book is written, is above all things tolerant. Time has taught it the faculty of leaving the individual alone. To live and

> let live is its philosophy; and it is the keynote of the life that daily throngs the platform of the Shway Dagon.[5]

O'Connor's need for homage to the Shwedagon Pagoda was personal, emotional and spiritual. Yet, his main point was that despite considerable attention from the globetrotters, Burmascape writers and others, it remained essentially little known. Similarly, the conclusion here is strangely like O'Connor's pagoda: these writers have been known, but nearly written out of history. Studying their efforts, achievements and misunderstandings reveals the world of British Burma in its full complexity. The Burmaphiles wrote to enable their audiences to see and comprehend the place and peoples they venerated. Ironically, in studying British authors writing about Burma it may well be necessary to fight a nearly identical battle to write them back into history.

Notes

Chapter 1

1 To provide one recent example: a wide ranging and highly significant study of the British Empire mentions Burma just once in 798 pages. See John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World System 1830–1970* (Cambridge, 2009) and Michael Aung-Thwin and Maitrii Aung Thwin, *A History of Myanmar Since Ancient Times: Traditions and Transformations* (London, 2012).
2 For a different perception see: Michael W. Charney, *A History of Modern Burma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.1.
3 Aung-Thwin and Aung-Thwin, pp. 16–17.
4 See the observations by historians of the Ottoman empire: Jane Hathaway, *The Arab Lands Under Ottoman Rule* (Harlow, England, 2008), pp. 244–7; Suraiya Faroqui, *Subjects of the Sultan* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), pp. 37–40.
5 It is worth noting that Maung Htin Aung identified the period from 1890–1920 as one of 'peace for the country'. He described a situation in which British rule was not challenged because the 'people were dazzled by new economic development and the restoration of law and order by the British'. See also: Maung Htin Aung, *A History of Burma*, p. 268 ff.
6 Michael W. Charney, *Powerful Learning*, p. 266.
7 Guy Lubeigt attributes this passage to Ni Ni Myint: Guy Lubeigt, "Introduction of Western Culture in Myanmar in the 19th century: from Civilian Acceptance to Religious Resistance" in *Essays in Commemoration of the Golden Jubilee of The Myanmar Historical Commission* (Yangon: Myanmar Historical Commission, 2005), p. 381.
8 Kin Thida Oung, *A Twentieth Century Burmese Matriarch*, p. 28.
9 Alicia Turner, *Saving Buddhism: The Impermanence of Religion in Colonial Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014), pp. 120–33, 138.
10 Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact*, p. 2.
11 Gregory A. Barton, *Empire Forestry and the Origins of Environmentalism*, pp. 6–7.
12 Su Lin Lewis, "Between Orientalism and Nationalism: The Learned Society and the Making of Southeast Asia", *Modern Intellectual History*, 10, 2 (2013), p. 354.
13 John Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*, pp. 306–7.
14 Neil A. Englehart, "Liberal Leviathan or Imperial Outpost? J.S. Furnivall on Colonial Rule in Burma", *Modern Asian Studies,* 45, 4 (July 2011).
15 Sir James George Scott, Burma: A Handbook of Practical Information (London: Alexander Moring, Ltd, 1911), p. 450.
16 Ibid., p. 450.
17 Ibid., pp. 453–4.
18 Ibid., p. 455.

19 Helen G. Trager, *Burma Through Alien Eyes* (Bombay: Asian Publishing House, 1966).
20 John Nisbet, *Burma Under British Rule—and Before*. 2 vols. (Westminster: Archibald Constable and Company, 1901), v.
21 Penny Edwards, "Relocating the Interlocutor: Taw Sein Ko (1864–1930) and the Itinerancy of Knowledge in British Burma", *Southeast Asia Research*, 12, 3, p. 278.
22 Thant Myint U, *Where China Meets India: Burma and the New Crossroads of Asia* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), pp. 15–16.
23 Alleyne Ireland, *The Province of Burma*. 2 vols. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1907).
24 Jonathan Saha, *Law, Disorder and the Colonial State: Corruption in Burma c. 1900* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 25.
25 Scholarly attention might be well served by collecting polemics directed against 'globetrotting' because it might prove to be its own unique strand of travel writing. Anti-globetrotting meant more than 'going off the beaten path' because it implied a level of expertise about a place, which might be informed not only by direct experience, but by related reading and study. See James Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism and the Ways to 'Culture' 1800–1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) and Stephen Keck, "Travel Writing About Hong Kong and Singapore" in Carmen Andras (ed.) *New Directions in Travel Writing and Travel Studies* (Aachen, 2010), pp. 154–68.
26 Gwendolen Trench Gascoigne, *Among Pagodas and Fair Ladies: An Account of a Tour Through Burma* (London: A.D. Innes & Co., 1896), p. 10.
27 Ibid., pp. 10–11.
28 Ibid., pp.10–11.
29 Anon., *A Dog's Life, Told by the Dog* (London: Henry J. Drane, 1909), p. 40.
30 Ibid., p. 90.
31 It might be noted that tracing the routes of these Officially Sanctioned Observers could go a long way to recovering the connections which linked colonial civil servants, that existed within Burma and India. More important, this type of method might be useful for producing information about the history not only of British Burma, but of other colonial elites.
32 Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Economy" in *Theory, Culture and Society*, 7 (1990), p. 296.
33 Parimal Ghosh, *Brave Men of the Hills*, p. 87.
34 *Report on the Police Administration of Burma For The Year 1918*, 8, (c) The British Library, IOR/24/3241.
35 R.F. Johnston, *From Peking to Mandalay: A Journey from North China to Burma through Tibetan Ssuch'uan and Yunnan* (Originally published in 1908. Reprinted. Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2001).
36 Andrew Marshall, *The Trouser People: A Story of Burma In the Shadow of Empire* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2002), p. 53.
37 G.E. Mitton, *Scott of the Shan Hills*, p. 67.
38 Sir James George Scott, *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States*, 5 vols. (Rangoon: Government Printing, 1900).
39 Harold Fielding-Hall, *The Soul of a People* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1898); *Thibaw's Queen* (London and New York: Harper and Brothers, 1899); *Burmese Palace Tales* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1900); *A People at School* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1906).

40 Stephen L. Keck, "Another Look at 'Thibaw's Queen': A Challenge To Colonial Historiography", *Essays in Commemoration of the Golden Jubilee of The Myanmar Historical Commission* (Yangon: Myanmar Historical Commission, 2005), pp. 357–77.
41 V.C. Scott O'Connor, *The Silken East*. 2 vols. (London: Hutchison and Co., 1904) and V.C. Scott O'Connor, *Mandalay and Other Cities of the Past in Burma*. (Originally published 1907. Reprinted. Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1996).
42 Capt. C.M. Enriquez, F.R.G.S, *A Burmese Enchantment* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Company, 1916) and Capt. C.M. Enriquez, F.R.G.S., *Burma, The Southern Shan States and Keng Tung* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Company, 1918).
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53 (c) The British Library, IOR/V/24/3606, p. 1.
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