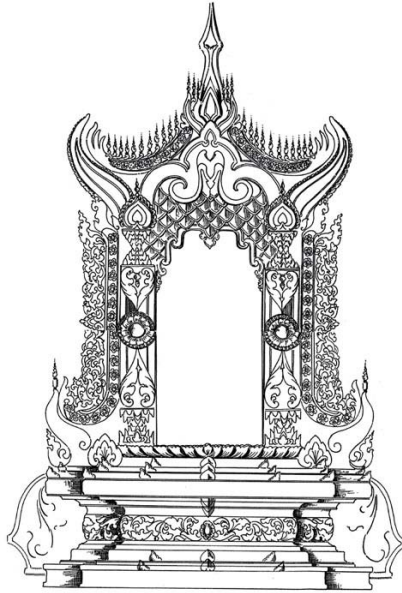


The Journal of Burma Studies



*Volume 3
1998*



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The Journal of Burma Studies

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Subscriptions	(815) 753-1981
Editorial Office	(815) 753-5790
E-Mail	seap@niu.edu
Fax	(815) 753-1776

The Journal of Burma Studies is an annual scholarly journal jointly sponsored by the Burma Studies Group (Association for Asian Studies), The Center for Burma Studies (Northern Illinois University), and Northern Illinois University's Center for Southeast Asian Studies.

Articles are refereed by professional peers. Send five copies of original scholarly manuscripts to *The Journal of Burma Studies*, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL 60115.

Subscriptions are \$12 per volume delivered book rate. Members of the Burma Studies Group (membership \$25 per year) receive the journal as part of their membership. For air mail add \$5 per volume. Send check or money order in U.S. dollars drawn on a U.S. bank made out to "Center for Southeast Asian Studies, NIU." Visa and Mastercard orders also accepted.

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The Journal of Burma Studies will be abstracted or indexed in the following: *America: History and Life*; *Bibliography of Asian Studies*; *Historical Abstracts*; *MLA International Bibliography*

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KINGSHIP IN PAGAN WUNDAUK U TIN'S "MYAN-MA-MÌN OK-CHOK-PON SA-DÀN"

L. E. Bagshawe*

This paper analyzes the attitudes toward kingship expressed in the Myan-ma-mìn Ok-chok-pon Sa-dàn ["The Royal Administration of Burma"], written by Pagan U Tin (1861-1933) and first published shortly after the author's death. Following a brief biographical account of Pagan U Tin, the discussion considers four perspectives on Burmese kingship appearing in the work: 1) the king as judge; 2) the king as guarantor of regularity; 3) the king as descendant of the Sun (and of Mahasammata, originator of civil society); and 4) the king as Buddha-to-be. The Burmese monarch was predominantly a symbolic figure who affirmed the kingdom's past and guaranteed its future. Although U Tin reports on the questionable morality of Kings Mindon and Thibaw, he nevertheless addresses both as "Excellent King" and admonishes his readers against offending the dignity of the throne.

Wherever power deifies itself, it automatically produces its
own theology;

Wherever it behaves like God, it awakens religious feelings
towards itself;

Such a world can be described in theological terms.

Milan Kundera

The Art of the Novel, translator M. H. Heim

I

In the year 1240¹ of the Burmese era, the King of Burma issued a formal order which began with the customary recital of his titles:

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¹ To convert from the Burmese Era (B.E.) to the Christian Era (C.E.), add 638, or, for dates between 31 December (in Nadaw) and the New Year (in Tagu, or mid-April), add 639.

An order from the Ruler of Sunaparanta, Tambadipa, the Golden City of Mandalay with its dependencies of Amarapura, Ratanapura, Jeyapura, Myin-saing, Vijayapura and of all the canopied Kings of these great countries; Lord of the Cakra Weapon; Master of the Mines of Gold, of Silver, of Amber, of Rubies and of all the seven Jewels; Commander of White Elephants, Red Elephants, Spotted Elephants, Parade Elephants, Draught Elephants, Work Horses and all other such valuables, together with docks for shipping; Possessor of Spires and Palaces, built only with the finest and purest Gold and decorated with True Crystal, so as to glitter with all the Nine Jewels, flashing rays like Thagyà-mìn's Vejayanta Palace; Lord of the Land and of the Waters, endowed with Supreme Glory and Excellence, holding the Royal Title of Siri-pavara-adhityalokadhipati Pandita Mahadhammarajadhiraja; Lord of the Royal Chaddanta Elephant; Master of White Elephants; Keeper of the Cakra Weapon; Great and Lawful King. . . .²

These are the king's splendid formal titles, worked out for him, no doubt on the best astrological and numerological principles, by the pon-nàs of the court. It is difficult to say how they may have fitted in with what his subjects thought about them and him. We can, in fact, say little about popular attitudes beyond the paradox that, while the people fought loyally and bravely for the king, *mìn* occupies the centerpoint in the list of mankind's proverbial Five Enemies,³ set neatly on the cusp between the dispassionately destructive forces of nature and the true malice of humanity. Though the Burmese have made it very much their own, this list does not originate in Burma: it can be found in the Sutta Pitaka, and there are similar lists in the Pali Lokaniti.⁴ Power is dangerous and

² Pagan Wun-dauk U Maung Maung Tin—Myan-ma-mìn Ok-chok-pon Sa-dàn—chapter 485. There are a number of editions, all in 5 volumes, published in 1931, 1968, 1970, & 1983 and maybe others, by the Central Press, Rangoon, and by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. Quoted below as MMOS, by chapters, as paginations differ somewhat. Translations are my own—LEB.

³ "Fire, Flood, King, Thieves, Personal Enemies."

⁴ For instance VI, 14 "aggi āpo ithi mūhlo sappo rājakulaṇi ca apayantena ganthabbo accekam pana mārani—"fire, flood, women, fools, snakes, and royalty."

you don't want to get too close to it, but the king has his customary claims over his subjects, which have to be taken into consideration. This does not take us very far: it is an attitude to government which can be found in most societies, but we can see a more detailed picture of the attitude of a small but important section of Burmese society if we examine U Tin's *Myan-ma-mìn Ok-chok-pon Sa-dàn* (The Royal Administration of Burma), which is the purpose of this paper.

Pagan U Tin—to be carefully distinguished from Mandalay U Tin, otherwise U Maung Maung Tin, the author of the Konbaung dynasty's Chronicle—was born in 1223 B.E. in Mandalay, according to his entry in the *Burmese Encyclopedia*. His family had for several generations served in the palace bureaucracy, and he was a good representative of this specialized class. At 14, while he was still a novice in the Hpon-gyaw monastery in Amarapura, he caught the attention of King Mindon's influential minister, the Kinwun Mingyi, by his precocious knowledge of the *min-gyi's* own book on Burmese law. The *min-gyi's* patronage soon gave him a place in the bureaucracy, as a clerk, with successive positions in the treasury, the king's personal office (known as the *Byè-daik*), and in the office of the ministers' council, the *Hlut-taw*. After the capture of Mandalay by the British and the exile of King Thibaw in 1247 B.E., the Kinwun Mingyi operated an interim administration while the British decided what to do next. U Tin remained working with his patron during this period. Once annexation was decided upon, U Tin was commissioned by the new government to gather together all the surviving documents from the palace archives and to bring them to Rangoon for storage. In Rangoon he was employed in the Home Department of the Secretariat as a clerk, translator, and reader of inscriptions. Ten years later, in 1257, he was transferred to Pagan, first as township officer and, eventually, as subdivisional officer. During this time he became well known as the author of some fifty works of history and essays. After his retirement in 1294 B.E. he took a post at Rangoon University, where he devoted himself to the study of historical inscriptions—many of which he had become familiar with at Pagan—and of the country's administration under the kings. In this he was associated with Taw Sein Ko, the Director of Archeology, who was Chinese, and on the director's suggestion he was commissioned by the government to go through the stored documents that thirty years earlier he had brought to Rangoon and from them to put together a collection which would provide precedents for the present administration. The result was his five-

volume *Myan-ma-mìn Ok-chok-pon Sa-dàn*, which was published shortly before his death in 1295 B.E. Inevitably, the book discloses much of how the royal administration looked to him.

It does not, of course, tell us much about the attitudes of the majority of the people of the country, although we may draw inferences from the strict distinctions drawn between the *athi*, people who had no defined obligations beyond the payment of taxes, and the *ahmú-dàn*, hereditary holders of the obligation and privilege of serving the king, whether as soldiers, boatmen, and guards of the *asú-gyì* units, or as carvers, painters, embroiderers, gaolers, and executioners of the *asú-nú* and *asú-kyàn* units. We can easily imagine that the privileged members of the *asú-gyì* would look at the system rather differently from the *athi*. According to U Tin,⁵ Taw Sein Ko, whom he describes as his teacher, felt that the king with his *asú-gyì* looked like an army of occupation in a conquered country—not unlike the *tat-madaw* of today's military government. King Bodawhpaya had indeed said in his order of 1147:

The establishment of the service groups has been the foundation of the State and through it the State will be perpetuated through the long future and because of the country's peace, the Religion will flourish.⁶

The holders of such a position would inevitably take a more positive view of the system than those left outside.

One point that immediately becomes apparent when you consider Burmese kingship is that although the Chronicles go back to kings who reigned before the start of the *kàw-za thet-kayit* in 638 C.E., and although legend takes the royal genealogy back some 300,000 generations, there is no single Burmese word for "king." The only words that apply exclusively to the monarch are adopted from India. For U Tin, the truly Burmese word *mìn* can be applied to any kind of authority, from the king himself down through princes and ministers to the hereditary leaders of small towns.⁷ *Mìn* only specifies the king when it is *Mìn-tayà*. Although both elements of this title have clear significance, it is difficult to attach any very precise meaning to the combination. It is often translated "Righteous King," but it was all too easy to be *Mìn-tayà* while being quite unrighteous;

⁵ MMOS, ch. 424.

⁶ MMOS, ch. 338.

⁷ MMOS, ch. 247.

King Bodaw-hpaya clearly recognized that rule might involve guilt. I suggest that it is nothing but a translation of the Pali "dhammarāja," a term glossed by Buddhaghosa as meaning "king who has gained his power lawfully." No one but a contender is going to call the ruling king anything else and the implication is that his power is part of *dhammatā*, the natural order of things. No doubt other meanings were attached to the phrase until it lost all precise meaning. *Dhamma* and *tayā* in this sense are not very far from the meaning of the Chinese *t'ao*, and there is perhaps a suggestion of the Chinese idea of "the Mandate of Heaven." On the precise meaning of the word *mìn-tayā*, U Tin offers no explanation, nor is he of much help on *mìn* itself; he can only refer to authorities that connect it with words meaning "thought," or else "assembly."⁸ The wide scope of the use of *mìn*, however, suggests an original patchwork of small, autonomous chieftainships. In such a structure, an historically very normal development is that one unit, usually that with the best economic resources, comes to dominate the others. In Upper Burma the main economic resource has always been irrigable land, to which Pagan had good access. The original autonomy of the township *mìns* is borne out by the facts that as late as 1171, King Bodaw-hpaya was still trying, not very successfully, to assert control over the appointments of village headmen and also that right up to the end of the kingdom they and their families were exempt from payment of the *tha-thameida* tax.⁹

When we look at U Tin's idea of the nature of the kingship under which he had served, it is, I think, possible to distinguish four strata, in which precision varies inversely with emotional force. The Pali scriptures tell how, early in the world, as the Golden Age faded, the deteriorating environment caused men to appropriate property for themselves. The institution of private property brought about crime and violence, which led to the Lie, the destroyer of all good. The existence of society became impossible when men could not believe what they were told by their fellows. (A more cynical theory is that it is at this point that human intelligence begins.) The situation must be put right and to do this the people elected Mahasammata to be their King, to recognize and judge truth and falsehood. This is the king as judge, not as war-leader, which he is in many societies. According to U Tin, in Burma the war-leader, the *bo-*

⁸ MMOS, ch. 247.

⁹ MMOS, chh. 251 and 533.

hmù wun-gyì, is second to the king, although the king can, if he wishes, be his own *bo-hmù*.¹⁰ But for a civil society to operate, it is not only necessary that it should be reasonable to believe what one is told in the way of fact, it must also be reasonable to rely on the fulfilment of promises, the execution of contracts, and the keeping of oaths. Enforcement of these are also a part of the king's function. The transition from belief in statements of what is past to what will be in the future comes easily in Burma, where *thit-sa*, the Pali *sacca*, covers both past and future, with a more inclusive range of meaning than we usually give to "truth." The king is therefore the guarantor and enforcer of oaths. The oath and the predictability of behavior which it makes possible were important in Burmese society—U Tin is somewhat appalled by the inconsequential way in which an oath is taken in the British courts.¹¹

II

The desire for the predictability in the workings of society that comes from a reasonable confidence that people will tell the truth and keep their promises must have been universal in all human groups. Because the most predictable phenomena have always been the movements of the sun and moon and stars, the ensurers of predictability and the guardians of oaths have usually been sky gods. The ancient Greeks had their Zeus Horkios—Zeus of the Oath—and in early Rome an oath, to be valid, must be sworn under the open sky, not under a roof. In Vedic India and in Persia a sun god was Mitra, the Mithras of the armies of the Roman empire, and he was regarded as the witness to pacts and alliances. Consequently, his name comes through to the Hindi *mitra*, the sworn ally, the friend, as well as to the Pali *mettā* and the Burmese *myit-ta* and *meik*, the cement of society.¹²

This brings us to the second stratum in U Tin's concept of the kingship in Burma. Just as in many other societies, in Burma the function of the king parallels that of the sun god as the guarantor of regularity. Burmese kings seized upon the Indian legends of the solar and lunar lines of royal descent and became firmly solar, perhaps originally to reinforce an uncertain position among all the other *mìn* in the country. *Āditya*, or *ādicca* (both meaning "sun"),

¹⁰ MMOS, chh. 418 and 460; in ch. 501 there is a *sit-bayin* above the *bo-hmù*.

¹¹ MMOS, ch. 516.

¹² *myit-ta*, "benevolence"—*meik*, friend(ship).

became a regular feature of their formal titles, and *nei-myò* ("of the line of the Sun") was a constant element of the titles that they gave to their followers, associating them with the royal clan.

But it was not only the Indian legends that they could use as the basis for a claim to the Sun's power. The legendary founder of the Pagan kingdom was Pyu-mìn-hti, or Pyu-zaw-ti—spelled in many different ways—the giant fifteen cubits high and four cubits across who was fathered by the Sun and born from the wonderful egg laid by a Nagà princess.¹³ In the early days he came to Pagan armed with a magical spear his father, the Sun, had given to him, and with which he rescued the people from the Four Enemies that beset them. He was given a princess in marriage, who was Sanda, the Moon. The enemies he defeated are said to have been flying squirrels, storks, pigs, and tigers—credible enough as pests to worry struggling farmers, but not very appropriate foes for a hero with a magical spear. Perhaps the legend is a misunderstanding of various Manichæan myths that found their way to the Pagan area, and perhaps his name was really Pyu-zaw-ti, Pyu-joti, Pyu light, whatever the "Pyu" may stand for. Mani himself visited India and Central Asia before 270 C.E., the first of a long series of missionaries who rivaled the Nestorian Christians; and there seem to have been Manichæan temples in China in the sixth century. The animal names would then be what the local people made of the exotic names of the Manichæan demons, Āz, Namrael, Ahrman, and the rest. The spear, which in Manichæan myth was the lightning, or a ray from the sun, remained a constant element in the legends and accoutrements of the Burmese kings.

The Pyu-zaw-ti legend, the story that the first king was actually begotten by the sun, was, of course, too much for Burmese scholarship to accept literally. U Tin prefers to interpret it symbolically:

A figure of speech is used; when you are confused by greed and wrath and you do not know your way, which is lost in folly, if someone appears who has the eye of wisdom, his appearance can be compared with the sun's coming out; it is like the sun's beams cast upon the darkness of the world.¹⁴

¹³ *Hman-nàn Ya-zawin* [The Glass Palace Chronicle], 3 vols. (Mandalay: Yadana Theik-di Press, 1921), vol. 1, sect. 113, 211-223.

¹⁴ MMOS, ch. 175.

Thus the king becomes the defender against the dark powers as well as the guardian of good faith in society. The Chronicles tell of a series of three early kings, two generations before the start of the current Burmese era, with the names Htun-taik, Htun-pyit, and Htun-chit,¹⁵ understanding the *htun* rather implausibly as meaning "harrow." If it is read, rather, as *htùn* "light" they become partisans of the Light, aiming for that Victory—Vijaya, or Zeyya—that constantly appears in royal titles. A parallel is also implied with the Buddha's struggle with Mara—a legend, incidentally, that Bodawhpaya rejected.¹⁶

The king was also associated with other gods, notably Thagyà-mìn, the ruler of the spirit world, himself identified with Indra, the Vedic sky-god and king. Thagyà-mìn was *par excellence* spirit guardian of the Religion,¹⁷ and his palace is upon the summit of the Myinmo Mountain—Mount Meru, the central axis of the world. The colors of the flags which belonged to the four gateways of the palace, white to the east, green to the south, *acheik* (patterned) to the west, and yellow to the north,¹⁸ asserted the association, since these were in legend the colors of the corresponding sides of the mountain, so that the palace became the mountain. An old locution for the palace was *Shwei-daung*, the Golden Mountain, and gold is always the metal of the sun. U Tin also says that formulas used in the court ritual identified the king with Vishnu,¹⁹ who, Burmanized as the *Peik-thandò nat*, played a considerable part in ritual, although there seems to be little about him in the legends.

III

This brings us to the third stratum. Although Burmese society was not so bound up in considerations of ritual purity as the Indian caste system, heredity had great importance; the saying was *kyet amyò lu ayò*—"lineage is to a man what pedigree is to a fighting cock." The belief in the king's solar descent made his heredity

¹⁵ *Hman-nàn-ya-zawin*, vol. 1, sect. 120, 237-238.

¹⁶ MMOS, ch. 355.

¹⁷ MMOS, ch. 409.

¹⁸ MMOS, ch. 453.

¹⁹ MMOS, ch. 414.

particularly important. All authority was, in fact, traditionally hereditary. In a village, the position of headman, the *thagyi*, was vested in one particular kindred, and the seniormost member of that kindred had the right to the authority that went with his position, provided that the people of the village agreed to grant it to him. Failing that, another member would serve. U Tin believed that this whole system arose from the fact that when a new village was founded it would normally be occupied by members of a single kindred—the village and the kindred being then one patriarchal family. Positions of irrigation clerks and field controllers were once, it seems, hereditary. By King Thibaw's time most of this work had been taken over by outside contractors; but when in the face of falling revenues proposals were called for on how to improve the system of collections, an important suggestion was that the work should be returned to the hereditary officers.²⁰ In the king's case, he derived a special value from his claimed direct descent from both the line of the Sun and from the great Mahasammata, the first creator of a civil society. U Tin regards this value given to high ancestry—*thwei-gyi*—as a natural phenomenon, arising

from the whole constellation of their (the *mìn*'s) first origin in a popular choice and from the leadership being vested in the chosen kindred; from their being included in the number of princes (*mìn*); from the title *mìn* itself; from their acceptance of offerings from the common people; from their being able to exercise an influence upon the common people; from their exclusive use of the insignia of authority; from their special way of life and special foods; from the acceptance, in special cases, of the *ywa-thagyi* and *ywa-myei-daing* into the ranks of excellence; from their being able to distinguish virtue from vice in the courts of law; and from their having been charged from their birth with the flavour of all these worldly factors.²¹

These are circular arguments, but they do have a practical psychological force, for many institutions exist only because they have existed from "time out of mind." The continuity of the dynasty

²⁰ MMOS, ch. 242.

²¹ MMOS, ch. 256.

was important, however, in its own right. Just as the king's justice extended over and unified the mandala of his power, so the dynasty, extending backward into the dim and legendary past and forward into all conceivable futures, unified his people in an historic Time; they have a history and are not held in the endlessly recurring cycle of myth. Figures of the past were not generic "ancestors" but definite personages in folk memory. Kings died, but even though the times when the reign changed were proverbially hard, the dynasty and the royal kindred continued. Kings often speak of the welfare of the dynasty as second only to that of the Religion. In one order, for instance, King Bodaw-hpaya says:

From the time when I attained the summit of power, I have devoted all my efforts, by day and by night, to procuring the prosperity of the Religion, of myself and of my dynasty and of all the people of the land.²²

The future of the dynasty lay with *thà-daw asin myèi-daw ahset*—"children and grandchildren succeeding"; its past was marked by the golden ancestral statues kept in the palace, before which monthly offerings were made to the accompaniment of appropriate *gathas*, the composition of which was one of the duties of the *pon-nàs* of the court. The statue which was made for King Mindon in 1238 took 5¹/₂ viss of gold. In U Tin's time the earliest of these statues was Alaung-hpayà's. Perhaps there were earlier ones which the Mons took, but U Tin knows nothing of them.²³

IV

Parallel to the succession of lives in the dynastic history was the succession of lives in the king's own personal fate, and this opens up the fourth stratum in U Tin's view of the kingship. There was a long-standing feeling that it took a very special *kamma* to become a king, so special that kings were taken to be future Buddhas. Such reverence of the monarch had a long history in the kingdom: Sainson's translation of a Chinese history of the Nan-chao kingdom quotes an earlier traveler who noted that in Burma the king was referred to by his subjects as "*pou-lo-lang*," and his queen

²² MMOS, ch. 338.

²³ MMOS, ch. 365.

as “*mi-p’ouo-la*.”²⁴ These are French transcriptions from the Chinese, but they can hardly represent anything but the familiar *hpayà-laùng* and *mī-hpayà*.

There is, of course, a logical difficulty in regarding every king of Burma as a future Buddha. After all, there is only one Buddha still to come in the present *kappa*, and so you can hardly have two future Buddhas living at one time. Perhaps there was once an idea, analogous to the *tulku* idea of the related Tibetans, of a continuing re-incarnation, only in this case it would be the king’s consecration which conferred the special quality. However that may be, the consecration was of supreme importance. U Tin remarks:

Strictly speaking, a king should not use the title of King (*min*) before he has received the *muddhabhisekha* consecration. He does not receive any regnal name, nor is he called “maharaja.” Generally speaking, the honours and privileges of kingship are not yet his. He can establish no regular succession of kings who will reign as lawfully enthroned *Dhammarājas*. . . . It is only after he has become truly King and received the consecration that he can act to promote the Religion; he then acquires the right to issue an order designating an Ordination Hall.

This is one of the aspects of kingship that give a king the standing to deal with the sangha, the order of Buddhist monks—at times almost a state within the state. The sangha depends upon him, because it must remain separated from the secular world of political power and obligations. Only a properly consecrated king has the authority to make this separation. Normally a gift creates an obligation, and a king’s gifts and rewards to his subjects bring a manifold return on *kadāw* days and other occasions, which were a substantial source of revenue. Gifts to the sangha, however, create no countervailing obligation (a monk should not even give thanks in return, as doing so would reduce the merit of the free gift), and this break in the nexus of society calls for a king’s power. Why this should be so is a more difficult question than it looks. Perhaps the connection may lie in the king’s being the channel of communication with the Spirit

²⁴ Camille Sainson, transl., *Histoire particulière du Nan Tchao traduction d’une histoire de l’ancien Yan-nan, accompagnée d’une carte et d’un lexique géographique et histoire* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1904), 67.

Lord, who is the prime owner of the land,²⁵ but this is too large a matter to deal with here and U Tin, mercifully, does not open it up.

It is said that merit and virtue come from the *muddhisabheka* consecration and that this merit turns to good fortune, leading to results that fulfill all desires.²⁶ The king himself thought of his consecration as conferring a special quality upon himself. In a proclamation dating from 1165, for instance, Bodaw-hpaya says,

I, sovereign King, have attained the rank of *khattiya*, having twice received upon my head the consecration proper to kings, having fulfilled the Ten Laws of Royal observance, the Seven Laws of Prosperity and the Four Laws of *Sangaha*,²⁷ and having conformed to the three Noble Practices that mark a Buddha-to-be.²⁸

Presumably, each time the *muddhabhisekha* consecration was repeated, the king was advanced a grade in his kingship—there is a relationship between coronations and initiations.²⁹ The consecration ceremony was in any case a time for mutual oaths. That to which the king swore was to seek always the well-being of the people and of the monks of the country, to take no more than a tithe from the production (*lok-hkun*) of the people of the country, as prescribed by ancient custom, to punish only in accordance with the law, frighten off all corruptions that might threaten the Religion, and to regard the well-being and lives of monks, novices, lay people, and all living creatures of the land as of the same value as the lives and well-being of his own sons and daughters, making no distinctions. He swore further that he had no bodily ailments and hoped to live long, to humiliate all the enemies of the country, and finally, to be blessed with the boon of a White Elephant.³⁰ An earlier form of oath, said to be that sworn by King Anaw-ratha at the beginning of Pagan's greatness, was simpler; it is, in fact, more like a plain non-aggression pact with the notables of the country.³¹

²⁵ A suggestion that I owe to Professor Kris Lehman.

²⁶ MMOS, ch. 163.

²⁷ "The principles of organizing a civil society," roughly translated.

²⁸ MMOS, ch. 191.

²⁹ See, for one instance among many, A. M. Hocart's *Kingship* (London, Oxford University Press, 1927).

³⁰ MMOS, ch. 167.

³¹ MMOS, ch. 170.

But the idea of the king as a Buddha-to-be was always around, even if rarely made explicit or fully formulated. Succeeding to the heritage of Manu/Mahasammata (himself a *hpayà-laùng*) through Gotama Buddha's Sakya line, the king was a religious figure, capable of bridging the immense gap between the otherworldly world of the sangha and the world of everyday. Even in the 1920s U Tin found it necessary to deny the idea, which is a fair indication of its continued existence:

The word *hpayà*, used when the *Ein-sheí-mìn* presided over the Hlut-taw, does not in this case refer to the Lord Gotama Buddha, but to the King. To the King one prayed as to one's lord, and it was proper to refer to him as *hpayà-laùng*. Consequently, it was usual to call the King *Hpayà*. In inscriptions, the King is usually called *Hpayà-shin*.³²

But if the king were the Buddha-to-be, Maitreya, there was only one to come in the present age, which brings us full circle, for Maitreya has more in common with Mitra than a mere similarity of name. If the king were Maitreya-to-be, linking the worlds, he was also Mitra, the Sun, the guardian and guarantor of the truth and justice on which a society must be based if it is to work smoothly and predictably. The king's ancestry, through the lineage of the Sun, gave his people their continuity with the remotest past. He himself, at the center point between the past of his dynasty and of its future, was the people's guarantor of a history in a future time. The king has become a symbolic figure; he has no personal name and is known only by his titles. Therefore, even if personally despicable, the king must always be revered. To be sure, U Tin has harsh things to say about King Mindon. He regards him as a sort of embezzler who spent state money—money which should have been spent for the nation's defence—on works of religion to gain merit for himself, personally:

He gained merit by spending his own money in this way, but using money needed for the country's defence

³² MMOS, ch. 414. *Hpayà-shin* could translate as either "Lord and Master" or "Living *hpayà*."

for alms-giving would count as one of the twenty-five forms of theft.³³

U Tin has worse to say about King Thibaw, who he is quite sure would have very soon been deposed by a rebellion if the English had not moved in first. After all, a king who breaks faith with the people might lawfully be deposed.³⁴ Despite these criticisms, however, King Mindon and King Thibaw are always referred to as *mìn-myat*, "Excellent King." U Tin quotes a Pali commentary:

It is not for commoners to cross the wishes of royalty; it is not becoming to grumble or complain about the rulers. If one encounters even an infant prince and fails to yield the road to him; if one fails to put aside the blanket or cloak from over one's waist-cloth³⁵; if one fails to rise from the spot where one is sitting; if one does not dismount from one's elephant or other beast; if one does any of these things, conscious of acting wrongly, this is called *lèse-majesty* (*avajānāti*) towards royalty.

Royalty is in all circumstances special: a country can no more do without a king than a king can do without a country, for he is the country's center point. His law extends out and unifies the mandala, of which the spire of his palace is the center, just as his dynasty unifies and validates the history of his people.

In any society, only a minority of people give any thought to long-standing institutions, beyond accepting them as facts of life. In some earlier times in Burma, members of this minority might perhaps have been found scattered through the country in the *pwè-gyaùng* monasteries, which combined study of the scriptures with the arts, both fine and martial. Of them U Tin says,

These *pwè-gyaùng* then were a great source of support for increase in knowledge of the world. They combined instruction in practical matters with the study of books and so, like the bird that has its two wings, were capable

³³ MMOS, ch. 402.

³⁴ MMOS, ch. 174.

³⁵ Pali texts constantly describe pupils, on taking leave of their master, as baring their right shoulders and showing respect by walking clockwise round him.

of flight. Consequently there was in ancient Burma a widespread expertise in worldly skills and methods that shone brightly, with great benefit to the country.³⁶

But by the time of the later Konbaung kings, the *pwè-gyaùng* had fallen into disrepute and were suspected of belonging to the old Arì tradition. (The Kinwun Min-gyi, who had in his youth studied in a *pwè-gyaùng* monastery, disliked having that fact mentioned before the king.) King Mindon abolished them, and consequently the study of the scriptures and meditation were the only fields left for the sangha, apart from a few mavericks. The minority who might give thought to the nature of the kingship would be the educated minority who had gravitated to the court instead of remaining in the monastery of their education. U Tin is representative of this educated minority, and it is legitimate to suppose that the attitudes he evinces would have been quite characteristic of those who gave any thought to the subject.

³⁶ MMOS, ch. 497. Chh. 492 to 497 deal with the *pwè-gyaùng* in detail.