Cover: Detail of a scene of Wethandaya, a Burmese version of the Vessantara Jataka (no. 547), showing the enraged Prince Vessantara holding a knife, as he entertains killing the Brahmin Zuzaka, while watching Zuzaka beating one of the children right in front of him. Textile wall hanging illustrating a narrative, called in Burmese shwe chi doe, in reference to the Burmese technique for gold thread embroidery; also commonly referred to as kalaga in Western literature. Late 19th/early 20th century. Black velvet ground with applique of cloth and stitch-work of gold and silver threads, silver and gilt sequins and glass beads: 45.7 cm H x 300 cm W, Burma Art Collection at Northern Illinois University, BC90.4.277. Bequest of Paul Jerry Bennett, 1990. See complete set of the Wethandaya kalaga* online at the Center for Burma Studies website: http://www.niu.edu/burma/Art_of_Burma_2/TRK_Gallery3a.html. (For more details see the "Scholarly Curiosities" in this issue.)

Cover design: Jeff Strohm, Northern Illinois University.

This type of wall hanging is especially characteristic of Burma/Myanmar and consists of fabric pieces, needlepoint, jewels, sequins, glass beads and metallic threads (frequently of gold and silver), appliqued onto a dark background in velvet or sometimes in silk. Such assemblages were originally very costly and were necessarily commissioned under royal patronage during the pre-colonial period and later on by wealthy patrons. This textile art, known in Burmese by the name of the technique, as shwe chi doe (i.e., gold thread), became quite popular at the court of King Mindon (1815-1878).

Such large hangings as these from the Burma Art Collection at NIU were likely used either as wall decor for funerals or as room dividers within sacred interiors inside monasteries, at the court, or even as part of the backdrop of a puppet theatre or of a stage play; i.e., during the sondawgy festival.

Such shwe chi doe usually, but not invariably, illustrated religious themes: typically the previous incarnations of the Buddha, formalized in the Pali Canon as the Jataka (birth-tale). The detail on the cover of the present issue of the Journal of Burma Studies is part of a set of three splendid kalaga depicting different episodes of the Vessantara Jataka, probably the best-known, and the most-beloved Pataki, as well as the last of the complete 547 Pataki Tales. The Vessantara Jataka illustrates one of the Ten Perfections "dana" (Pali), i.e., the concept of perfect generosity, in the extraordinary example of Prince Vessantara, whose final act of selflessness was to give away his wife and children (who are, in due course, returned after Prince Vessantara rises to the karmic challenge of serving as the Buddha's penultimate incarnation).

—Catherine Raymond, Curator, Burma Art Collection at Northern Illinois University