Cover: Illustration of a Wa couple. From a bound album entitled, "Tribes of Burma", c. 1900; artist unknown. Watercolor on paper. Courtesy of Burma Art Collection, Center for Burma Studies, Northern Illinois University, IL, USA.

Cover design: Jeff Strohm, Northern Illinois University

This is a hand-painted illustration of the Wa with their iconic attire and personal artifacts. It comes from a rare album encompassing some 22 other ethnic groups. Above the drawing of the couple, "Wa" (or more exactly, "La wa") is written in pencil in three different languages: old Shan, Burmese, Tai Kheun; and also in English apparently added later in black ink. (In the middle of the page and written in Burmese, "number 16" indicates the original page number within the album.) This volume is undated and includes no further information regarding its provenance, but we can assume that it came from Kengtung area, Eastern Shan States (in the extreme NE of Burma), where similar albums were found and where the Kheun people live. This bound album made of paper gives detailed visual depictions of couples from a wide range of ethnic groups of this area. It was probably produced by a local artist, sometime in the 20th century, and likely intended for a European clientele then living in British Burma.

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