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Featuring Articles by:
Jack Daulton
Charlotte Reith
Donald Seekins
Julian Wheatley
San San Hnin Tun
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F.K. Lehman

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Center for Burma Studies
Northern Illinois University

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Manuscript Formatting
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Publications Assistant
Mishel Pilisha

Subscriptions
(815) 753-1981

Editorial Office
(815) 753-5790

E-Mail
seap@niu.edu

Fax
(815) 753-1776

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SARIPUTTA AND MOGGALLANA IN THE GOLDEN LAND
The Relics of the Buddha's Chief Disciples
at the Kaba Aye Pagoda

Jack Daulton

In this article, the author reconstructs and documents the story of the relics of the Buddha's chief disciples, Sariputta and Moggallana, at the Kaba Aye Pagoda in Burma. Using previously unpublished archival materials, including first-hand archaeological reports and internal museum documents, as well as contemporary newspaper accounts, the author details the discovery of the relics by British military officers in 19th-century India, the subsequent removal of the relics to England where they were placed on museum exhibition, and their eventual reenshrinement in Burma and India 100 years later.

Early one morning in late July, 1992, I stood waiting with a dozen or so Burmese men and women in front of a strongbox at the Kaba Aye Pagoda north of Rangoon, Burma. On this special day, the strongbox was to be opened and its contents removed for display. After we had been waiting for about an hour, a pagoda trustee, named U Thein, finally arrived. He opened the strongbox and removed three tiny, interlocking, crystal vials. The vials contained relics of the Buddha and his two chief disciples, Sariputta and Moggallana. 1 As I stood

1 Jack Daulton, a graduate student in art history at Northern Illinois University, is an adjunct lecturer for The Art Institute of Chicago and has led museum trips to Burma and over a dozen other Asian countries. He is also a practicing attorney with a particular interest in international law relating to cultural property. He wishes to acknowledge the contribution of his graduate advisor, Prof. Richard M. Cooler, Northern Illinois University, who encouraged him to pursue this topic even though it took him beyond the strict confines of his graduate field, art history. He also wishes to thank John Guy of the Victoria and Albert Museum and Patricia Herbert of the British Library for their gracious assistance in locating unpublished manuscripts and archival materials at their respective institutions.

For convenience, all diacritical marks will be omitted. In addition, the Pali language will generally be used in preference to the Sanskrit equivalent. Thus, the Pali names of Buddha's chief disciples, Sariputta and Moggallana,
before the strongbox watching U Thein, to my astonishment he placed the crystal vials upon my head and recited a simple blessing of protection. It was a truly extraordinary moment.

* * *

Since the early fifth-century BCE when Sariputta and Moggallana both died in northeastern India, their relics, bits of bone, have travelled widely. This is the story of their journey to modern Burma.

The Lives of Sariputta and Moggallana

Sariputta and Moggallana were born in the sixth-century BCE in neighboring villages in the vicinity of Rajagaha (modern Rāgrī in Bihar State), India. They were both from wealthy Brahmin families and had been friends since childhood. Together they renounced the

will be used instead of their Sanskrit (Sariputra and Maudgalyayana) or Burmese (Thariputtara and Mauggalan) equivalents.

3 This article focuses on the role of Burma in relation to the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana. I have necessarily abridged many other aspects of the story of these relics. My documentary sources were primarily (1) first-hand archaeological reports of 19th and early 20th-century British archaeologists, including unpublished manuscripts at The British Library, Oriental and India Office Collections, London, (2) unpublished archival materials at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, relating to its acquisition and return of the relics, and (3) newspaper accounts in Inda, Ceylon, Burma, England, and the United States, reporting the return and reenshrinement of the relics in the 1940's and 1950's. In addition to these documentary sources, this article is also based on my field work at the two principal sites associated with the relics -- Sanchi in India and Kaba Aye in Burma -- in July and August, 1992.

world and became wandering ascetics, seekers of spiritual truth not unlike Siddhattha Gotama (the historical Buddha), Vardhamana (Mahavira, the historical founder of Jainism), and many of their other contemporaries in northeastern India.

After years of unsatisfactory spiritual progress in the company of Moggallana and under the tutelage of various teachers, Sariputta, by chance, encountered the monk Assaji, who was one of the Buddha’s first five disciples. Assaji’s peaceful countenance impressed Sariputta, and he therefore asked Assaji who his teacher was and what doctrine he taught. Assaji responded that his teacher was Buddha Sakyamuni (the “Sage of the Sakya” clan) and that the Buddha’s teaching could be summarized as follows:

The Buddha hath the causes told
Of all things springing from a cause;
And also how things cease to be --
’Tis this the Mighty Monk proclaims.¹

Upon hearing these words, Sariputta immediately realized that they suggested profound insight; and he resolved to follow the Buddha henceforth. When Sariputta told his companion, Moggallana, what he had learned from Assaji, Moggallana also determined to be a follower of the Buddha.²

Soon after the ordination of Sariputta and Moggallana as Buddhist monks, the Buddha recognized that, among his followers, Sariputta had the greatest wisdom or insight (panna) and Moggallana the greatest power or potency (iddhi). He therefore decreed that they

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¹ The statement uttered by Assaji to Sariputta became one of the most famous stanzas in all of Buddhism. His words can be found throughout Buddhist Asia, inscribed on temple walls, stelai, and votive tablets (being especially ubiquitous on the votive tablets of Pagan-period Burma). See Patricia M. Herbert, The Life of the Buddha (San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1993), 89; Alfred S. Geden, “Life of the Buddha,” in Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, vol. 2, ed. James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1955), 883; Huyen-Vi, 22 n. 3.

were his two chief disciples (aggasavaka). Sariputta and Moggallana remained the Buddha's faithful followers until their deaths more than 40 years after their ordination. Sariputta died and was cremated at Nalagamaka, the village near Rajagaha where he had been born. About two weeks after Sariputta's death, Moggallana also died near Rajagaha, and he too was cremated with great honor. The Buddha himself died only a few months later. The generally accepted year of the Buddha's death is 486 BCE, although some debate continues over this dating.

The Nineteenth-Century Discovery of the Relics of Sariputta and Moggallana

According to early Buddhist texts and Chinese travellers' accounts, relics of Sariputta and Moggallana (i.e., their bones and other cremation remains) were originally enshrined at various sites in northeastern India. Unfortunately, none of those reports has ever been confirmed by an archaeological find. In the nineteenth-century, however, British excavations at two sites in central India, not

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6 For the story of Sariputta's death, see generally Malalasekera, 2: 1115-1116, summarizing the accounts in the Sanyutta Nikaya and in the Sanyutta Commentary; Thomas, Life of Buddha, 140-142, whose version is based on a similar account in the Digha Commentary. For Burmese versions, see Bigandet, 2: 9-25; Edwardes, 130-138; Herbert, 60-62, 90-91 (illustrated with an early 19th-century Burmese manuscript painting, from the Burney parabikgs, or folding books, depicting the death of Sariputta, his cremation, and the collection of his relics).

7 For the story of Moggallana's death, see Warren, 221-226, a translation of the account in the Dhammapada Commentary; for a Burmese version, see Bigandet, 2: 25-27.

8 See Malalasekera, 1: 803, 2: 940.


10 For references to the Buddhist texts, see Thomas, Life of Buddha, 141-142 (relics of Sariputta enshrined at Savatthi and of Moggallana at Veluvana near Rajagaha), citing the Digha Commentary; Malalasekera, 2: 546 n. 48, 936, 938 (Veluvana); see also Bigandet, 2: 25 (Savatthi); 27 (Veluvana); Edwardes, 138 (Savatthi). For Chinese travellers' accounts, see James Legge, trans., A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms, by Fa-Hien (1886; reprint, New York: Dover, 1991), 44 (Mathura), 81 (Nalagamaka, Sariputta's birthplace); Thomas Watters, On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India, ed. T. W. Rhys Davids and S. W. Bushell (1904-05; reprint, Delhi: Munshi Ram Manohar Lal, 1961), 1: 302. (Mathura), 387-388 (Rajagaha), 394 (Savatthi), 2: 150 (Rajagaha), 171 (Ka-lo-pi-na-ka, also known as Nalagamaka, Sariputta's birthplace, and Kolika, Moggallana's birthplace near Rajagaha).
mentioned in the Buddhist texts or in the Chinese travellers’ accounts, discovered relics of Sariputta and Moggallana. Those two sites, dated to the middle of the second-century BCE, are Sanchi (Stupa No. 3) and Satdhara (Stupa No. 2). At both sites, relics of Sariputta and Moggallana were enshrined side-by-side in the same stupa, paired in death as they had been in life.

Sanchi is a hill located in central India near the town of Bhilsa (Vadisha), about 25 miles northeast of Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh.\textsuperscript{11} At least as early as the time of Asoka, the great Mauryan emperor of the third-century BCE, Sanchi flourished as a Buddhist center (sangharama).\textsuperscript{12} During the next 1300 years, numerous temples, monasteries, funerary monuments, and other structures were erected at Sanchi, reflecting the entire development of Buddhist art and architecture in India. For this reason, and because the site is in a relatively good state of preservation, Sanchi is one of the most celebrated Buddhist sites in India.

Asoka himself constructed both a stupa (hemispherical funerary monument) and one of his famous edict pillars on the hilltop at Sanchi.\textsuperscript{13} It is believed that a relic of the Buddha was enshrined in this stupa following Asoka’s legendary subdivision of the original Buddha relics into 84,000 parts for distribution in stupas throughout his empire. Asoka’s stupa, which has been reconstructed and enlarged since his day, is known as the Great Stupa or as Stupa No. 1 at Sanchi.\textsuperscript{14}

In the middle of the second-century BCE, two smaller stupas were constructed at Sanchi: Stupa No. 2, on the western slope of the hill, about 350 yards from the Great Stupa; and, most importantly,


\textsuperscript{12} Marshall, Foucher, and Majumdar, 1: 1-2, 14-15, 18.

\textsuperscript{13} Marshall, Foucher, and Majumdar, 1: 20.

\textsuperscript{14} See Marshall, Foucher, and Majumdar, 1: 22 (Asoka’s division of relics), 25 (original Asokan brick stupa likely to have enshrined Buddha relics), 32 (later Sunga-reconstructed stupa also likely to have enshrined Buddha relics). Cf. Julius Jolly, “Stupa,” in \textit{Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics}, vol. 11, ed. James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1955), 902-905 (stating that this stupa was a memorial stupa, not a relic shrine). The hypothesis that Asoka’s stupa at Sanchi enshrined a Buddha relic has not been confirmed by an archaeological find.
Stupa No. 3, on the hilltop about 50 yards from the Great Stupa (Figure 1). It has been theorized that, at this time, one of the Sunga kings may have undertaken an Asoka-like division and redistribution of relics of the Buddha’s disciples and other Buddhist luminaries and that new stupas, such as Stupas No. 2 and No. 3 at Sanchi, were erected to enshrine these subdivided relics. As we shall see, there is archaeological evidence which supports this theory.

During the succeeding centuries, there was, periodically, additional construction at Sanchi. But with the Hindu renaissance, the introduction of Islam, and the concomitant decline and virtual disappearance of Buddhism in India, Sanchi was abandoned and forgotten after the 12th century.

It was not until the 19th century, during the British colonial period in India, that Sanchi was brought out of obscurity. In 1851, Major Alexander Cunningham, an army engineer, arrived at Sanchi to explore the site with Captain Fredrick C. Maisey, who had preceded him there. Upon arrival at Sanchi, Cunningham went directly to Stupa No. 3, where he and Maisey proceeded to excavate a vertical shaft down through the center of the stupa. In the course of this excavation they made a fabulous discovery. Inside the stupa they found an undisturbed relic chamber. There were two sandstone boxes in this chamber; in each of these boxes there was a small steatite (soapstone) relic casket, approximately six inches in diameter and three inches in height. One of these caskets contained a tiny piece of human bone an inch in length and seven beads of semiprecious materials; the other casket contained two minute pieces of bone, the larger piece being less than half an inch in length. Inscriptions on the lids of the boxes and caskets unequivocally identified these remains as relics of Sariputta and Moggallana.

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17 Marshall, Foucher, and Majumdar, 1: 18.

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respectively (Figure 2). After discovering this amazing relic trove at Stupa No. 3, Cunningham and Maisey moved on to other sites in the vicinity of Sanchi.

One of the other sites explored by Cunningham and Maisey after leaving Sanchi was Satdhara, six or seven miles to the west. Satdhara is a similar hilltop site where a group of stupas and other Buddhist monuments, also dated to the second-century BCE, is located. It is neither as large a site as Sanchi, nor is it as well preserved. Nevertheless, in their explorations at Satdhara, Cunningham and Maisey again made a great find. In the course of excavating Satdhara's Stupa No. 2, they discovered another pair of steatite relic caskets, approximately three inches in diameter and two inches in height (Figure 3). Each of these two caskets also contained pieces of bone, although the exact quantity and size of these bones is not specified in the reports of Cunningham and Maisey. Inscriptions on the Satdhara caskets clearly identified these bones, too, as relics of Sariputta and Moggallana.

The relic finds at Sanchi and Satdhara were important and unique for a number of reasons, including the antiquity of their archaeological context (circa second-century BCE), their definite attribution to the Buddha's chief disciples by associated inscriptions, and therefore the relative strength of their claim to authenticity. To my knowledge there have been no other documented archaeological finds of relics identified with Sariputta and Moggallana.

In their few months of joint activity in the Bhilsa area in early 1851, Cunningham and Maisey excavated many other stupas but made no finds as important as those at Sanchi and Satdhara.

20 For firsthand reports of the excavations at Stupa No. 3, Sanchi, see Alexander Cunningham, The Bhilsa Topes; or, Buddhist Monuments of Central India (1854; reprint, Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1966), 191-193, Pl. XXII; and Gen. F. C. Maisey, Sanchi and Its Remains (1892; reprint, Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1972), 110-111.
22 For Cunningham's firsthand account of the excavation at Stupa No. 2, Satdhara, see Cunningham, 209; see also Maisey, 112. On the subject of the nature of the relic find at Satdhara, Cunningham simply makes a vague reference to "a few calcined bones." Cunningham, 209. Maisey similarly reports that the steatite caskets contained "pieces of bone (?unburnt)." F. C. Maisey, "List of Antiquities Excavated in the Vicinity of Bhilsa," 1851, MMS. EUR. D. 572, Oriental and India Office Collections, The British Library, London, p. 12 (reverse).
23 See Cunningham, 199-206, 211-220, 221-226 (excavations at Sonari, Bhujpur, and Andher, respectively).

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Cunningham then moved on to duties elsewhere in British India. His interest in archaeology continued, however, and in 1861 he became the first Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India.24 Maisey’s own work at Sanchi came to an end in 1852 with the outbreak of the Second Anglo-Burmese War, when he was posted to the Burma campaign for two years. His military career thereafter did not involve him in archaeology,25 but he remained interested in the subject and, most importantly, maintained a collection of antiquities which he had collected in the field, including the Satdhara relic trove.

Sometime after he concluded his work with Cunningham, Maisey brought to England the Satdhara relics and the steatite caskets in which they had been found. In 1866, he loaned the relics and their caskets, together with other artifacts from India and Burma, to the museum now known as the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.26 In 1921, the Museum purchased the Satdhara materials from Maisey’s son, to whom ownership had devolved.27

What became of the relics from Sanchi (Stupa No. 3), the much more celebrated site, after their discovery in 1851, is unknown. In one of the greatest mysteries in the history of Indian archaeology, this spectacular find appears to have been lost.28

24 Cunningham, who has been called “the father of Indian archaeology,” held the position of Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India until 1885. See The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15th ed., s.v. “Cunningham, Sir Alexander.”
27 Minute Sheet, Nominal File - Saward, Miss Dorothy [niece of Maisey’s son], Registered Paper #3021/1921, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (recording approval for purchase).
28 See Sir John Marshall, “The Monuments of Sanchi, Their Exploration and Conservation,” in Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report, 1913-14, ed. Sir John Marshall (Calcutta: Superintendent, Government Printing, 1917), 12: “The relics themselves [from Stupa No. 3, Sanchi], together with the steatite caskets in which they reposed and the gems and other articles that accompanied them, seem to have been taken away by the finder [namely, Cunningham and/or Maisey] and subsequently lost . . . .”

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The Return of the Relics to South Asia

In the late 19th century, a Buddhist revival movement emerged in South Asia. This revival movement was led by the Maha Bodhi Society, an organization founded in 1891 by Anagarika Dharmapala of Ceylon for the purposes of reviving Buddhism in India and of reclaiming and restoring the sacred Buddhist sites there. Relics and the reenshrinement of relics often played a part in the Society’s revival efforts. As early as the 1920’s, the Maha Bodhi Society and other interested parties raised the question of the return of the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana to India; they found it inappropriate that these relics, being sacred to Buddhism and having been removed from a shrine in India, should repose in a British museum.

In securing the return of the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana to India, Burma also played a central role. In March 1939, the Trustees of the Shwedagon Pagoda, through the Government of Burma, submitted to the British Government a formal protest of the exhibition of the relics at the Victoria and Albert Museum: Sariputta and Muggalana [sic] were the Aggasavakas or Chief Disciples of the Lord Buddha himself in the order of precedence. Their ashes and relics deserve worship and adoration. They should be enshrined in a Pagoda as objects of religious worship; and it is absolutely improper and most objectionable to place them among the exhibits in a museum.

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30 See, for example, Dutt, 79-80, 91-93.

31 The Maha Bodhi Society expressed an interest in the status of the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana, specifically, in 1928 at the Society’s All India Buddhist Conference in Calcutta. See Dutt, 103; see also Minute Paper, 20 August 1923, Nominal File - Saward, Miss Dorothy, Registered Paper #5618/1923, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (reporting the museum visit of Sir John Marshall, Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India, and his statements in support of the return of the relics to India).

About this time the Buddha Society of Bombay, India, registered a similar complaint, via the Government of India, requesting that the relics be given to the Maha Bodhi Society for reenshrinement in India. In April 1939, in response to these two protests in particular, the British Government and the Victoria and Albert Museum reached the decision to relinquish the Satdhara relics. The major Buddhist organizations in India, Burma, and Ceylon, and the respective governments of those countries, agreed that Maha Bodhi Society of India should take custody of the relics pending reenshrinement of the relics at a suitable site in India, the land where they originally reposed. In Burma three major Buddhist organizations concurred in that decision: the Board of Trustees of the Shwedagon Pagoda, the Young Buddhist Society, and the Buddhist Mission. With the beginning of World War II, however, the Maha Bodhi Society decided to suspend further action on the matter and to leave the relics in British custody until the cessation of hostilities, rather than to risk loss of the relics in wartime transportation.

After the war ended, the parties reactivated the prewar agreement to return the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana to India. Thus, on February 24, 1947, in a ceremony at the Victoria and Albert Museum, representatives of the Museum and the British Government transferred physical custody of the Satdhara relics to Daya Hewavitarne, a representative of the Maha Bodhi Society and

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35 Vice President, Buddhist Mission, Akyab, to U Kyaw Din, Additional Secretary to the Government of Burma, Education Department, Secretariat, Rangoon, 8 August 1939, Registered Paper #46/886, Nominal File - Buddhist Relics, Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Po Thaung, Managing Trustee, Shwedagon Pagoda, Rangoon, to Additional Secretary to the Government of Burma, Education Department, Rangoon, 10 August 1939, Registered Paper #46/886, Nominal File - Buddhist Relics, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

36 See General Secretary, Maha Bodhi Society of India, to Director General of Archaeology in India, 29 August 1945, Registered Paper #46/886, Nominal File - Buddhist Relics, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
the Government of India. By prior agreement of the interested governments and Buddhist organizations, Mr. Hewawitarne then transported the relics to Ceylon for an extended period of public veneration by its predominately Theravada Buddhist populace. The relics remained in Ceylon for almost two years. In January 1949, they next journeyed to Calcutta, India, where they were formally received by Indian Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and then handed over to the Maha Bodhi Society of India. The Maha Bodhi Society arranged to have the relics tour northern India (Assam, Ladakh, Sikkim, and other places) prior to the permanent reenshrinement of the relics at Sanchi in November 1952. The Maha Bodhi Society also allowed the relics to visit Burma.

Tour of Burma

On February 4, 1950, during a ceremony at the Maha Bodhi Society’s assembly hall (vihara) in Calcutta, Burmese Prime Minister U Nu formally assumed custody of the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana for their visit to Burma. From the assembly hall, the relics were transported in a procession through the streets of Calcutta to the waiting Indian Navy Ship Tir, where U Nu placed the relics on a special altar on board the vessel. The Tir then departed for Rangoon carrying the relics.

On February 8, 1950, the Tir, carrying the relics, arrived in Rangoon and docked at the Phayre Street jetty. At the jetty a party of Burmese dignitaries, including the President and the Prime Minister of Burma, officially received the Tir and took custody of its precious cargo. The Burmese Government had orchestrated the arrival in

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39 “500,000 See Pandit Nehru Hand Over Relics,” Statesman (Calcutta), January 15, 1949, 1, 7, 10.
Rangoon of the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana from India to coincide with the arrival of other relics from the Temple of the Sacred Tooth in Kandy, Ceylon, including, most notably, a celebrated Buddha relic discovered at the ancient Buddhist city of Taxila in modern Pakistan. The British cruiser H.M.S. *Kenya*, transporting these relics from Ceylon, docked at the adjacent New Barr Street jetty, and amid the firing of salutes - the Burmese dignitaries also received this ship and its cargo. Meanwhile, a throng of Burmese devotees had gathered to witness the arrival of the relics. Before this vast crowd, the President of Burma carried the Ceylonese relics from the *Kenya* to a decorated car waiting nearby. Then, Prime Minister U Nu carried the relics of the disciples in a golden reliquary model of Sanchi’s Stupa No. 3 from the *Tir* to another decorated car. A long motorcade taxied the relics from the jetties to the Dhammayone (Religious Discourse Hall) at Rangoon University. Devotees lined Strand Road and the other streets on the route taken by the motorcade; it was said that almost the entire city had turned out to welcome the relics. Many of the devotees fell to their knees and bowed in homage as the relics passed by. Upon arrival at the Dhammayone, the relics were placed on a special altar for viewing and veneration. Several dignitaries spoke at the Dhammayone ceremony, including U Nu who prayed that the relics would confer a blessing on the nation of Burma. For the next month while the relics were on display at the Dhammayone, Burmese devotees from all walks of life visited the relics in a constant stream, making offerings of flowers, candles, and incense.

On March 14, 1950, the relics left Rangoon for a tour of Burma. The complete tour program included stops at the following cities: Meiktila, Yamethin, Mandalay, Bhamo, Myitkyina, Lashio,

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43 However, the Tooth Relic itself did not leave Ceylon.
Although the viewing hours were lengthy (5:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.), one commentator complained that the regulations which governed the viewing of the relics were so restrictive (apparently, in terms of the time allowed any individual devotee) that meaningful worship of the relics was impossible. This commentator added, “I do not know how much the worshippers may profit as good Buddhists in their next existence, but I am sure the flower sellers and food vendors are doing very well in this mundane world, without any thought, probably, of the next.” See “Roundabout,” *Burm.,* February 27, 1950, 2.
Kyaukme, Heho, Taunggyi, Yawngwe, Kengtung, Lio-kaw, Akyab, and Kyaukpyu. Prominent in the reporting of the relics’ tour was their journey to non-Burman ethnic areas and the warm reception received there, emphasizing, it would appear, a point of unity in those divisive times. On April 12, 1950, the relics returned to Rangoon for a final period of veneration.

On April 16, 1950, the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana concluded their roughly two-month visit to Burma. In a large procession, the relics were transported to Mingaladon Airport where Prime Minister U Nu ceremoniously placed the relics on a special plane bound for Calcutta. The Burmese Foreign Minister, Sao H Kun Hko, escorted the relics back to India. In a colorful ceremony in Calcutta, he formally returned custody of the relics to the Maha Bodhi Society. A few weeks later, on May 7, 1950, the Buddha relics from Ceylon also departed Burma.

Relic spectacles, such as the 1950 visit of the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana, had significant political as well as religious dimensions within Burma. In the early 1950’s, the Burmese state, under the leadership of Prime Minister U Nu, increasingly tuned to religion in an attempt to obtain political legitimacy and national

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46 “Tour Programme of Sacred Relics,” Burman, March 16, 1950, 3. In Mandalay, the relics were taken in a procession to the Ein-daw-ya Pagoda. See Burman, March 22, 1950, 1 (photograph of procession).
47 See, for example, “Sacred Relics In Taunggyi,” Burman, March 30, 1950, 1 (reporting that the reception provided by the Pa-Os was quite impressive); “Kachin Peoples’ Gratitude,” Burman, April 5, 1950, 1 (reporting that, in gratitude for the opportunity to venerate the relics, some Kachins were heard to exclaim enthusiastically: “So these are the fruits of Independence!”).
48 See Burman, March 16, 1950, 3.
49 “Dutch Minister Leaves on Plane With Sacred Relics,” Nation (Rangoon), April 17, 1950, 1.
50 “Holy Relics Returned to India,” Burman, April 18, 1950, 2.
51 “Sacred Relics Leave for Ceylon,” Burman, May 8, 1950, 1 (reporting that each of the dignitaries who attended the send-off ceremony was accorded the special privilege of receiving a blessing with the relic casket placed on his head). See note 76, below. It appears that when the Ceylonese relics were loaned to Burma, there was an agreement that donations received during the exhibition in Burma would be shared with Ceylon. Thus, in May, 1950, after the relics returned to Ceylon, Burma presented Rs 50,000 to Ceylon as its share of the cash offerings; this sum then apparently went to the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, the lender of the relics. See “Sacred Tooth Relic,” Burman, May 27, 1950, 1; “Burmese Buddhists’ Donation to Ceylon Temple,” Nation (Rangoon), June 5, 1951, 1; “Burmese Buddhists Donation to Ceylon Temple,” Burman, June 5, 1951, 2.
unity. During this period, characterized by widespread civil strife in Burma, the Burmese government actively promoted a Buddhist revival. Relics, especially of celebrated figures such as Sariputta and Moggallana, played an important part in this program. The state augmented its legitimacy by acquiring important Buddhist relics, by associating itself with such relics, and by promoting public veneration of them in great state-sponsored spectacles. These relic spectacles rallied Burmese throughout Burma around the political leaders closely associated with the relics and thereby had a unifying effect.

In the specific case of the visit of the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana to Burma in 1950, it was from the outset expressly hoped and anticipated that the visit would stimulate a religious revival in Burma. It was similarly hoped and anticipated that the relics would bring peace and prosperity to Burma, which was then wracked by civil war. Upon arrival of the relics in Rangoon in February 1950, one of Rangoon's English-language dailies, The Nation, even invoked the Buddhist monarch par excellence, Asoka, and his golden age, when in a front-page headline it proclaimed, "Burma Receives Sacred Relics: Glories of Asokan Days Recalled." A subheading further proclaimed, "People's Fervour Foreshadows Religious Revival in Burma." In the opinion of those persons who were closely connected with the relic mission, the visit of the relics to Burma was indeed successful both in terms of religious revivalism and political pacification and unification. Thus on the return of the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana to India in April 1950, Prime Minister U Nu stated that "at every place where the relics have been exhibited, most of all in the neighborhoods of disturbed areas, public morale greatly improved." On a number of occasions, he later stated categorically that the relics had helped to bring peace to

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53 Mendelson, 275-276; Smith, 168-169; Brohm, 396-399.

54 Nation (Rangoon), February 9, 1950, 1; see also "Sacred Relics and Their Significance to Burma," Burman, February 21, 1950, 1; "Historical Importance of Sacred Relics," Burman, February 27, 1950, 1, 2.

55 "Holy Relics Returned to India," Burman, April 18, 1950, 2.
Burma. As one specific example of the pacifying and protective effect of the relics, he observed that, "thanks to the influence of the sacred relics, the town [of Toungoo] was [reoccupied] with the loss of [only] one soldier and injuries to two." Other officials also expressed the opinion that the exhibition of the relics throughout Burma had caused a religious revival and had promoted peace.

Enshrinement at Kaba Aye

In view of the positive religious and political effects attributed to the relics, it is not surprising that, shortly after the relics of Sariputta and Mogallana left Burma, Prime Minister U Nu asked India to give to Burma a portion of the chief disciples' relics for permanent enshrinement there. On or about May 28, 1950, in Calcutta, U Nu appealed to the trustees of the Maha Bodhi Society of India for a portion of the relics. He also made a direct appeal to Indian Prime Minister Nehru, who, in June 1950 during a visit to Burma, expressed his support for the proposal. On August 5, 1950, Prime Minister Nehru, on behalf of the government of India, gave formal approval to U Nu's request and agreed to make a "permanent loan" to Burma of a portion of the relics of Sariputta and Mogallana. India's action was a gesture of goodwill toward its newly independent Buddhist neighbor; its action recognized the important

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56 See, for example, "Thakin Nu on Influence of Sacred Relics," Burman, May 3, 1950, 1; "Indian Buddhists Celebrate Visaka Poornima Day," Burman, May 4, 1950, 1; "Thakin Nu's Press Conference," Nation (Rangoon), June 1, 1950, 8 (reporting the following colloquy between a Life magazine correspondent and U Nu: "Questions... Would you say they [the Ceylonese relics] had any influence in bringing peace to the country?" Answer: "They had a most wonderful effect. Absolutely wonderful.").

57 Burman, May 3, 1950, 1; see also "Thakin Nu Receives Portion of Sacred Relics," Nation (Rangoon), May 31, 1950, 1 (attributing to U Nu a statement that the government's recent military successes were, in large part, due to the visit of the relics).

58 See, for example, "Dutch Minister Leaves on Plane With Sacred Relics," Nation (Rangoon), April 17, 1950, 1 (opinion of Indian Ambassador to Burma, Dr. Rau); "Sacred Relics Leave for Ceylon," Burman, May 8, 1950, 1 (opinion of Chief Justice F Maung); "Sacred Relics Reach Ceylon," Burman, May 13, 1950, 2 (opinion of Attorney General U Chan Htoo); "Buddha Relics For Burma," Burman, June 11, 1950, 1 (opinion of Sir U Thwin).


60 See "Burma Secures Permanent Loan of Sacred Relics," Burman, August 7, 1950, 1; see also "Rousing Reception for Pandit Nehru at Mingaladon Airport," Burman, June 21, 1950, 1.

61 Burman, August 7, 1950, 1.
role of Burma in securing the return of the relics from England and the tremendous reception received by the relics during their recent visit to Burma.

India's "permanent loan" to Burma of a portion of the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana took place on January 20, 1951, in Calcutta. The physical division of the relics occurred during a religious ceremony at the Maha Bodhi Society. In this ceremony, Burma's portion of the relics was placed in a pair of Burmese ivory reliquaries. These reliquaries were then transported to Government House, Calcutta, on a decorated chariot drawn by devotees in a long, pan-Asian Buddhist procession of Indian, Burmese, Ceylonese, Chinese, Tibetan, and Nepalese representatives in their respective national costumes. On the lawn at Government House, the ceremonial transfer of custody took place before an audience of about 5,000 persons. Dr. S. P. Mookerjee, the President of the Maha Bodhi Society, presented the relics to Dr. Kailashnath Katu, the Governor of West Bengal, who in turn delivered them to U Win, the Burmese Minister for Home, Defense, and Religious Affairs.

On the day after the ceremony in Calcutta, January 21, 1951, U Win and the Burmese delegation transported Burma's share of the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana to Rangoon on a specially chartered plane. In Burma, a committee called the Sacred Relics Reception Committee had been established to make arrangements for the reception and exhibition of the relics. The Reception Committee had arranged for relics of the Buddha himself, namely the famed Peshawar relics enshrined on Mandalay Hill, to join his disciples' relics upon their arrival in Rangoon. Thus, on the morning of January 21, Prime Minister U Nu and a large crowd of officials, monks, and other devotees gathered at Mingaladon Airport.


For a photograph of the ivory reliquaries, see Nation (Rangoon), January 22, 1951, 1; Burman, January 20, 1951, 1. In August, 1992, I observed those reliquaries at the Kaba Aye Pagoda, north of Rangoon. They are usually not on public display, but are kept in a strongbox with the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana.

Rangoon, to greet and receive the relics of the Buddha from Mandalay and, 45 minutes later, the relics of his two chief disciples from Calcutta. When the relics arrived, the entire crowd fell to its knees and bowed in homage. The relics of the Buddha and his disciples then toured the city in a long motorcade.64

The Sacred Relics Reception Committee also arranged for the disciples’ relics to tour the country with the relics of the Buddha from Mandalay Hill and from the Botataung Pagoda in Rangoon (the Buddha’s hair relic). The tour commenced on February 14, 1951, departing Rangoon by special train. The itinerary took the relics to the following Burmese towns: Prome, Allanmyo, Thayetmyo, Shwedagon, Paungde, Nattalin, Zigon, Gyobingauk, Minhla, Letpadan, Tharrawaddy, Thanze, Okkan, Taikkyi, and Hmawbi. At each of these towns, the relics were exhibited briefly for public veneration.65 Enthusiastic crowds greeted the relics at every stop.66

On March 26, 1951, the relics returned to Rangoon, and the tour concluded.67

The Burmese government originally intended to enshrine the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana at the Botataung Pagoda in Rangoon.68 During World War II, bombing in Rangoon had completely destroyed the Botataung. After the war ended, reconstruction of the pagoda was commenced.69 In March 1951,

64 Nation (Rangoon), January 22, 1951, 1; “Sacred Relics Arrive in Rangoon,” Burman, January 22, 1951, 1; “Buddhist Sacred Relics Arrive in Rangoon,” Statesman (Calcutta), January 22, 1951, 1; see also “Sacred Relics From Mandalay Hill to be Brought to Rangoon,” Burman, January 15, 1951, 1.


67 See Nation (Rangoon), February 14, 1951, 1; Burman, February 14, 1951, 2.

68 Nation (Rangoon), January 22, 1951, 1.

however, the Botataung was not yet in a condition to receive the relics. Therefore, they were temporarily housed in a nearby shrine.  

Meanwhile, in 1950, Prime Minister U Nu, reputedly in response to an oracle, began construction of a new pagoda, known as the Kaba Aye (‘World Peace’) Pagoda. This new pagoda was situated on Sirī Mangala (‘Glorious Prosperity’) Hill near the village of Yegu (two or three miles north of Rangoon). When the Kaba Aye Pagoda was completed in March 1952, U Nu decided to enshrine the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana there instead of at the still incomplete Botataung Pagoda.

The Kaba Aye Pagoda is distinctive in a number of respects. With a height of 118 feet and a base circumference of 300 feet, it was said to be “the largest pagoda built in modern times.” The design of the pagoda consists of a bell-shaped, stupa-form superstructure on a windowed, multi-storied circular base (Figure 4). Unlike the traditional stupa, such as Stupa No. 3 at Sanchi, which has no interior space and where the relics are encased in an inaccessible chamber deep within the solid mass, the Kaba Aye Pagoda has a large interior space with a strongroom, 100 feet in circumference, in the center where relics and other sacred and valuable items are kept. The focal point of this room is a silver-alloy Buddha image, nearly eight feet in height, seated in the earth-touching hand position (bhumisparsa mudrā). The strong room is opened periodically to permit public viewing and veneration of the contents. Thus, in this

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70 Brohm, 397.
72 See “Kaba-Aye Pagoda Consecrated With Hoisting of ‘Umbrella’,” Nation (Rangoon), March 6, 1952, 1; Mendelson, 272-275; Brohm, 394-395. Sirī Mangala would also be the site of the Sixth Great Buddhist Council or Synod (Chattha Sangayana), which commenced in May, 1954. “Chattha Sangayana, Sixth Great Buddhist Council: Programme,” The Burman and Picture News Supplement, May 17, 1954, 7 (inaugural day of Council); “Sixth Buddhist Synod: 200,000 Watch in Heavy Rain While Rockets Herald Opening,” Burman, May 19, 1954, 1.
73 Brohm, 397. Reconstruction of the Botataung Pagoda was completed in late 1953. Mendelson, 275.
74 Brohm, 394.
modern relic shrine, there is an emphasis on visibility of the relics, an emphasis which was not generally present in ancient times.\textsuperscript{75}

In elaborate ceremonies lasting from March 5 to March 11, 1952, the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana were enshrined at the Kaba Aye Pagoda, and the pagoda itself was consecrated. On March 5, a procession carried the disciples' relics on a decorated car from their temporary shrine near the Botataung Pagoda to Siri Mangala Hill, a distance of two or three miles. Among the many dignitaries who participated in the procession were Prime Minister U Nu, Religious Affairs Minister U Win, Sir U Thwin (President of the Buddha Sasana Council of Burma), and other prominent Burmese officials; Venerable Jinaratana, Mahathero of Ceylon; and Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, President of the Maha Bodhi Society of India. Devotees lined the route of the procession, which also carried the hair relic of the Buddha from the Botataung Pagoda. As the relics of the Buddha and his disciples passed by, the devotees fell to their knees and bowed in veneration.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{75} U Ohn Ghine, “The Kaba Aye,” 44-45; Charles, 28-29, 60-63; “Kaba Aye Zedi,” in \textit{Myanma Sue Soun Kyaw} [Burmese Encyclopedia], vol. 1 (Rangoon: Burma Translation Society, 1954), 454-455. I wish to acknowledge with gratitude Saya U Saw Tun, Northern Illinois University, for his assistance with the translation of this source and other Burmese-language sources and terms.

Regarding the design of the Kaba Aye Pagoda, see also Brohm, 396 (“Architecturally [the Kaba Aye Pagoda] has been charitably described as ‘a novel and pleasing interblend of the ancient and modern,’ [quoting \textit{New Times of Burma}, March 5, 1952,] though Westerners may see in its unusual windowed stupa a rather disappointing ‘railroad station’ motif’); Mendelson, 274 (“the Kaba Aye Pagoda [is] a curious structure not very happily wedging a circular, Western-inspired ‘pukka’ type of block to a typical Burmese pagoda spire”). At the time of my visit to Burma in July, 1992, the Kaba Aye Pagoda had been recently refurbished, and my own opinion is that it is now a structure of great beauty and interest.

The large Buddha image in the strongroom is of contemporary manufacture, using more than a half ton of silver. “Lord Buddha’s Image for World Peace Pagoda,” \textit{Burman} October 12, 1952, 2; U Ohn Ghine, “The Kaba Aye,” 45; Brohm, 398, citing also \textit{New Times of Burma}, September 2, 1552. The image is called Maha Zii Nein Daw or the Great Governor of the Human. Every morning, a group of lay women devotees performs a water-offering ritual before this image, perhaps in emulation of Sujata’s legendary offering of milk-rice to the Buddha while he was meditating under the Bodhi Tree.

\textsuperscript{76} “Kaba Aye Pagoda Festival,” \textit{Burman}, March 6, 1952, 1; “Kaba-Aye Pagoda Consecrated With Hoisting of Umbrella,” \textit{Nation} (Rangoon), March 6, 1952, 1; see also “Ven’able Jinaratana Leaves Rangoon,” \textit{Burman}, March 13, 1952, 1.
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After the procession reached Siri Mangala on March 5, the pagoda's finial-hoisting ceremony commenced. During this ceremony, which extended over the next seven days, the new pagoda was consecrated by the hoisting of a gem-encrusted umbrella finial or hti in seven stages along an aerial line to the top of the pagoda's spire. Rockets were fired as U Nu himself initiated the long process of hoisting the umbrella finial. Contemporaneous with the seven-day consecration ceremony, they also celebrated the first annual pagoda festival at Kaba Aye, a festival which has been held every year since then at the pagoda during the last month (Daboun) of the Burmese calendar (which roughly corresponds with March in the Western calendar). Thus, during this seven-day period in March, 1952, three major events coincided: the enshrinement of the relics, the consecration of the pagoda, and the celebration of the first annual pagoda festival. A huge crowd of devotees from all over Burma, estimated in the hundreds of thousands (including, reputedly, one thousand monks), gathered on Siri Mangala to witness the relic enshrinement and pagoda consecration ceremonies and to participate in the pagoda festival. A great public celebration took place on Siri Mangala Hill and at nearby Yegu village, including fireworks, food stalls, Burmese dancing and theatrical performances, open-air cinema, and boxing matches. It was perhaps the most extraordinary celebration in modern Burmese history.77

In recent years, the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana have been removed from the central strongroom at the Kaba Aye Pagoda and are now kept with a relic of the Buddha in a strongbox just off the circumambulatory corridor around the strongroom (Figure 5). These relics of the Buddha and his two chief disciples are contained in three tiny interlocking crystal vials in the form of miniature stupas, which can be separated for display; in this tripartite arrangement, the central vial contains the relics of the Buddha, and it is flanked by vials containing the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana, respectively. On Saturdays, Sundays, and official holidays, and on the full moon and new moon days of each month, the relics are

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77 Burman, March 6, 1952, 1; Nation (Rangoon), March 6, 1952, 1; “Kaba Aye Zedi,” Myamma Sue Soe Kyan, vol. 1, 454-455; see also “Kaba-Aye Pagoda Festival,” Burman, March 9, 1952, 2 (reporting the hoisting of the hti, or finial, to the fourth stage); “Hoisting of the Hti at Kaba-Aye Pagoda,” Burman, March 10, 1952, 1 (reporting that Prime Minister and Mrs. U Nu, as well as the wives of “the late lamented National leaders,” participated in the hoisting of the hti to the fifth stage).
removed from the strongbox for public display and veneration. Early in the morning on those days, a pagoda trustee transfers the relics from the strongbox to a nearby glass case where they are displayed on an ornate silver stand. During the brief transition period from strongbox to glass case, the trustee will give a special blessing to each person who is then present; while reciting the blessing, the trustee rests the relics, which are contained in the tiny crystal vials, upon the head of the person who is being blessed (Figure 6). Thus, the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana, who died in ancient India 2,500 years ago, continue to be part of a living Buddhist tradition in modern Burma.\textsuperscript{78}

**Enshrinement at Sanchi**

Burma's role in connection with the return of the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana to Asia did not conclude with the enshrinement ceremony at Kaba Aye. On November 30, 1952, about eight months after the Kaba Aye ceremony, India's portion of the relics was enshrined at Sanchi in a newly-constructed assembly hall (\textit{vihara}) there. In \textit{The Burman}, Rangoon's English-language daily, this event was called "the most sacred [Buddhist] ceremony of the century."\textsuperscript{79} Thousands of monks, officials, and other devotees from around the world attended the enshrinement ceremony. Among the many international dignitaries in attendance were Burmese Prime Minister U Nu and his wife.\textsuperscript{80} The ceremony began with a long procession from the foot of Sanchi hill to the new assembly hall on the hilltop. In

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\textsuperscript{78} Loosely translated, the terms of the relic blessing are: "By reason of your close communion with the corporeal relics of these great personages, if you have faith, your good wishes will be granted and you will be protected from evil." The relics blessing ritual is, then, a classic example of what Melford Spiro calls "apotropaic Buddhism." See generally Melford Spiro, \textit{Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes} (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), chap. 6. I acknowledge with gratitude the assistance of my guide in Burma, Ko Thet Tun, who contemporaneously translated the relic blessing for me.

The placing of relics upon or over one's head is an ancient Buddhist gesture of submission and veneration. In the \textit{Mahavamsa}, the "Great Chronicle" of Ceylon, and in Yuan Chwang's 7th-century CE account of his travels in India, there are descriptions of royal rituals during which relics were briefly placed upon a king's head. See Nancy Falk, "To Gaze on the Sacred Traces," \textit{History of Religions} 16: 287-288 (1977).

\textsuperscript{79} "Nehru Welcomes U Nu at Delhi Airport," \textit{Burman}, November 29, 1952, 1.

\end{footnotesize}
the procession, U Nu played an especially prominent part. At the final stage of the procession, he carried the relics to the hilltop on his head in a gold stupa-form casket. Indian Prime Minister Nehru then carried the relic casket up the steps of the shrine itself. At the top of the steps, he handed the casket to two Ceylonese monks. They placed the casket on an altar that was covered with a gold-embroidered cloth and then opened the casket to reveal the relics. The relics were thus displayed for a two-hour period of veneration. During the enshrinement ceremony, another notable moment occurred when, near the assembly hall, Prime Minister U Nu planted a sapling from the Bodhi Tree at Bodh Gaya. Thus, Burma’s role in connection with the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana continued to be an important one at the Sanchi ceremony.

Conclusion
With the enshrinement of the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana at Sanchi in November, 1952, their peregrinations come to an end, for now. The extraordinary events of that journey are all the more amazing when we remember that they concerned tiny pieces of bone, probably not much larger than a fingernail. Yet, as we have seen, those tiny pieces of bone moved not only millions of devotees worldwide but national governments as well. And, in this century at least, no country was more affected by those tiny bones, those sacred relics of the Buddha’s chief disciples, than Burma.

81 See Nation (Rangoon), December 15, 1952, 1 (photograph of U Nu at Sanchi carrying relic casket on his head).
Figure 1.

Stupa No. 3, Sanchi, August 1992.

Photograph by the author.
Figure 2.

Maisey's Drawings of the Relic Caskets and Other Objects Discovered at Stupa No. 3, Sanchi.


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Blue Caskets from No. 2 Stupa at Satdhara.

Figure 3.

Maisey’s Drawings of Relic Caskets Discovered at Stupa No. 2, Satdhara.

Figure 4.


Photograph by the author.
Figure 5.

**Strongbox (right, with flower garland) Containing Relics of Sariputta and Moggallana, Kaba Aye Pagoda, July 1992.**

Photograph by the author.
Figure 6.


Photograph by the author.