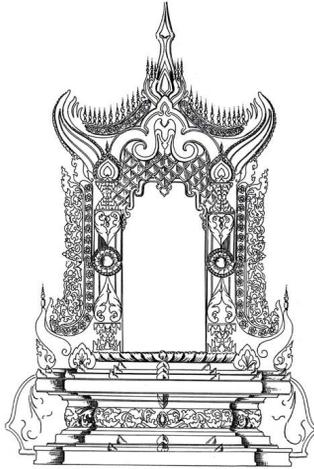


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*Volume 9
2004*



Special Issue

*In Homage to
U Pe Maung Tin*

Featuring Articles by:

Anna Allott

Denise Bernot

Tilman Frasch

Patricia Herbert

Jacques Leider

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U Tun Aung Chain

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NOTES ON DIPAVAMSA
An Early Publication by U Pe Maung Tin

Tilman Frasch*

While residing in Yangon during the winter of 1990–91 for the purpose of studying Pagan epigraphs in preparation for my doctoral dissertation, I had few commitments in the evenings. Life at that time was still far from normal—curfew, for example, lasted from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m., and everyone considered it an improvement when on November 1 the curfew was modified to start at 11 p.m. Street life usually subsided well before this time, after which only patrolling army trucks and jeeps were heard and occasionally seen. Even the famous all-night weaving ceremonies on the full moon day of Thadingyut were suspended. Periodically I called on friends, but most evenings were occupied by strolls along the streets where vendors arranged impromptu markets. With the exception of booksellers who had spread their printed goods on the pavement, there was little of interest to me. With the booksellers, however, I cultivated the spirit of prehistoric man by hunting and gathering whatever materials I could find. Stone Age man's provisions for survival will be called an "archive" by a modern historian, and inevitably, every historian sooner or later becomes a keeper of his own archive. My amassed print collection of various value and origin amounted in weight to about forty-five kilograms, but somehow I managed to lift it into an aircraft for the journey home.

*Research Fellow, Asia Research Institute, Singapore. This text was originally presented at the colloquium in honor of U Pe Maung Tin, which took place in September 1998 at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Though the author has updated the text where new information required revision, the original style of the lecture has been maintained, including the very personal approach to both the person and the subject.

Among those texts that I acquired just because I thought that they were good to have with me, there was a small booklet of roughly forty pages with a self-made cover and a hand-written title, *Notes on Dipavamsa*. Being interested in the Buddhist historiography of Ceylon, I bought it without much hesitation. The Dipavamsa, as may be known, is to a certain extent a national history of the Sinhalese people, especially their religion.¹ The chronicle was later revised (and with regard to style and arrangement surpassed as well) by another monk who entitled his work the Mahavamsa (The Great Chronicle).² Both chronicles were already popular in Burma during the Pagan period and had a significant impact on history writing in Burma altogether. The Mahavamsa (and its continuation, the Culavamsa), for example, provided the textual reference for the painters who embellished the walls of the Myinkaba Kubyaukkyi temple at Pagan with portraits of Buddhist kings like Ashoka or Vijaya Bahu of Sri Lanka.³ Simultaneously, the chronicles were among the Buddhist literature dedicated to monastic libraries,⁴ a tradition that was to continue until the twentieth century.⁵ The Dipavamsa served as a model for the first surviving Burmese chronicle, the *Yazawin-kyaw* (Well-known Chronicle) of Shin Mahasilavamsa, written in the early sixteenth century.⁶ Even U Kala, whose famous *Yazawin-gyi* (Great Chronicle) of the early eighteenth century may be considered the first “modern” history of Burma, had obviously been inspired by the Pali chronicles of Sri Lanka and used them as a reference in the field of religious history.⁷ Apart from that, the Sinhalese chronicles were published in Burma as well, the Mahavamsa in a little-known edition of 1932 and both the Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa in translation as a part of a series of Buddhist historical works prepared in the mid-1950s.⁸

However, my sincere hope to find new information concerning the role of the Dipavamsa in Burmese historiography was disappointed as the text added nothing to the Dipavamsa itself, consisting instead of philological explanations of certain obscure Pali passages; notes on a few

Buddhist terms; and a short, one-page introduction. The most intriguing mystery with regard to the text turned out to be the question of its authorship. Lacking the original front cover or a title page, the introduction was the only available source of information from which the origin of the booklet could be surmised. Dated "Insein, 18th December, 1911," the text may have been published in that year or in 1912 at the latest. I had not been able to trace the work in any of the prominent bibliographies or catalogues.⁹ The author did not reveal his full name, but signed with the initials "M.T." I had heard that U Pe Maung Tin's name was originally U Maung Tin, and that he later added the syllable "Pe" in reverence of his father.¹⁰ With his later service as the first professor of Pali at Yangon University in mind, I did not hesitate to identify the "M.T." of the introduction with the person we celebrate in this very publication. *Notes on Dipavamsa* was indeed his first published book, as revealed in the introduction where he identifies it as "this first attempt of mine at authorship."

The work itself poses further questions. As U Pe Maung Tin stated in the introduction, the text was meant for matriculation students, very likely of the Rangoon College, as an aid to understanding the language of the Dipavamsa in order to pass examinations. The Dipavamsa, as he correctly noted, with its many corrupt, inaccurate, or unintelligible passages is hardly suitable for such a purpose. It is indeed difficult to understand why the Dipavamsa, rather than a more important Pali text with canonical status (e.g. from the Sutta), had been selected for the examination. Even if the Dipavamsa was identified, for whatever reason, as a historical text, Geiger's standard edition of the Mahavamsa, containing the same information in better Pali, had been available since 1908, although his English translation was to follow later in 1912.¹¹ Certainly, with a "nationalist" outlook created by thematically combining religion, people, and land, the increased importance of the Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa may have developed for political reasons.¹² Especially following the turn of the century, the chronicles became more and more popular in Sri

Lanka. Thus, the Sinhalese translation of the *Dipavamsa*, first published in 1879, saw four more reprints between 1912 and 1917.¹³ Sinhalese nationalists soon regarded the *Dipavamsa* as their national, that is Sinhala-Buddhist, history book. Though it is possible that the chronicle's fame spread to Burma as well, I have found no indication at all that the *Dipavamsa* was used in a similar way as a textbook in Burma.

Apart from the question of why the *Dipavamsa* was selected as a text for college examinations, U Pe Maung Tin's *Notes* addresses another important problem. To explain this, I have to go a bit deeper into the texts in order to establish the relationship between them. As I had indicated above, the only available edition (disregarding the Sinhalese translations) of the *Dipavamsa* had been published by Hermann Oldenberg in 1879. This edition contains the Pali text with critical notes along with his translation. U Pe Maung Tin's *Notes on Dipavamsa* refers to chapters 1–5 of the Oldenberg edition. But, while Oldenberg starts counting the verses afresh from every new chapter, *Notes* begins with verse 1 and ends with verse 362, corresponding to verse 102 of chapter 5 in Oldenberg's edition. However, the final verse of *Notes* should correspond to verse 366 of Oldenberg's edition, if the verses are simply counted continuously.¹⁴ Therefore, the version of the chronicle U Pe Maung Tin had at hand must have been different from the manuscripts that Oldenberg employed for his seminal work. The first discrepancy arises after Dv 4.14 corresponding to MT II.95. The next instance is after Dv 2.33 corresponding to MT II.117, a third after Dv 3.46 = MT III.196. Finally, MT begins chapter 5 with verse 261 which is already verse 265 of the published Oldenberg edition. Different readings, however, are almost absent. The only case to be found is in verse 196 or chapter 3.48 of Oldenberg, where U Pe Maung Tin employs the word *mahâyakaniya* where the Oldenberg edition has *mahesakka*, though Oldenberg actually refers to the former as a variant reading in his footnotes. Nevertheless, these few deviations make it clear that U Pe Maung Tin had access to a longer version of the text than Oldenberg.

But what did this text look like? As we have seen, U Pe Maung Tin stated in his introduction that the work was meant for students in preparation for matriculation examinations. Therefore, the text in question may have been a small booklet, perhaps quite similar to a small textbook containing passages from the Mahavamsa that had been used for a similar purpose in Sri Lanka.¹⁵ Again, the established bibliographies relating to Burma do not contain any reference to such a textbook ever existing in Burma; it is impossible to tell what this text looked like and, more importantly, what its sources were. U Pe Maung Tin's *Notes* suggest, however, that it was not the text as edited by Oldenberg. Apparently, the excerpt had been taken from an unedited manuscript preserved in a Burmese archive.¹⁶ If this assumption proves right, U Pe Maung Tin unintentionally has provided us with another important piece of information, essentially that somewhere in Burma a manuscript of the Dipavamsa exists which obviously contains more verses than the manuscripts upon which Oldenberg based his edition. Oldenberg's edition, it may be added here, was collated from various manuscripts held by European libraries and procured in Sri Lanka, all of which were corrupt and sometimes unintelligible, as the editor has repeatedly pointed out in his footnotes.¹⁷ The version he found most trustworthy was discovered—unsurprisingly—in one of the two manuscripts originating from Burma.¹⁸

Since 1998, when I first presented this observation on the occasion of U Pe Maung Tin's centennial anniversary, I have had no opportunity to continue with the search for manuscripts until only very recently. Not long ago, I had the opportunity to consult the Pali manuscripts kept at the John Rylands Library in Manchester. These manuscripts had been catalogued in the early 1970s by the Sinhalese professor of Pali, N. A. Jayawickrama, though his catalogue turned out to be incomplete due to internal rearrangements and additions to the collection.¹⁹ Item no. 64 of this collection is a palm-leaf manuscript of the Dipavamsa in Burmese script, consisting of thirty-eight pages (numbering *ka-gha*) with ten lines to a page.

According to the colophon, it was copied on the 13th day of Tabodway in 1259 of the Burmese era, that is 4 February 1898. A comparison with the text edited by Oldenberg instantly revealed that this manuscript, despite being much younger, is clearly more detailed and less corrupt than the manuscripts utilized by Oldenberg. As a detailed scrutinization of the manuscript is still under preparation, a few remarks on the most important characteristics shall suffice here. First and foremost, the manuscript occasionally supplies additional verses. The first instance is in chapter 1.24–25, where notice is taken of the Second Council with the lines “*dutiyo hessati sanghato / tayo dvisatavassâni.*” Oldenberg has noted the absence of this council in a footnote. Again, the part of chapter 6.47–50 that Oldenberg found too corrupt to translate is emended in the manuscript.²⁰

Secondly, the Manchester manuscript has a number of variant readings including inversions, which do not change the meaning of the text but show a distinct tradition. It should also be noted, however, that the variants contain several mistakes and misreadings that clearly fall behind the edited version. Therefore, we cannot say that the Manchester manuscript is superior to all known manuscripts in every respect.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings, it is clear that the new manuscript represents a textual tradition that is highly independent from the one Oldenberg relied upon. The manuscript also indicates that we may expect considerable progress in the field of Sinhalese historiography from systematic research in Burmese archives, in Burma, and elsewhere.

In concluding, I would once more emphasize the significance of U Pe Maung Tin’s first publication which, from my point of view, lies less in its original design as a grammatical treatise but more in the clues it gives for further research. *Notes on Dipavamsa* clearly shows how tremendously important the Burmese tradition has been and continues to be for the history and literature of Theravada Buddhism. In that sense, I offer this article in honor of U Pe Maung Tin, who combined scholarship in Pali and Buddhism with far-reaching

knowledge of Burmese literature, history, and culture as an invitation to scholars to continue research in these fields that he mastered, making use of the rich stock of Burmese sources available, both in Burma and beyond.

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_____ 1958. ဒိပဝင်္ဏုနှင့် ဆကေသဓာတုဝင်္ဏု (Dipawin-wathtu hnin Hsakeithadatuwin-wathtu). Rangoon: Hanthawati Press.

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Footnotes

¹ As the Dipavamsa is too well-known to be introduced here in detail, it shall suffice to note that the Dipavamsa was clumsily compiled from various Indian and Sinhalese sources in the course of the fourth century A.D. At that time, Buddhism was on the wane in its Indian homeland, and the chronicle must be seen as an attempt to warn the Sinhalese ruler and people not to allow similar decay in Sri Lanka, styled as the *dhhammadipa* (island of religion). The combination of people, land, and religion composed its alleged national character. It has been edited and translated by Hermann Oldenberg, *The Dipavamsa: An Ancient Buddhist Historical Record* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1879, several reprints). In connection with the celebrations of the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha's parinirvana in 1956, another translation was prepared by B. C. Law, which appeared in 1959 as vol. 7 of the *Ceylon Historical Journal* (Maharagama: Salman Press).

² The Mahavamsa is also too well renowned to require further remarks. Like the Dipavamsa, it was written at Anuradhapura, but perhaps a century later. Continued in several lots, the Mahavamsa records the history of one of the monasteries in the capital until its demise in the thirteenth century. Later additions, known as Culavamsa, continue the story up to the advent of the British period. The standard edition and translation was prepared by Wilhelm Geiger for the Pali Text Society, *The Mahavamsa* (London: Luzac for the Pali Text Society, 1912, several reprints), and idem, *The Culavamsa* (London: Luzac for the Pali Text Society, 1927–29, originally in two volumes).

³ See Gordon H. Luce, *Old Burma—Early Pagan*, vol. 1 (New York: Artibus Asiae 1969–70), 373–83. References to Vijaya Bahu, who died around the time the temple was built, may even show that this part of the chronicle had been transmitted to Pagan almost immediately after it had been written in Sri Lanka. See Tilman Frasch, “A Buddhist Network in the Bay of Bengal,” in *From the Mediterranean to the South China Sea: Miscellaneous Notes*, ed. Guillot, Lombard, and Ptak. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), 69–93.

⁴ *She-haung Myanma Kyauksa-mya* (Old Burmese Inscriptions), vol. 1, ed. U Aung Thaw, (Yangon, 1972), 289. For a reading of this inscription see Tilman Frasch, *Pagan: Stadt und Staat* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1996), 327.

⁵ A set of Sinhalese chronicles was included in the vast library, which the Taungdwin-thugyi and his wife dedicated to a monastery at Pagan in AD 1442. See Mabel Bode, *The Pali Literature of Burma* (London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1909), 101–9; and again in a library established at Moulmein in 1920: Ref.

⁶ Edited by the Hanthawadi Press, Rangoon 1965, the chronicle follows the traditional *nissaya* style with its fifty-four Pali verses (taken from the Dipavamsa) followed by Burmese explanations.

⁷ U Kala, *Yazawin-gyi*, 3 vols., ed. Saya Pwa (vols. 1–2) and U Khin Soe (vol. 3), (Yangon, 1960–61). Despite its importance, the chronicle still lacks proper investigation with regard to its sources, contents, and purpose of composition. U Kala finished his work around 1720 when the ailing Ava kingdom was about to be overturned by the Lower Burmans. U Kala obviously made use of inscriptions (e.g. the famous Kalyani inscriptions of King Dhammaceti of Pegu were known to him) as well as other historical works. The only study of U Kala’s chronicle comes from Victor Lieberman, who investigated its reliability for events in the sixteenth century against contemporary European accounts, “How Reliable is U Kala’s Chronicle?” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 17, no. 2 (1986): 236–55.

⁸ *Dipawin-wathtu hnin Hsakeithadatuwin-wathtu*, ed. U Khin Soe et al. (Rangoon: Hanthawati Press, 1958). *Mahawin-wathtu-taw-gyi*, 2 vols., ed. U Khin Soe et al. (Rangoon: Hanthawati Press, 1957).

⁹ L. D. Barnett (comp.), *A Catalogue of the Burmese Books in the British Museum* (London: British Museum Press, 1913); Kenneth Whitbread, *Burmese Printed Books in the India Office Library* (London: HMSO, 1967); Frank Trager (ed.), *Burma: A Selected and Annotated Bibliography* (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files Press, 1973). Editor’s note: see no. 7 in Patricia Herbert’s bibliography in this issue, which confirms the date of publication as 1912 and that the work was U Pe Maung Tin’s first published book.

¹⁰ In discussions at the 1998 London symposium, scholars suggested that Maung Tin had added “Pe” to his name in order to reduce confusion among peers between himself and another Maung Tin studying simultaneously at Oxford. Weary with constantly being mixed, he attempted to distinguish himself from the fellow student.

¹¹ Of course, one could also have chosen the section of the Vinaya that relates the history of Buddhism up to the Second Council or some other historical text from the canon.

¹² Some scholars therefore have even gone so far as to suggest that it was this early nationalism of religion, land, and people that enhanced the emergence of a Sinhala-Buddhist historiography. See Heinz Bechert, *Zum Ursprung der Geschichtsschreibung im indischen Kulturbereich*, Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, 1. Philologisch-historische Klasse, Nr. 2. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1969). This approach, however, disregards the political circumstances of its inscription. In India, Buddhism began to disappear from its original homeland in the Gangetic plains around Patna, the capital of the Gupta rulers who were staunch followers of Hinduism. Challenged by the revival of Hinduism and perhaps influenced from Buddhist traditions abroad, Buddhism in India took new directions such as Tantra. At the same time in Ceylon, the two most important monasteries were quarrelling after a king had attempted to abolish the older monastery of the two, the famous Mahavihara at Anuradhapura. In this situation, the composition of the Dipavamsa must be understood as an appeal to the people and rulers of Sri Lanka not to allow similar decline on their island. The chronicle, in my opinion, was instrumental in shaping a Sinhala-Buddhist identity, not the outcome of it.

¹³ Hier Referenzen für Singh. Übers. nachtragen.

¹⁴ The figures are: chapter 1, 81 *slokas* (verses); ch. 2, 69 verses; ch. 3, 61 verses; ch. 4, 53 verses; and ch. 5, 107. Together 371 verses.

¹⁵ Chandrasena Pannila, *The Mahavamsa, Chapters XIX–XXIV* (Colombo: 1962). This text was prescribed for the G. C. E. Advanced Level Examination at the time.

¹⁶ This likely would have been at the Bernard Free Library, because neither the University Library nor the library at the Kaba-e pagoda existed at that time. Bode also refers to this library (*Pali Literature*, introduction and p. 102) and notes that a hand-written list of its manuscript holdings, compiled by Charles Duroiselle, exists, which was inaccessible to me. The Bernard Free Library is now part of the National Archives at Yangon.

¹⁷ In his introduction, Oldenberg refers to eleven manuscripts (two in Burmese script, the others in Sinhalese) from the British Library, the India Office Library, Cambridge University Library, the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, the Colonial Library in Colombo, and one copy from a Sinhalese monastery. See Oldenberg, *Dipavamsa*, p. 10–11.

¹⁸ The superiority of the Burmese Buddhist tradition regarding the transmission of Buddhist canonical and semi-canonical texts has been recognized by many scholars, for one example see Oskar von Hinüber, *Die Sprachgeschichte des Pali im Spiegel der südostasiatischen Handschriftenüberlieferung: Untersuchungen zur Sprachgeschichte und Handschriftenkunde des Pali I*, Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse 8, (Mainz: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, Stuttgart: F. Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1988).

¹⁹ N. A. Jayawickrama, "Pali Manuscripts at the John Rylands Library, Manchester," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 55, no. 1 (1972): 146–76.

²⁰ However, in two similar cases (in chs. 15.19–20 and 17.12–14), the manuscript agrees with the reading of the edition.