

Communications to the Editor

A Note on Burmese Religious Landholdings

(Previous material on this topic was included in *JAS* 38, 4; 39, 4; and 40, 1. At the request of the Editor, Dr. Lieberman abbreviated his comments.)

Michael Aung-Thwin asserts (*JAS* 40, 1: 87–90) that the difference between our views on religious wealth in Burmese history is merely a matter of emphasis and that his perspective can accommodate my own. I do not agree. His central hypothesis, which prompted my original critique (*JAS* 39, 4: 753–69), posited that the institutional relation between throne and *sangha* was unchanged for a thousand years and that monastic landlordism provided the underlying rhythm for every political cycle between the ninth and nineteenth century. I presented evidence to show that the institutional relation was by no means static and that the problem of religious lands was at best of marginal significance after the mid-sixteenth century. In his latest piece, Aung-Thwin skirts these arguments. He reasserts that landed donations had a cumulative impact but fails to prove that donations were permanent in fact as well as in theory, fails to consider that administrative arrangements evolved to the crown's benefit, fails to explain how dynastic founders asserted themselves in the face of supposedly permanent endowments, and ignores the widely discrepant political implications of cash and landed patronage.

Where his essay breaks new ground—and where a specific rejoinder is necessary—is in his discussion of statistics. He raises four issues, three of which point to a cursory reading of the critique. First, he claims that my data on lithic inscriptions are outdated because they derive from Duroiselle's 1921 list. Yet the text and notes plainly state (p. 760) that my table was compiled not only from Duroiselle, but also from annual reports issued between 1913 and 1965 by the Archaeological Survey, Burma. No more comprehensive or accurate source is available.

Second, he suggests that I have assigned an unreasonably late date to the close of the Ava period so as to include inscriptions that more properly belong to the subsequent First Taung-ngu cycle: "No historian of Burma has ever before . . . extended the Ava period to 1555," he writes. Are not G. E. Harvey, Htin Aung, and Arthur Phayre—all three of whom terminate the Ava period in 1555 (see Harvey, *History of Burma*, chap. III-A, p. 366; Htin Aung, *A History of Burma*, p. 337; Phayre, *History of Burma*, pp. 108, 284–85)—the standard authorities? The justification for this periodization is obvious: in 1555 Ava was conquered by Bayín-naung and its domain joined to that of the First Taung-ngu empire. Donations from northern districts still controlled by Ava before that date could not affect the tax base of the independent Taung-ngu state. On the other hand, all pre-1555 inscriptions from areas subject to Taung-ngu were entered in First Taung-ngu statistics.

Nor can one accept his suggestion that small religious acreage figures from the Restored Taung-ngu era are suspect because deltaic weather conditions ravaged inscriptions around the capital. Aung-Thwin has conflated two quite separate

administrative cycles, the First Taung-ngu cycle, when the capital was in the delta, and the subsequent Restored Taung-ngu cycle, throughout which the capital was in the dry zone. The figures to which he referred derived *entirely* from the latter period (cf. *JAS* 40, 1: 88, and 39, 4: 759–60, 763–64).

Finally, on the issue of Pagan cultivation he rightly points out that 3,000,000 acres are too large for the thirteenth century—but this figure was never presented as such. Rather it was intended to demonstrate, through early colonial surveys, the impossibility of attempting to equate acreages watered by major irrigation works with total cultivated area. Although pollen analyses eventually may reduce our ignorance, no one is currently able to gauge total cultivation in the thirteenth century, and it would be best to acknowledge this. The whole thrust of my argument has been against elaborate projections from limited Pagan data, whether as regards the percentage of Pagan lands owned by religion, or, more importantly, the cyclic dynamics of postclassical history.

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