Imagining Yangon: Assembling heritage, national identity, and modern futures

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Abstract

Myanmar stands on the edge of momentous and swift transformation. Rapid economic development and modernisation are the result of recent political reforms and the easing of international sanctions. This article explores how the built heritage of Myanmar’s former capital cities Mandalay, Bagan, and Yangon feature prominently in the heritage discourse and national imaginary of Myanmar today. The paper investigates the heritage assemblage processes underway in Yangon and interrogates the ‘geographies of knowledge’ that inform the emerging heritage discourse and its associated materiality.

Introduction

Today Myanmar sits on the precipice of significant and rapid transformation, poised between a period of sustained limited development and 21st century modernity. This transition is a result of recent political reforms and the easing of international sanctions. This article explores how the built heritage of Myanmar’s former capital cities Mandalay, Bagan, and Yangon feature prominently in the heritage discourse and national imaginary of Myanmar today; from the nostalgic glory of civilisations past, to developmentalism, ideological narratives of a homogenous national identity, and the globalism of Asian cities. What has occurred or is occurring at each place varies considerably and among these three projects of heritage making, Yangon stands out as extraordinary. No longer the Union’s capital it still serves as the commercial and international cultural hub of the country and is the primary space where contemporary debates of heritage, national identity, and imagined urban futures are being forged. Unlike the government’s depictions of Mandalay and Bagan, Yangon can best be described as an assemblage of global dimensions whose history and future have been, and continue to be, cast in worldling practices. Before we consider what makes Yangon so exceptional in the contemporary

Figure 1: Downtown Yangon looking towards Sule pagoda. (Source: Kecia Fong, 2013)
heritage, conservation and identity making processes, we should turn back to the first national heritage restoration campaigns of the late 1980s immediately following the 1988 uprisings. The following preliminary findings are a result of current doctoral fieldwork and as such, represent a work in progress.¹

Background

In 1988 hundreds of thousands of Burmese nationals took to the streets in protest of the failed economic and social policies of the Ne Win regime and his ‘Burmese Way to Socialism’. Thousands were killed, imprisoned, or fled the country and a military coup replaced the ‘Burma Socialist Party Programme’ with the ‘State Law and Order Restoration Council’ (SLORC). The new government’s response to the country-wide internal dissent was to make consolidation of national unity a priority (Aung-Thwin 1985; Callahan 2004; Houtman 1999). This was enacted through a variety of means from the renaming of places, streets, and even the country, to large-scale restoration and reconstruction campaigns of historic and ancient capital cities.

Restoration Campaigns

Embodied Knowledge – (Re)Constructing Sovereignty

In the hearts of Myanmar nationals, the spirit of patriotism and the awareness that they had once lived under their own sovereignty independently and that they must protect their independence, will be aroused by seeing the reconstructed palace and this will, in turn, contribute to national reconsolidation.

Nyunt Han, Deputy Director General, Dept. of Archaeology (as cited in Houtman 1999: 96)

Mandalay was the last sovereign capital of Myanmar prior to British consolidation of the country and its subsumption into the British Indian empire. Because of this, Mandalay looms large in the Burmese national imaginary. In historical terms, Mandalay is a relatively recent capital. It was constructed in the mid-19th century by King Mindon who gathered the artists, artisans, intellectuals, and literati of his kingdom to establish Mandalay as the indisputable epicentre of Burmese culture, society, and rule. To this day among Burmese, Mandalay is referred to as ‘the culture city’, a vestigial assignation of its former cultural prominence. In 1885 the British renamed the Palace and its citadel Fort Dufferin and occupied it as the seat of their administrative headquarters for the country. The palace was noteworthy for its exceptional architecture and craftsmanship (see Figure 2). The buildings were made of teak, many were finely carved, gilded, and lacquered, and some such as the royal living quarters were highly ornamented with mirrored glass mosaics thus lending it the name, the Glass Palace as immortalised in chronicles and fiction alike (Pe Maung Tin & Luce 1923; Ghosh 2001).

In 1901, Lord Curzon the then viceroy of India, recognising the architectural exceptionality of

Figure 2: Mandalay Palace post restoration.
(Source: Kecia Fong, 2012)
Due to its place in Burmese history, it is not surprising that Mandalay was selected as one of the first national heritage restoration campaigns post the 1988 uprisings. Between 1989 and 1996 under the direction of General Khin Nyunt the citadel and palace complex were restored and reconstructed. This feat was rendered possible through the mobilisation of thousands via both compulsory and so-called ‘volunteer labour’ and official employment (Houtman 1999; Moore 1993). Out of practical necessity and political strategy, the Burmese people would, through their own fortitude, resurrect their rightful sovereignty. Naing Win of the Mandalay Division of the Department of Archaeology (DoA), (personal communication, 19 December 2012) explained that in 1996, and immediately thereafter, the Mandalay DoA expanded from 26 to 142 employees. The DoA is legal steward of the Union’s cultural heritage. This dramatic increase in staff clearly signaled the government’s recognition of the central role built heritage played in the production of history, identity, and a national narrative. The reconstruction of the palace and citadel has been controversial in conservation circles due to the methods and materials used (Pichard 2013). However, apart from debates of material authenticity, what clearly emerges is that for Khin Nyunt the greatest import lay in the visual, physical symbol of the palace; the embodied act of its resurrection; and the forging of a link to an essentialised past that had been severed by the aberrant intrusion of colonialism.

Meritorious Acts – Consolidating a National Identity

Tasks covering preservation of cultural heritage such as rebuilding and renovation of ancient Myanmar palaces and old pagodas and stupas in accord with the characteristics of the olden times…are aimed at revitalisation of a civilization.

Senior General Than Shwe, State Peace and Development Council Chairman (as cited in Houtman 1999: 95).

The next large-scale restoration project to which the government turned its attention, was Bagan. Even more so than Mandalay, Bagan occupies a place of mythic importance to the Burmese as it was one of the great civilisations of Southeast Asia and the empire under which the Burmese were first united and a common language emerged. It was at its height between the 11th and 13th centuries, frequently referred to as the Golden Age of Burmese history. Long a site of great fascination for Burmese and foreigners alike, Bagan has often been compared to Angkor for the scale and artistry of the built environment, the geographic extent of the empire, and for the profusion of its religious architecture across the landscape. Similar to Angkor, Bagan has been designated an archaeological park of national, cultural, and religious heritage (see Figure 3). Alongside the Shwedagon pagoda, Bagan is Myanmar’s single largest tourist attraction.
Bagan contains over three thousand documented monuments across 104 square kilometres. These monuments consist primarily of brick structures, most of which were originally plastered and polychromed in the forms of temples, pagodas, monasteries, ordination and image halls, fortification walls, and caves. Beginning in the early 1990s at the behest of Khin Nyunt, the DoA initiated an extensive restoration campaign of Bagan. This was not the first time that structures on the site had been restored or repaired, however this would become the single largest organised restoration campaign the site has to this day experienced. Both Hudson (2008) and Soe Soe Lin, Deputy Director of Conservation at Bagan (personal communication, 17 December 2012) assert that between 1995 and 2010 upwards of 80 per cent of the documented monuments were restored to some degree.

In 1996 the Ministry of Culture submitted Bagan for World Heritage listing. The nomination was referred back to the nominating State Party by the World Heritage Committee over concerns about the lack of a clearly defined core protection area along with ‘legal measures’ and a ‘management framework to ensure the site’s protection, authenticity and integrity’ (UNESCO
The restoration work performed by the DoA was widely criticised by the international conservation community for its disregard of established international conservation norms such as those promulgated by UNESCO (Pichard 2013; Stadtner 2005). Most of the criticisms pertained to the incompatible and extensive use of cement, the degree of speculation involved in the ‘completion’ and wholesale reconstruction of buildings, a template approach to the ‘restorations’, and the allowance of new structures and roads within the site (see Figures 4 and 5). As was the case in Mandalay, arguments were made in defense of and against the reconstruction and renewal approach. Cultural relativity and religious imperatives were cited by the Burmese government and others in support of the reconstruction techniques used.

Unable to secure additional UNESCO funding for the repair and restoration work, the Burmese government appealed to its own citizens, the Burmese diaspora, and the larger Buddhist community. The appeal was framed in terms of religious piety and merit-making at one of the most famous Buddhist sites in the world. Through the solicitation of contributions and by facilitating the restoration work, SLORC established an implicit association between the state and Buddhism which was manifested in the state’s role as caretaker, patron, and steward of Bagan (Aung-Thwin 1985; Callahan 2004; Houtman 1999; Pichard 2013).

Where the Palace reconstruction in Mandalay reestablished a continuity of sovereign rule and a link to royal authority, restoration of Bagan advanced a narrative of a national identity that was Burman, Buddhist, and centuries old. Collectively, these efforts consolidated the military junta’s authority and promoted a homogeneous, mono-ethnic, mono-religious national identity; one which differs significantly from the lived reality of many Burmese. What is distinct about the government’s treatment of these two former capitals and the built heritage that symbolises them is how both were almost exclusively presented as relics of the past – as important reminders of what the Burmese had once achieved. Even the symbolic resurrection of Mandalay was more an enactment of history than it was about the creation of a future. Perhaps it was difficult to conjure an imagined future when so much energy was devoted to maintaining control of the present through a retelling of the past.

Cosmopolitanism – Restoring Burmese Modernity

…the establishment of a cosmopolitan state is unacceptable.

Khin Maung Nyunt, Historian and retired Director General of the Historical Commission, Chairman of the Committee for Compiling Authentic Facts on the History of Myanmar (as cited in Houtman 1999: 128)

Yangon presents a very different case. It served as the capital of the country from 1886 to 2005 during which time it was ruled by the English, the Japanese, and the Burmese. Earliest documented accounts of the settlement known as Dagon describe a small fishing village noteworthy for the presence of the Shwedagon pagoda, a site of holy pilgrimage. By the 18th century, Yangon, so named by the reigning monarch King Alaungpaya, was an international port and the centre of a highly regarded French-Burmese ship building trade (Harvey 2000: 353). In the mid-19th century, the end of the second Anglo-Burmese war left Yangon decimated and designs were proposed for a new planned city. Dr. William Montgomerie of Singapore and Lieutenant Alexander Fraser laid out a rationalist Cartesian grid for the city anchored by Sule pagoda as the centre point and Shwedagon to the north. This grid remains largely intact and constitutes the downtown historic core of the city today.

D.G.E. Hall describes the urban population of Yangon in the 1880s as being composed of ‘four distinct communities, the Burmese, Indian, Chinese and European’ (1950: 148). Within these broad categories was a range of distinctions that included a variety of religious faiths, represented by Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam among others. Myint U has noted that ‘J.S. Furnivall, a Cambridge political economist and long-time Burma civil servant invented the term “plural society” to describe Rangoon’s mix of nationalities’ (2011: 19) and ‘by the late 1920s Rangoon even exceeded New York as the greatest immigrant port in the world’ (ibid:18). Through a network of steamship lines between India and China and with the
advent of air travel and print media, Yangon became a commercial and cultural hub within Asia. Its reach and connectivities extended beyond the financial and political geographies of Britain’s colonial port cities to create shared global and regional identities or what Collier and Ong would later identify as phenomena of ‘global assemblages’ characterised by technological advances, transnational mobilities, and borderless geographies (2005). In her discussion of maritime Rangoon Su Lin Lewis advanced the work of Benedict Anderson’s ‘imagined communities’ (1991) by arguing that what in fact effloresced was not merely the creation of a single national identity but rather multiple ‘imagined communities’ particularly within cosmopolitan centres such as Rangoon (2011). With increased mobility came a rising middle class, not unlike what is happening today. Yangon is where the Burmese first encountered modernity. It is where they first listened to jazz, where they delighted in the luxuries of distant places through the recent innovation of the department store, where they discussed the political philosophy of Marx, literature, and poetry, where they embraced print journalism to disseminate debates about governance and independence, and where they attended art exhibitions and salons exchanging ideas of the latest artistic movements (Lewis 2010, 2011).

As Yangon grew, its early wooden architecture was replaced with masonry structures that were more durable, fire resistant, and suited to an international community that sought to exert a presence of permanency. The largest building campaign occurred during the British colonial period, although not always by the colonists themselves, and many of the most impressive civic, religious, or commercial structures date from that time. The Secretariat, the administrative seat from which both the British and Burmese ruled the country is one such building. It has been, and continues to be a symbol of governance and independence for the Burmese as a nation. It was here that General Aung San and his colleagues were assassinated in 1947. Aung San was one of the primary architects of Myanmar’s independence and to this day he is regarded as an heroic figure in Burmese history. While Shwedagon is the spiritual and religious heart of the city, the Secretariat has been its historical political heart and as a consequence, plays a significant role in contemporary conceptualisations of Burmese heritage. These material and social histories and the spaces in which they occurred constitute the fabric and lives of the city and its generations of inhabitants as will be elaborated further on.

In the past three years, a combination of limited political reforms and the easing of international sanctions have resulted in an influx of interest from foreign governments, international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the private sector. Speculation abounds and Myanmar is routinely framed as a frontier to be developed, exploited, protected, or managed. All of this attention has brought with it the concomitant pressures of a burgeoning population and international investment – philanthropic or otherwise – that range from the physical and political structures of diplomacy; the housing and social service needs of rural to urban migrants; the micro-economies and materialities of the aid industry; and the for-profit private sector’s interests in development and extraction. Each of these sectors has direct impact on the built environment and the evolution of the city as they individually and collectively contribute to the demand for office and residential space, physical and legal infrastructure, resources, and expectations of what a city should look like and how it should perform. These pressures are not limited to foreign influence but are similarly generated by local actors (Barta 2012; Vallikappen 2013).

The promotional billboards that surround the proliferating new tower developments present images of a future that typically bear little resemblance to their immediate surroundings. Land-use, architectural, socio-cultural, environmental, economic, and historical contexts are ignored. The impulse to (re)develop is spurred on by a combination of sky-rocketing land and property values, building stock that is deteriorating due to decades of lack of maintenance combined with a harsh climate, and the desire to participate in an idea of modernity – one which is overwhelmingly associated with a developmentalist vision of Asian urbanism. Singapore, Shanghai and even Dubai are invoked as aspirational models.

Assembling Heritage

In this ambit, heritage is an emergent phenomenon arising out of a non-seriated concatenation of forces. Here Actor-network-theory (ANT) provides an apt framework. Accordingly, heritage
would be located in the contingent and shifting configurations of actor-networks and their interactions. Actors are symmetrically identified amongst a panoply of heterogeneous forms – human and non-human, physical and immaterial – which collectively influence and evolve the discourse and physical object reality of the heritage in question. ANT and assemblage theory are increasingly invoked in analyses of the built environment at varying scales from that of architectural objects (Callon 1996; Latour & Yaneva 2008), to critiques of ‘the city’ (Farias & Bender 2012; Graham & Marvin 2001), and as a lens through which to interrogate the condition of globality (Ong & Collier 2005). However, with few exceptions (Koziol 2013; Yaneva 2008), seldom have these conceptual tools been utilised to interrogate the ontology and stability of heritage objects. The imperative to probe these normative constructs is critical not only for a theoretical understanding of what constitutes the heritage object (at any scale) but equally, if not more pertinently, is of crucial importance in devising its conservation. Latour asserts, that to acquire the view of a thing’s construction requires disambiguation of what constitutes an actor and actor-networks. Only then will we be able to, ‘glimpse…what it is for a thing to emerge out of inexistence’ (2005: 99). He states, ‘The “making of” any enterprise – films, skyscrapers, facts, political meetings, initiation rituals, haute couture, cooking – offers a view that is sufficiently different from the official one’ (2005: 99). It is this ‘unofficial view’ of heritage that this article seeks to illustrate through the contributions of ANT and assemblage theory.

In her genealogical mapping of the idea of the historic city Lamprakos skilfully traces its evolution from singular monuments and artistic objects of discrete authenticity to complex, multifaceted organisms encompassing ideas of nature, modernity, and environmental determinism (2014). Significantly, she identifies the Renaissance origins behind the idea of artistic authorship embodied in an individual, moment, or event and summarily conveys how these dissolved with the construction of new social and cultural theories that privileged radically different readings of history and the built environment. She notes that while most disciplines progressed from the positivist position derived from notions of authentic authorship and direct causation, these tenets stubbornly endure within conservation. The counter-perspectives advocated and described by Latour, Lamprakos and others afford an exponential enhancement of our understanding of what constitutes a thing, freeing our perception of things as distinct objects of discrete identity. No longer is architecture, an object, a city, a site, heritage or its conservation a singular creation or act. What follows are a series of unfolding observations about how heritage is being assembled in Yangon today through a discursive interplay of heterogeneous actors; of things physical and immaterial, by appearances stable and simultaneously geographically unbounded.

...rather than simply being the material worked upon, heritage plays a part in shaping the interactions in which it is enmeshed (Macdonald 2009: 118).

In anticipation of the pressures accompanying a modified liberalisation of the economy, the Yangon Heritage Trust (YHT), a local non-governmental heritage preservation organisation, was launched in 2012 with a conference titled, Towards a Conservation Strategy for Yangon in the 21st Century. Many members of the diplomatic community, NGOs, local officials and the media were in attendance (Deed 2012). The conference was held in the grand ballroom of the historic Strand Hotel, once one of the most exclusive hotels in the British Empire and notably, one of the first historic structures in downtown Yangon to be restored. The Trust is headed by Dr. Thant Myint U, a Burmese national who was born, raised, and educated in the United States and England. He is an historian of Burmese history and the grandson of U Thant, the popular former Secretary General of the United Nations. Dr. Thant Myint U also has his own professional history at the UN, is a member of the (President of Myanmar’s) National Economic and Social Advisory Council, and is a Senior Advisor to the Myanmar Peace Centre. To establish the YHT required financial, political, and professional support from various sectors of society. With his political and cultural capital, Myint U was able to interest local and regional officials in the idea of protecting historic Yangon and was similarly able to attract the attention and support of international communities and media. His efforts built upon and coincided with those of others such as the Association of Myanmar Architects who in 1996, along with a few academics and the Municipality, created a list of 189 heritage buildings. In 2010 the United Kingdom Department of International Foreign Development commissioned a report on the potential
for the renovation and development of Yangon. This research eventually resulted in a popular publication *30 Heritage Buildings of Yangon*. The book, which was published in 2012, has augmented the international visibility of the city, the Trust and its mission, and is one of the few contemporary books focused on Yangon. In 2011 a local developer proposed a controversial plan to convert the Secretariat, a site of hallowed Burmese history, into a hotel. The Secretariat, along with many government administration buildings, was vacated with the relocation of the capital to Nay Pyi Taw. The public was outraged. Mobilised by anger and facilitated by the media, a debate ensued about the importance of preserving aspects of Yangon’s heritage which raised the question of what constituted the heritage of Yangon. The word for heritage in Burmese is *ahmwei ahnit* which in terms of built heritage most understand to be palaces, temples, pagodas, and monasteries. What is happening in Yangon challenges this conception.

A building; a book; an institution; a personal history; political shifts and the economic speculation they incite; the durability of bricks; the spaces in which ideas circulate and transactions occur; and the convergence of international communities are giving rise to Yangon heritage. This phenomenon in and of itself is not necessarily new – heritage emerges in the onslaught of modernity – however the ways in which we analyse its emergence and consequently understand its generative and curatorial contexts, constituent components, and the ontologies that engender its interpretation and stewardship are evolving. Meanwhile, heritage has become a nexus through which a plurality of agendas is being pursued, many of which are not particularly concerned with conservation. Some of these agendas merely invoke the language or idea of heritage for the emotional responses it triggers or the justification it seemingly provides for leverage in contestations of identity, land rights, regional security, the control of resources, and access to power (Labadi & Long 2010; Logan 2010; Meskell 2013, 2014; Winter & Daly 2010). Others are concerned with the raising of an international profile be it Myanmar’s own on the international stage, or that of an institution or individual seeking to conduct work in a city that is currently in the limelight.

In the first half of 2014 alone, the multiplicity of actors that have sought to influence the definitions, forms, and discourse of heritage have included but have not been limited to the following manifestations:

- **JICA/YCDC (Japan International Cooperation Agency/Yangon City Development Committee)** *Strategic Urban Development Plan for Greater Yangon*. JICA is an affiliate of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. YCDC is the Yangon municipality.
- **European Union**
- **Swiss Embassy**
- **French Embassy**
- **British Embassy**
- **US Embassy**
- **Turquoise Mountain Foundation**, a charity of HRH the Prince of Wales.
- **AusAid (Australian Agency for International Development) and AVID (Australian Volunteers for International Development)** both of which have supported the YHT and the exchange of heritage professionals through monies previously committed by former Minister of Foreign Affairs Bob Carr.
- **Word Monuments Fund (WMF)** which listed Yangon on their 2014 Watch list
- **United Kingdom Department of International Foreign Development (DFID)**
- **Regional Plan Association**, a New York City based urban planning organisation
- **Getty Conservation Institute**
- **University of Cologne, Human Geography department** which has been working on urban geography issues for a number of years with local Burmese university faculty and the Ministry of Construction.
Various international universities with interests to collaborate

- Serge Pun Associates, a diversified conglomerate business and one of the largest developers in Myanmar

- UN Habitat

- The Netherlands, through the coordinated efforts of Nuffic and the International Institute for Asian Studies at Leiden University

- And countless other individuals (myself included) who have passed through the doors of the YHT and YCDC, written about the city, or who profess to offer knowledge on the conservation and stewardship of urban heritage and city planning.

Many of these actors contribute through financial support, capacity building and training courses, proposals for physical conservation projects, advocacy campaigns, the production of studies and reports, and the provision of expertise. This does not include all of the indirect ways that heritage discourse is informed — through development pressures, speculation, demolition, lack of specialised knowledge, legal and policy infrastructure, the physical fabric itself, and a lack of imagination on the part of many locals to envision a multiplicity of modernities due to a half a century of extreme limited exposure. Collectively these actors shape the language, discourse, and materiality of heritage and wittingly or not they bring with them the underlying ideologies that inform their processes of knowledge production, value systems, aesthetics, and accepted methodologies. They depict a map of knowledge and practice through their own geographies. These are the actor-networks Latour encourages us to perceive. In an ANT-ian analysis one traces the actors and the networks they form, taking note of ‘those that become “strategic” because of the number of connections they make possible in a highly contingent world’ (Joyce & Bennett 2010: 4) or what Hodder has described as the locations of tautness within entanglements (2012). These strategic and taut locations where the greatest number of connections are afforded are perhaps the most interesting areas of focus, although not to the exclusion of the configurations that support their position.

Prominent among the many, the YHT, itself an assemblage, is advancing a discourse of heritage conservation within a language of modernity and sustainability. They are attempting to present heritage conservation as an intrinsic factor in the complex urban equation for a better quality of life and the making of a global city. All of this is being played out in the media (domestic and foreign), through regulatory proposals, in the forging of local alliances, behind closed-door meetings, and in the facilitation of possible physical restoration projects. The Trust walks a fine line between its inherent cosmopolitan origins and larger national narratives of Burmese identity. It’s imperative to produce a new vision of Asian urban modernity that is at once intrinsically Burmese and global, which seamlessly integrates the unknown futures with the continuity of the past, is an act of imagining whose outcome is yet unknown.

Conclusion

To return to the question of how the built heritage of these three former capital cities has been employed in city-making and the construction of national identities, it is clear that the restoration and reconstruction campaigns of Mandalay and Bagan were grand state-building projects in which the military junta relied on imagined distant pasts as justification for their present rule. As has been argued here, not only is Yangon different for the origins of its heritage conservation movement but for the pluralistic narrative and futures it presents. The cosmopolitanism and diversity that have long been the distinguishing characteristics of Yangon run counter to the last quarter century of a nationalistic, homogeneous identity promoted by the state. As the commercial capital of the country and the primary international port of call, Yangon is effectively the site of initial encounter between the world and Myanmar and as such, is the locus where debates of heritage are being forged. In light of this, to accept the layered, transnational histories of Yangon as heritage is to admit complexity of identity and history. To position heritage and its conservation as an aspect of a new Asian urban modernity is to confidently assert an ownership of one’s past as relevant to imagined and possible futures.
Such an approach advocates inclusion and requires transparency and participatory processes in governance.

It remains to be seen which forces will dominate the debate and if and how heritage will be conserved in Yangon. There are numerous actors at play and the configurations of their entanglements mutate and shift according to often unpredictable contingencies. This is how heritage is being produced. What happens in the making of Yangon’s built heritage or as a byproduct of its conservation is as much a process of global assemblage as the phenomena that created Yangon to begin with. 3

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Endnotes

1 A note about names – Myanmar, Yangon and Bagan are the official contemporary names of what were Burma, Rangoon and Pagan respectively. For consistency and clarity, regardless of period reference and unless a direct citation, I use Myanmar, Yangon, and Bagan. In this article ‘Burmese’ is used to refer to the people of Myanmar irrespective of ethnicity.

2 There is no official transliteration system for the Burmese language.

3 The author would like to acknowledge Professor William Logan for his generous invitation to contribute to the AusICOMOS 2014 conference panel The Role of Heritage in Asia’s Capitals and his subsequent encouragement to contribute to the present publication.