

and political changes of the early decades of the twentieth century (pp. 137–54). In his analysis of the autobiographies of a number of prominent women, in the final essay, the reader learns about the arduous and sometimes degrading struggles that these women have faced in overcoming difficult personal and social circumstances.

The volume is prefaced by an illuminating foreword by fellow Cornell University graduate Craig Reynolds and an introduction by Thak himself that explains the background to his forays into Thai literature. Anyone with an interest in modern Southeast Asia will enjoy and benefit from these essays.

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Myanmar in the Fifteenth Century: A Tale of Two Kingdoms. By Michael A. Aung-Thwin. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2017. xiv+369 pp.

In *Myanmar in the Fifteenth Century: A Tale of Two Kingdoms*, Michael Aung-Thwin reassembles the histories of the kingdoms of Ava and Pegu between the decline of Pagan at the end of the fourteenth century and the rise of the Toungoo dynasty in the sixteenth century. Aung-Thwin’s analysis draws on primary sources, including stone inscriptions (*kyauksa*) and chronicles (*yazawin*). He uses these to create a detailed narrative of the history of each kingdom, in the process critiquing previous scholarly assumptions about each.

The book is arranged symmetrically, its two main parts corresponding to the northern and southern kingdoms of Upper and Lower Myanmar. In each part, Aung-Thwin introduces a historiographic convention relating to Ava or Pegu dating from the colonial era that he goes on to challenge; he then tracks the rise, consolidation, fall and legacy of each kingdom. The ‘Ava Convention’, as Aung-Thwin defines it, is the notion that the kingdom of Ava originated as a Shan kingdom, founded then ruled by T’ai or Shan speakers. Aung-Thwin argues that there is no primary source evidence to support this colonial-era explanation of Ava’s origins, and he then presents a narrative history of Ava following the extant primary sources. He emphasizes the ways in which the kingdom of Ava built on and borrowed from the kingdom of Pagan that preceded it—Ava reached its height in the early fifteenth century, and thus chapter 6, which describes the kingdom in this period, is titled “Pagan Writ Small”. The factors that ultimately led to Ava’s decline in the sixteenth century were also similar to those that ended Pagan. They included the outflow of funds to the sangha, court factionalism, and the rise of regional power centres capable of challenging the throne, including both elites within the kingdom and Shan polities. In addition to the detailed narrative he presents, Aung-Thwin assesses Ava’s lasting legacy. He argues for Ava as a precursor to the modern state of Myanmar, as Ava’s literary heritage preserved the importance of the Burmese language, and the foundation of Ava in the northern ‘Dry Zone’ of present-day Myanmar blocked the potential expansion of a T’ai kingdom there.

The second part of *Myanmar in the Fifteenth Century* discusses the rise of the kingdom of Pegu in Lower Burma. Here, Aung-Thwin has less material to work with: there are far fewer inscriptions extant. In parallel with his discussion of Ava, Aung-Thwin defines a ‘Pegu Convention’ with two parts, the first being what the author calls the ‘myth of Ramannadesa’—the supposed historical connection between this ancient kingdom and the kingdom of Pegu in Lower Burma. Aung-Thwin argues that there is no primary source evidence for an ancient Rman kingdom in Lower Burma, and that the idea

of Ramannadesa was promulgated by the fifteenth-century King Dhammadzedi to create an “imagined community” to “conceptually strengthen Pegu” (p. 188). Centuries later, according to Aung-Thwin, colonial historians adopted the myth as history for their own purposes. Aung-Thwin’s earlier *The Mists of Ramanna: The Legend that Was Lower Burma* (2005) presents this argument about the early history of Lower Burma in detail. The ‘myth of Ramannadesa’ sits uneasily with the second part of the ‘Pegu Convention’, the multilayered ‘Mon Narrative’, the descriptor that Aung-Thwin uses for the Mon-language sources of Lower Myanmar. After outlining the rise, ‘golden age’ and decline of Pegu, Aung-Thwin returns to Ramannadesa when he assesses Pegu’s legacy in the penultimate chapter, emphasizing the importance of the ‘myth’ to colonial scholars despite its lack of basis in historical fact. In the book’s conclusion, Aung-Thwin emphasizes the connections between Ava and Pegu, describing these connections as consistent with a larger “Upstream-Downstream” (p. 300) dualism that has characterized Myanmar’s history.

Aung-Thwin demonstrates a deep familiarity with his primary source material. The argument that the “reification of ethnicity” (p. 8) found in colonial-era historical scholarship about Myanmar distorted historical causation is compelling. But his dismissal of scholarly critiques of his previous work as careerist or politically motivated seems a bit too easy, and at times, as when he associates minority independence movements in Myanmar with a Western-driven “Democracy Jihad” (p. 192), the book moves into the realm of polemic. Nevertheless, as Aung-Thwin presents a detailed reconstruction of the understudied era between the mid-fourteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries in Myanmar, *Myanmar in the Fifteenth Century* makes an important contribution to the historiography of Southeast Asia.

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