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BAGAN AND THE WORLD

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BAGAN AND THE WORLD

Early Myanmar and Its Global Connections

EDITED BY

GOH GEOK YIAN

JOHN N. MIKSIC

MICHAEL AUNG-THWIN

ISEAS YUSOF ISHAK
INSTITUTE

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30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace
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Cover image: Mural from Temple 1026 in Bagan depicting a journey by water. The temple is undated but probably was constructed in the 12th or 13th century. Photo Credit: Goh Geok Yian.

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Preface

This book was inspired by a conference in Bagan, sponsored by the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre, ISEAS, in 2012. Participants in the conference were invited to submit chapters for a book about ancient Bagan's connections with the rest of Asia. This book contains ten chapters, each by a respected expert in early Myanmar history. The publication of this volume marks an important step forward in reintroducing scholarship on Myanmar and Myanmar scholars to the rest of the world. Four of the authors are Myanmar academics, and one of the three author-editors is of Myanmar ancestry.

The conference sought to gather evidence with which to dispel the myth that Myanmar has always been a hermit kingdom or nation. This book presents abundant evidence that the kingdom of Bagan, which flourished from around 1000 to 1300, played a major role in the development of the economy, religion, art and technology in the area which stretches from India to China.

At the time the conference was conceived, Myanmar was just re-establishing contact with the outside world. The publication of this book demonstrates that Myanmar's growing integration into the international community does not signify a new relationship; Myanmar has more often been a catalyst for development and communication between West Asia, South Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia than a passive bystander. Buddhism formed one of the major contexts in which Myanmar exerted considerable influence over early Asian civilization. Bagan was also an economic power, and one of Southeast Asia's oldest and largest urban cultures. Myanmar is now resuming its role as an integral part of Asia which it played a thousand years ago.

The editors and authors would like to pay tribute to the late Pamela Gutman, who passed away during the interval between the conference and the publication of this book. She is greatly missed by all scholars with an interest in Myanmar. Her publications will long remain important contributions to the study of this fascinating nation. We would like to dedicate this volume to her memory.

Contributors

Michael Aung-Thwin is Professor of Asian Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, Honolulu, United States.

Olga Deshpande is an art historian in the Oriental Department, State Hermitage Museum, Saint-Petersburg, Russia.

Goh Geok Yian is Associate Professor in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

The late **Pamela Gutman** was Honorary Associate with the Department of Art History, University of Sydney, Australia.

Bob Hudson is with the Asian Studies Program, University of Sydney, Australia. He is Adviser to UNESCO and the Myanmar Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, Bagan and Pyu Ancient Cities World Heritage Bids; an Open Society Foundations Visiting Fellow, Yangon University, Myanmar; a Visiting Lecturer with the Field School of Archaeology, Pyay, Myanmar; and Adviser to the Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development, Amsterdam.

Kyaw Lat is an architect and town planner.

John N. Miksic is Professor in the Department of Southeast Asian Studies, National University of Singapore.

Elizabeth Moore is Professor in the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London and Visiting Researcher at the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore.

Rila Mukherjee is Director of Institut de Chandemagore, West Bengal and Professor of History at the University of Hyderabad, India.

Mya Oo is Director of the National Library of Myanmar, Department of Archaeology, National Museum and Library, Ministry of Culture, Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

Pyiet Phyo Kyaw is a lecturer in the Department of Archaeology, University of Yangon, Myanmar.

Win Maung (Tampawaddy) is a traditional architect and an independent scholar.