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Volume I: Text and Bibliography

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Declaration of Originality

I,  hereby declare that the thesis here presented is the outcome of the research project undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the source of ideas, references, quotations and paraphrases attributable to other authors.

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This journey began in 1995 with the gift of a nat puppet.

At the time I had no inkling I'd taken the first step towards researching nat imagery for a PhD, which began in earnest with my Honours year thesis in 2011. Two years later, I arrived in Naypyitaw for a meeting with Daw Nanda Hmun, Director-General of the Department of Historical Research, to talk about my hopes for further study. The new capital's streets were wide and empty, an appropriate metaphor, I felt, for the fieldwork journey I was about to embark upon. But to my great good fortune, Daw Nanda Hmun and her colleague U Thein Lwin, Director of the Department of Archaeology, conspired between them to supply me with guides far knowledgeable than myself: Ma Aye Aye Khine in Mandalay, and Ko Min Swe in Bagan. Together we set out in search of nats, and much of this thesis is the result of what I found along the way with their generous assistance. It is dedicated to them — and to the nats of Myanmar.

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I was told the nats are happy I am interested in them and I thank them too — as well as all the *natt'ein*, *natkadaw*, artists and people in Myanmar who were so generous with their time and assistance. The art historical viewpoint was quite new to most of the participants in my research, and their way of thinking about nat imagery was different to mine. While my thesis inevitably reflects my Western-trained constructions of art and history, I hope that what has been drawn out in my research amounts to more than the sum of its parts.

Last, but by no means least, I thank my husband, Rob, who has patiently watched my collection of 'nat art' grow considerably over the past few years, and whose loving support of my journey has never wavered.

Abstract

Supernatural beings known as 'nats' are widely represented in Myanmar art. Until now they have been a neglected area of research, overshadowed by an academic focus on the country's Buddhist art and architecture.

The research for this thesis analyses why the nats are depicted in particular ways, how this has changed over the centuries, and why they are placed in certain contexts. Close examination of primary sources highlights the disconnect between Western and local understanding of the different kinds of nat and their role in Myanmar culture. Clarification of the different typologies of nat is a crucial part of the research. The findings presented highlight the limitations of the resources currently available on the nats, and dispel the misconceptions and ambiguity around the different types. This is particularly important in relation to the pantheon generically known as the 'Thirty-Seven Nats'.

For the first time, a formal art historical analysis of the imagery of Myanmar's nats is provided. Images of the nats are examined in light of their different typologies, to identify the iconography used in their creation. An analysis of the stylistic development of nat imagery from the 11th century is established for the main media used in their artistic representations. It is argued that the different typologies of the nats reflect their fundamental role as guardians spirits of very different physical and conceptual spaces. Art is used to frame this narrative, and as nats have been made in such a wide variety of media and across all time periods, their imagery reflects how devotees have interacted with their temporal and spiritual worlds throughout history.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Spirits of Place**Prologue I**

In the ancient kingdom of Tagaung there lived a mighty blacksmith, whose son, Maung Tinde, grew to be even mightier. Maung Tinde was so strong that when he worked in the smithy he wielded two hammers, one weighing 80 kilos, the other 40 kilos, and the very city quaked and trembled when he pounded his anvil. News of this powerful man soon reached the ears of the King of Tagaung, who, fearing the blacksmith's strength and his ability to smelt iron, ordered his arrest. Warned in time, Maung Tinde fled to the forest, leaving behind his sister and his wife, Shwe Nabe.

But the King was treacherous. He sent for the sister, who was very beautiful, and raised her to be his Queen. After some time he said to her, "I no longer fear your brother, as he is now my brother too. Send for him and I will make him Governor of the city." The sister believed her husband and sent messengers to find Maung Tinde, who came willingly to the court — but the King's soldiers seized him and tied him to a sagà tree on the bank of the Ayeyarwaddy River. The jealous King then ordered a huge fire to be lit at the feet of the captive, and as the flames rose, the sister threw herself onto the pyre to die with her brother. Too late, the King tried to save his Queen by pulling her from the fire by her hair, but only her beautiful face could be saved. Thus Maung Tinde and his sister died together, and became nat spirits living in the charred remains of the sagà tree.

In their anger, the two nats caused any human or animal who walked in the shade of the tree to be killed. The king became afraid. "Cut down the tree", he ordered, "and throw it into the river."¹

¹ This is my own retelling of the well-known legend.

WHAT IS A NAT?

When Maung Tinde and his sister took up residence in the *sagà* tree, they exemplified an ancient Southeast Asian cultural belief that those who die suddenly and violently remain attached to the site of their death, literally becoming spirits of place. In Myanmar, where these spirits are known as *natsein* (green spirits), or more commonly and simply just as ‘nats’, legends like that of Maung Tinde and his sister form part of a vibrant oral, literary and artistic tradition.² Representations of different types of nats in human or semi-human form, as seen in Figs. 2 to 4, have a significant presence in the country’s rich and complex visual culture.

Belief in nats, and in the need to acknowledge them correctly, is common to all levels of Myanmar society. Traditionally, people paid homage to a variety of different nats: their personal guardian nats; their house guardian nat; their village guardian nat; and the nats from their parents’ place of origin. All nats are recognised as guardians of particular locations, and many are now associated with individual occupations, enterprises or cultural groups.³

As the nats are widely believed to have the power to influence one’s life for good or bad, there is abundant physical evidence of their propitiation. Bunches of *thäbye* leaves are commonly seen tied to the side mirrors or the front of vehicles to acknowledge the local nats whose territory they are passing through (Fig. 5), and taxis and buses often have red and white ribbons tied around their rear-view mirror for the same reason.⁴ *Natkùn* (shrines) for nature spirits, local guardian nats and other popular nats, are found in homes and businesses, attached to

² The suffix *sein*, meaning the colour green, is used in the context of the nat’s life being raw or unfinished. Myanmar Language Commission, *Myanmar-English Dictionary* (Naypyitaw: Ministry of Education, 2000), 554. Hereafter cited as *The Dictionary*.

³ As recorded by anthropologist Melford Spiro in 1961, one’s personal nat is known as the *kosaún* nat, and the nats from one’s parents’ place of origin are known as the *mis’ain p’as’ain* (mother’s side, father’s side) nats. Melford E. Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1967), 54. For a list of nats associated with particular social groups, see Khin Maung Than, *Yòya Naq Youncihmu hnín Dalét’oùnsanmyà* (Yangon: Tháwca Sape, 2001), 5. Khin Maung Than, a professor of psychology from Mandalay University, has written two books and at least one article on the nats that not surprisingly focus on the ritual elements of nat belief. See also Ma Thanegi, “Spirit Worship in Myanmar: The Nat Pantheon,” *My Magical Myanmar*, no. 18 (October 2014). Ma Thanegi is a well-known author who has written several English-language books on Myanmar culture.

⁴ The customary use of *thäbye* was recorded in the colonial era by James Scott (1851-1935), writing as Shway Yoe, *The Burman: His Life and Notions* (London MacMillan and Co., 1896), 236. Scott was, at various times, a schoolmaster, journalist and the Deputy Commissioner of Burma during the colonial period of Myanmar’s history. The use of red and white coloured ribbons is linked with Maung Tinde’s legend — red represents the flames of his funeral pyre, and white the soothing juice of the coconut which is his main offering. Sylvia Fraser-Lu, *Burmese Crafts: Past and Present* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994), 30, footnote 33.

prominent trees, guarding roads, on the outskirts of villages, in the centre of cities and within Buddhist environments. These range from rudimentary wooden boxes attached to auspicious trees, providing a place for believers to leave votive offerings; to small structures by the side of the road containing an image of the local guardian nat; to elaborate *natnàn* (nat palaces) (Figs. 6 to 7). *Natnàn* are built to house images of particularly important nats who are cared for by *natt'eìn* (hereditary shrine attendants) or *natkadaw* (spirit mediums), who dance to invite the nat to possess them during a *natpwèh* (festival) held in the nat's honour. *Natt'eìn* and *natkadaw* act as intermediaries between the nat and its supplicants, who come to their shrines and festivals to pay homage and seek the nat's favour.⁵

'LOVE THE BUDDHA, FEAR THE NAT'

Although following the teachings of the Buddha ensures one's spiritual advancement, a better rebirth and eventually, it is hoped, freedom from sentient existence, it is a practice concerned with one's death — a hopefully distant future event. Accordingly, for many people, the structure of Buddhist belief requires supplementation by practices oriented to the more mundane problems of day-to-day life — such as the necessity to appease capricious and potentially malicious nats.⁶ This is expressed in the commonly heard adage 'Love the Buddha, Fear the Nat', a neat summation of the combination of the conventional *kammatic* Buddhism practised

⁵ This is an extremely brief overview of a complex ritual process that has been studied in far greater depth by anthropologists, mostly recently by Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière in "Spirit Possession: An Autonomous Field of Practice in the Burmese Buddhist Culture," *Journal of Burma Studies* 20, no. 1 (2016), 1-29. Her article provides a full account of the mechanics and economics of nat possession specific to modern ceremonies honouring the 'Thirty-Seven Nats'. For an account of a major *natpwèh*, see Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière, "The Taungbyon Festival: Locality and Nation-Confronting in the Cult of the 37 Lords," in *Burma at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Monique Skidmore (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 65-89.

⁶ "The World Factbook" records that 89% of Myanmar's population identify as Buddhists and 1% as animist, but does not provide a figure for those who believe in nats, or provide a breakdown of their figures among Myanmar's ethnic groups. However, it is acknowledged anecdotally that belief in nats is widespread. Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook", <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html> (as at May 6, 2016). On nat belief in Myanmar, see Michael Aung-Thwin and Mairii Aung-Thwin, *A History of Myanmar since Ancient Times: Traditions and Transformations* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 50.

in Myanmar, with the more ancient belief in the widespread presence of nats in natural and built environments who must be appeased.⁷

Although Buddhist ontology rejects the existence of a soul as incompatible with the doctrine of *anattā* (non-self), the more ancient belief in nats is encompassed within its framework of multiple rebirths into one of the many realms of existence.⁸ Therefore, the nats are simply viewed as another class of being engaged, alongside humans, in this endless cycle. The actual transition from human to nat is explained by the belief in the *leiqpya*, the 'butterfly' spirit, a spiritual 'essence' which may either be reincarnated or live on as a disembodied being. It is believed the moment of one's death is marked by the *leiqpya*'s permanent departure, and its re-embodiment in a new form is the basis for one's rebirth. If the rites to ensure the *leiqpya* is reborn into one of heaven's good abodes are not held, it may become a nat, and will require propitiation to ensure it will not wreak havoc in the community.⁹ Images of nats are linked with their *leiqpya* by a ritual which captures it in a vessel, such as the one pictured on the back shelf, far right, of Fig. 10 and in Fig. 11, among a collection of nat statues within a *natkùn* at the old royal city of Inwa.¹⁰

⁷ Today, Buddhism as practised in Myanmar can be divided into three paths, the ideal being the way of the ordained monk within the *saṅgha* (monkhood). Here the emphasis is on achieving *neibban* through personal effort, via study of the scriptures, meditation, an ascetic lifestyle and closely following Buddhist doctrine, including the many precepts specific to monks. The other two paths are divided into *Vipassana* and *kammatic* Buddhism. The *Vipassana* ('Insight') practice includes intensive meditation and following the five to ten Buddhist precepts for lay people. Kate Crosby credits the establishment of the World Fellowship of Buddhists and the Sixth Buddhist Synod sponsored by Prime Minister U Nu in the 1950s for the practice of *Vipassana* meditation spreading both within Buddhism and beyond into the realms of neuroscience and psychotherapy. See Kate Crosby et al, *Champions of Buddhism: Weikza Cults in Contemporary Burma* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2014), xxi-xxii. *Kammatic* Buddhism, as practiced by the general population, simply encourages a virtuous life, with an emphasis on merit making via donation to the *saṅgha* and charitable causes, and the performance of other meritorious acts. In all cases, the merit accrued through one's practice of Buddhism is for a rebirth into a more favourable realm of existence than the one the practitioner is currently experiencing.

⁸ Myanmar author Khin Myo Chit writes, "The state of being a nat of high or low level is just one of the planes of existence in the cycle of rebirth." Khin Myo Chit, *A Wonderland of Burmese Legends* (Bangkok: The Tamarind Press, 1984), 13. For a fuller explanation of the different Buddhist realms see Shravasti Dhammika, *All About Buddhism* (Singapore: The Buddha Dhamma Mandala Society, 1995), 12-29.

⁹ An excellent description of the social and cultural effect of the belief in *leiqpya* is given in Shway Yoe, *The Burman*, 386-91. See also Melford E. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 69-70.

¹⁰ Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière describes how nat statues are ritually linked with their owner via the ceremony known as *leiqpya thwin* (introducing the butterfly spirit). Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière, "Royal Images' in Their 'Palaces': The Place of the Statues in the Cult of the 37 Nats," in *Burma: Art and Archaeology*, ed. Alexandra Green and T. Richard Blurton (London: The British Museum Press, 2002), 99. See also Khin Maun Than, *Yòya Naq Youncihmu*, 4.

Images placed in shrines like these function as an embodiment of the nat and provide a focus for propitiation. Myanmar's hills may be physically shared by a shrine for the local nat and a Buddhist stupa or temple, and many Buddhist monuments have nat shrines within their surrounding walls. Whereas the Buddha, having achieved *neibban* (the release from endless cycles of death and rebirth), has passed into a state of formlessness and does not have an earthly or heavenly abode, it is understood that the physical location of a nat shrine is within the nat's domain, the locus of its power.

This concept of a place containing immanent power is deeply rooted in Myanmar history. The sites of royal cities were legitimated as such partly through the use of retrospective prophecies linking them with auspicious places in the life of the Buddha.¹¹ Dynastic lines were not therefore linked to family, but to city and place, with the place having permanent significance as an *aunmye*, a 'victory ground'.¹² When kings conquered territories, these also became 'victory grounds'.¹³ People, on the other hand, historically belonged to hereditary 'castes' based on occupation, and were linked to a specific place via their ancestral guardian nat. For example, Myin Hpyu Shin, the Lord of the White Horse, Fig. 12, was recorded as the guardian nat of the area from which the royal cavalry regiments were drawn, and people's allegiance to him remained even if they emigrated to another part of the country.¹⁴ Myin Hpyu Shin is still widely propitiated in Upper Myanmar, and belongs to two of the three pantheons of nat Lords recognised by Myanmar scholars and outlined below.

¹¹ Michael Aung-Thwin noted the primary importance of place in Myanmar on the basis of dynasties flourishing in "Buddha-prophesised cities". Michael Aung-Thwin, *The Mists of Ramanna: The Legend That Was Lower Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 13. For a discussion of this in relation to the foundation of Mandalay, see Francois Tainturier, "The Foundation of Mandalay by King Mindon," (PhD diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, 2010), 55-6.

¹² Elizabeth Moore, "The Early Buddhist Archaeology of Myanmar: Tagaung, Thagara, and the Mon-Pyu Dichotomy," in *The Mon over Two Millennia: Monuments, Manuscripts, Movements*, ed. Patrick McCormick et. al. (Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, 2011), 7-23. Moore argues that human demography remains immovably embedded in specific locations, and that the role of place and its implied land control provides a new approach to the understanding of the transition from ancestral to Buddhist tradition.

¹³ Myanmar scholar Tun Aung Chain suggested this notion goes back to King Kyanzitha's (1030-1113) reference to Bagan as Arimaddanapura, the "city which crushes enemies". Tun Aung Chain, "Prophecy and Planets: Forms of Legitimation of the Royal City in Myanmar," in *Selected Writings of Tun Aung Chain* (Yangon: Myanmar Historical Commission, 2004), 127-8.

¹⁴ J. S. Furnivall, "Powers of Heaven and Earth," *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 3 (1913): 82-83. Furnivall suggested that a detailed enquiry into the distribution of nat worship would provide clues to the movement of people throughout Myanmar. Spiro noted that as emigration prior to the British conquest of Lower Myanmar was almost non-existent, people who propitiated a particular 'family' nat lived within the nat's domain. Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism*, 99.

NAT TYPOLOGIES

The etymology of the word ‘nat’ is held to be from the Pāli *nāhta*, meaning protector, refuge, or help, yet there are many different kinds of nat. The *Myanmar-English Dictionary* defines the word ‘nat’ as an opulent, resplendent being worthy of veneration; a lord; or a protector. There are three forms formally recognised: the *Thammudi* nats, who were kings or became nat Lords by popular acclaim; the *Uppapati* nats who are the celestial *dewa*; and the Buddha, who is known as the *Withouddi* Nat.¹⁵ However, the term ‘nat’ is used generically in Myanmar for a wide range of spirits, including nature spirits, local guardian nats, and the three discrete pantheons of nat Lords described below; and if not accompanied by an explanation it can be difficult for outsiders to understand exactly what kind of nat is being referred to.

‘Higher’ nats

Conceptually, all nats fall within two broad categories based on their origin and the domain to which they are attached. The *āt’eq* or ‘higher’ nats are *dewa* residing in the various heavens; while the *auq* or ‘lower’ nats, like Maung Tinde and his sister (Fig. 2) are earthly spirits.¹⁶ The ‘higher’ nats include Thakya Min (in Pāli, Sakka), the protector of Buddhism; *Natgyi* (literally ‘Great Nats’) from the Brahmanic/Hindu pantheon; and other *dewa* resident in different levels of the Buddhist cosmos.¹⁷ These ‘higher’ nats provide protection of Buddhist pagodas and monasteries, with carvings of Thakya Min or other *dewa* commonly placed over entrances or beside doorways (Fig. 3). *Yakkha*, known in Myanmar as *bilù* (feminine *bilùmá*), are another

¹⁵ *The Dictionary*, 236. For a description of how local villagers defined nat typologies in 1961-2 see Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism*, 40-44 and 54-5. Spiro’s research concluded that “the average Burman recognises three types of nats. First, there is a type which comprises nature spirits of various kinds ... A second type, referred to collectively as devas, resides in various of the Buddhist heavens ... A third type ... is known as “the Thirty-Seven” nats.” He also recorded that the “average Burman, monk and layman alike” distinguished two types of *dewa* nat: *Thamma dewa* and *Byamma dewa*. *Ibid.*, 42-3. As indicated on the diagram at Fig. 41, the *Byamma dewa* occupy a higher level in Buddhist cosmology than the *Thamma dewa*.

¹⁶ These terms reflect their relative positions as either supra-worldly spirits of the heavenly *lāwkuttaya* realm, associated with the liberation from sentient existence; or as spirits of the earth-bound *lāwkiyè* realms, where humans, the ‘lower’ nats and other supernatural beings reside.

¹⁷ Sakka, the Brahmanic deity tasked with the protection of Buddhism, is called ‘Thakya Min’ in Myanmar — the conjunction of ‘Thakya’, the Burmese language word for Sakka, with the Burmese language word ‘*min*’, meaning ‘Lord’. *The Dictionary*, 495 and 350.

class of 'higher' nats featured in many Buddhist scriptures, and their images are often found guarding the stairways leading up to pagoda platforms (Fig. 4).¹⁸

'Lower nats'

As their name implies, the 'lower' nats are spirits of earthly locations. They include nature spirits residing in features of the landscape, such as trees and mountains; and *āsaiún*, the guardian nats of villages, cities or even man-made structures. As the 'lower' nats are often considered to be, at the very least, capricious, making offerings to them ensures they will not cause problems or thwart a planned venture. They are placated to ensure positive outcomes such as a good harvest, safe passage along a road, an improvement in one's health or the success of one's business affairs.¹⁹ Members of a pantheon of particularly important 'lower' nats known as the *min* (nat Lords), once provided protection of Myanmar's royal cities.²⁰ Some of these nat Lords were legendary and/or historic people who suffered a violent or untimely death, like the unfortunate Maung Tinde and his sister. Others were royal, connected with the reigns of ancient kings; or like Shwe Nabe, the daughter of a sea-serpent, have mythical origins that betray their origins as nature spirits (Fig. 9).

There are many other prominent 'lower' nats whose images are frequently encountered in *natkùn* today. One example is Popa Medaw, the popular *bilùmá* nat whose sons, Shwe Pyin Gyi and Shwe Pyin Ngeh, collectively known as the Taungbyon Brothers, are famous nat Lords. As nats are often accompanied by family members, images of the Taungbyon Brothers are usually

¹⁸ *The Dictionary* gives the translation of *bilù* as "ogre", and notes a possible Sanskrit origin for the term. *The Dictionary*, 321. Than Tun and U Aye Myint define '*bilù*' as meaning "Ogre, spirit, evil ones and good ones, high class and low class, distinguishable in [artistic] design as well (Sanskrit *yaksha*, Pali *yakkha*)." Than Tun and U Aye Myint, *Ancient Myanmar Designs* (Bangkok: iGroup Press Co., Ltd., 2011), 356.

¹⁹ These beliefs persist today. A 2012-13 study of into cultural beliefs related to *natkadaw* lifestyles was carried out in the Yangon area. 28.3% believed illness was caused by forgetting a promise to pay homage to the nats, 10% by the anger of nats, and 96.7% believed that illness could be cured by paying homage to the nats. Than Pale Khine Khine Aye, Mya Mya Khin and Khin Zaw, "The Cultural Beliefs in Health Related Lifestyles among Spirit-Mediums (Natkadaws) in Yangon Region," (Yangon: University of Yangon, 2013), 1.

²⁰ *The Dictionary* gives several different translations of '*min*', including (1) monarch, king, ruler of a state; (2) royalty and aristocracy; (3) high government official. In the context of the nats, the word is conventionally translated as 'Lord', reflecting the nat's responsibility for a particular location. The word 'Shin' is often incorporated in the names of nats, and has a similar meaning. In Pagan Wundauk U Tin's "*Myan-ma-min Ok-chok-pon Sadàn*", the honorific 'Min' could be applied to any authority from the king down to the hereditary leaders of small towns. L. E. Bagshawe, "Kingship in Pagan Wundauk U Tin's "*Myan-ma-min Ok-chok-pon Sadàn*," *The Journal of Burma Studies*, Vol. 3 (1998): 80 and 201-3.

found alongside their mother, Popa Medaw, as shown in Fig. 13. Another commonly encountered nat is the Bo Bo Gyi or Bodaw, names that translate as Great Grandfather and Royal Grandfather respectively, common generic titles for the guardian nat of a particular locality. The title ‘Great’ is also used in the sense of important, noble, and majestic, as seen in the imposing statue of the Mandalay Bodaw, whose main *natnàn* is located on Mandalay Hill (Fig. 14).

THE THREE PANTHEONS OF NAT LORDS

The best known group of nats in Myanmar is undoubtedly the pantheon of 37 nat Lords referred to in the West as the ‘Thirty-Seven Nats’, and in Myanmar as the *Āpyin Thoùn’s’eh-k’niq Min*, the Outside Thirty-Seven Lords. The understanding of Western scholars in relation to this pantheon is summarised in the recent entry in the *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*:

nat. In Burmese, a generic term for a “spirit” or “god” ... Nats can range in temperament from benign to malevolent, including those who are potentially helpful but dangerous if offended ... The best-known group of nats is the “thirty-seven nats” of the Burmese national pantheon. For centuries, they have been the focus of a royal cult of spirit propitiation; the worship of national nats is attested as early as the eleventh century CE at PAGAN (Bagan). At the head of the pantheon is Thakya Min, but the remaining are all spirits of deceased humans who died untimely or violent deaths, mostly at the hands of Burmese monarchs. The number thirty-seven has remained fixed over the centuries, although many of the members of the pantheon have been periodically replaced ...²¹

While the *Princeton Dictionary’s* entry provides a good general overview of the different types of nats, when it comes to describing the ‘Thirty-Seven Nats’ its definition is oversimplified, implying there is only one pantheon — a common misconception that has become received wisdom in the West. In fact, there are three very different pantheons of nat Lords, each with a different history and function. Rather inexplicably, the differences between these remain undiscussed in the Western language literature, despite the typologies being recognised by Myanmar scholars and the majority of my informants in the course of my fieldwork. The term the ‘Thirty-Seven Nats’, as used in the Western literature, is therefore a highly ambiguous one, and the differences between the three pantheons must be clarified at the outset.

²¹ Robert E. Buswell and Donald S. Lopez Jr., *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 577.

The Thirty-Seven Buddhist Lords

The first of the three pantheons of nat Lords is drawn from the heavenly abodes of the ‘higher’ nats, and is referred to as the ဗုဒ္ဓဘာသာ ၃၇ မင်း: (*Buddabatha Thoùn’s’eh-k’niq Min*), the Thirty-Seven Buddhist Lords. As discussed in Chapter 3, its members are *yakkha* named in the *Mahāsamaya* and *Āṭānāṭiya suttas*, Buddhist *parittas* (collection of verses) recited to ward off evil spirits.²² This pantheon includes the Four Great Kings of the cardinal directions, collectively known in Pāli as the *lokapāla*. These Four Great Kings are the leaders of groups of guardian deities: Datarata (east), is the Lord of the *gandabba*; Wirulaka (south) is the Lord of the *gounban* (in Pāli, *kumbhaṇḍa*); Wirupakkha (west), is King of the *nagà*; and Kuwera (north), is the Lord of the *yakkha*.²³ Like the *dewa* nats, imagery of the Four Great Kings is found in contexts where they can be seen to offer protection.

The Inside Thirty-Seven Lords

The second of the three pantheons is the အတွင်း ၃၇ မင်း: (*Ātwin Thoùn’s’eh-k’niq Min*), the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords. Images of these nats are believed to have been placed inside the enclosure walls of Bagan’s Shwezigon *pāyà* at the time of its construction in the 11th century, to provide protection of the *zedi* (the stupa itself) and its precious relics.²⁴ This pantheon contains ‘higher’ nats, including Thakya Min, the Four Great Kings and several Hindu deities, combined with ‘lower’ indigenous nats, reflecting the mix of spiritual beliefs operating at Bagan at that time. The history of this pantheon and my research on its imagery is discussed in detail in Chapter 6, “The Inside Thirty-Seven Lords”.

²² Piyadassi Thera, *The Book of Protection: Paritta* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1999), 108-18. In the *Āṭānāṭiya sutta*, King Vessavana recites the verses that confer protection so that *yakkha*, monks, nuns and lay people may be at ease, guarded, protected and unharmed.

²³ Their names in Pāli are Dhataratṭha, Virūlhaka, Virūpakka and Vessaraṇa respectively. The *gandabba* are defined as a class of semi-divine beings who are the lowest ranked of all the *dewa*. *Yakkha* are described as not human, but half deified and possessing great power. They are usually kind to humans, and interested in their spiritual welfare. *Gounban* are a class of spirits mentioned in the scriptures alongside *yakkha* and *nagà*, and the *gāloun* (commonly *garuda*) are mythical birds often represented in art as hybrid humans. The *nagà*, represented by serpents, are the eternal enemies of the *gāloun* and are defined as a class of beings playing a prominent part in Buddhist folklore. T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede, *Pali-English Dictionary* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1921), 545-6; G. P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names* Vol. I: A-Dh (London: John Murray, 1937), 638 and 746; G. P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names* Vol. II: N-H (London: John Murray, 1938), 1354-5; Maurice Walshe, trans., *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya*, (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 472-6.

²⁴ The term ဘုရား (*pāyà*) is used in Burmese to denote the entire monument, while ဇေတီ (*zedi*) refers to what is usually referred to as a stupa in the West.

The Outside Thirty-Seven Lords

The third of the three pantheons is the အပြင် ၃၇ မင်း: (*Āpyin Thoùns'eh-k'niq Mìn*), the Outside Thirty-Seven Lords. As the title suggests, they are known to Myanmar scholars as the Outside Thirty-Seven because they are all indigenous nat Lords from locations outside the precincts of the Shwezigon *pāyà*.²⁵ However, the title *Āpyin Thoùns'eh-k'niq Mìn* is used by Myanmar scholars for four quite separate historical iterations of this pantheon of nat Lords from different eras of Upper Myanmar's history, whose members, depending on how they are counted, ranged in number from 15 to 38. The history of these four separate iterations and their connection with Myanmar's kings is discussed in detail in Chapters 7 and 8. However, at this point it is worth noting that only one of these four iterations is the 'Thirty-Seven Nats' referred to in the *Princeton Dictionary* as a "national pantheon"; the one promulgated by the court in 1820 (see Table 1.1 overleaf). This is also the iteration that was the subject of Sir Richard Carnac Temple's book, *The Thirty-Seven Nats: A Phase of Spirit-Worship Prevailing in Burma*, the most cited publication on the nats in the Western literature.²⁶

Importantly, the blanket and very ambiguous title the 'Thirty-Seven Nats' must be clearly qualified in order to fully understand what kind of nat is being discussed, and only then can their imagery be explained in any detail. Accordingly, to assist the reader, Table 1.1 is provided as a summary of the different nat typologies, the three pantheons of nat Lords, and other supernatural beings referred to in this text, while Appendix A provides a more comprehensive explanation of where their images are found and their generalised iconography.

²⁵ They are also sometimes understood as being 'outside' Buddhism. Khin Maung Than, "The Outside Thirty-Seven Nats," *Myanmar Review*, date unknown. With thanks to Aung Swe Aye (Harry) for supplying me with a copy. In this article, Khin Maung Than proposed a means of classification according to the places the nats guard, dividing them into guardians of towns and villages; guardians of watercourses, guardians of mountains, and eight others associated with a particular illness or disease. In his more comprehensive 2001 book on the nats he also categorised them according to the types of places they are associated with, underlying this fundamental connection with place. See Khin Maun Than, *Yōya Naq Youncihmu*, 5-6.

²⁶ Richard Carnac Temple, *The Thirty-Seven Nats: A Phase of Spirit-Worship Prevailing in Burma* (London: Kiscadale Publications, 1991). *The Thirty-Seven Nats* was originally published in 1906 by William Griggs, London. It was republished in limited edition in 1991 by Kiscadale Publications and is now widely available in Myanmar as a pirate photocopy.

Table 1.1: Overview of nat typologies and the different pantheons

The nats			
<i>Āt'eq</i> ('higher') nats Different classes of celestial deities	Combination of <i>Āt'eq</i> ('higher') and <i>Auq</i> ('lower') nats	<i>Auq</i> ('lower') nats	Other supernaturals
Thakya Min and other <i>dewa</i>		Nat Lords (<i>Min</i> , guardians of the royal cities)	<i>nagà</i> (m), <i>nagāmá</i> (f)
<i>Natgyi</i> (Hindu/Brahmanic deities)		Bo Bo Gyi and Bodaw	<i>weíza</i>
The Four Great Kings of the cardinal directions (<i>lokapāla</i>)		Local guardian nats (<i>Āsaún</i> , guardians of cities, villages and towns)	<i>óussasaún</i>
<i>bilù</i> (m) <i>bilùmá</i> (f) (<i>yakkha</i> , <i>gandabba</i> and <i>gounban</i>)		Nature spirits	
Which pantheon of Thirty-Seven?			
The Thirty-Seven Buddhist Lords	The Inside Thirty-Seven Lords	The Outside Thirty-Seven Lords	
The Four Great Kings: Datarata, Wirulaka, Wirupakkha and Kuwera (and their <i>bilù</i> followers)	only at the Shwezigon <i>pāyà</i> , Bagan, 11th century	Nat Lords, protectors of the Burmese royal cities	
	A mix of Buddhist <i>dewa</i> , <i>bilù</i> , Hindu deities, tree spirits and local guardian nats		Four iterations:
	Mindon Min's Thirty-Seven Nats		
	A mix of Buddhist <i>dewa</i> , <i>bilù</i> , Hindu deities, spirits of the natural elements and local guardian nats (1857)	1. Pindale Min, 17th century (15 nat Lords)	
		2. Wungyi Padetheyaza, early 18th century	
		3. Myawaddy Mingyi, 1820	
		4. Mindon Min's Thirty-Seven Lords (1857)	

OTHER SUPERNATURAL BEINGS

Alongside the nats, there are many other supernatural beings widely propitiated in Myanmar and encountered in the country's art, such as *nagà*, *oússāsaún*, and *weíza*.²⁷ *Nagà* are serpent guardians of the underworld and watercourses and appear in art all over Southeast Asia. There are also several prominent female nats, sometimes referred to as *nagămá*, who are hybrid human-*nagà* (Fig. 9). *Oússāsaún* are female 'treasure-spirit' nats, who are venerated because they have the ability to confer financial success.²⁸ *Weíza* are practitioners of esoteric Buddhism who have achieved extraordinary powers, due to their mastery of arcane arts such as alchemy, mantras or the writing of *in* (magical diagrams with a protective function). It is believed these powers will enable them to be present to hear the first sermon preached by the future Buddha, Mettayya, thereby allowing them to attain *neibban* without having to go through further cycles of rebirth. Although *weíza* are believed to have 'passed on', they remain available to their followers for assistance in spiritual endeavours.²⁹

As the images included here demonstrate, the nats appear in a range of artistic forms. However, there are general themes for each different kind of nat or supernatural being: *dewa* appear in the regalia of Burmese royalty; Bo Bo Gyi as idealised humans; while the nat Lords and other local guardian nats are generally created as wooden statues decorated with paint and gold leaf. It will

²⁷ As explained by Spiro, the nats were not the only supernatural entities people had to contend with. He noted belief in witches, demons and a variety of ghosts, who could all be appeased by the practice of Buddhism, the use of magic ritual and the wearing of amulets. Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism*, 21-39, and 55.

²⁸ Donald Stadtner, *Sacred Sites of Burma: Myth and Folklore in an Evolving Spiritual Realm* (Bangkok: River Books, 2011), 120-1. Stadtner relates the history of Mya Nan Nwe, a popular *oússasaún* whose shrine is next to the Botataung *pāyà* in Yangon.

²⁹ Two well-known *weíza*, Bo Bo Aung and Bo Min Gaung, whose images are frequently seen at *pāyà* or in nat shrines, are historical personalities who became famous through acquiring supernatural powers. Bo Bo Aung lived during the reign of King Bagyidaw (1819-1837), and was a master of *in*. It is said he escaped the soldiers sent by the King to arrest him, and lived until his final enlightenment on Mt Popa, the legendary home of the first nat Lords, Maung Tinde and his sister. As an historical person Bo Bo Aung's images have a natural, if idealised, human appearance, and his iconography has become conventionalised to depict him sitting, dressed in white, with a *zawgyi*'s (alchemist's) turban and a scarf draped over one shoulder, or standing holding a staff. The imagery of Bo Min Gaung, who died ca. 1952, is an idealised portrait, being based on a contemporary photograph taken during his earthly life. This brief overview of *weíza* is provided to round out my overview of the supernatural beings encountered in Myanmar's art. However, they are outside the scope of my thesis and will only be referred to in passing later in the text. An account of their legends is given in Irene Moilanen, "Last of the Great Masters? Woodcarving Traditions in Myanmar —Past and Present," (Jyvaskyla, University of Jyvaskyla, 1995), 57-8. For a fuller account of *weíza*, see J. P. Ferguson and E. Michael Mendelson, "Masters of the Buddhist Occult: The Burmese Weikzas," *Contributions to Asian Studies* 16 (1981), 62-86; and Crosby, et. al., *Champions of Buddhism*. A good overview of the making of *weíza* imagery is presented in Irene Moilanen and Sergey S. Ozhegov, *Mirrored in Wood: Burmese Art and Architecture* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1999), 50-2.

become clear, however, that there are considerable nuances in the style and iconography of nat imagery, which has evolved over a long period of time.

NAT IMAGERY

I first encountered nat images in 1995, when I became intrigued by the small statues of Myin Hpyu Shin seen in small shrines by the side of the road (Fig. 7).³⁰ Nowadays, the vast majority of nat images encountered are painted or lacquered and gilded wooden sculptures of local guardian nats, often swathed in traditional red and white ribbons or in lengths of fabric offered by their supplicants. However, nats of different kinds are widely represented in Myanmar's art. They appear in relief carvings decorating stupas, temples and monasteries; as stone or brick and stucco sculptures; in paintings, frescoes and ceramic plaques; decorating lacquerware and textiles; as puppets and as magical tattoos.

Yet despite the time and resources poured into its creation, nat imagery has attracted little academic attention. Until now, no surveys have been undertaken, nor has there been any research into their role in Myanmar's visual culture. The best-known publication available in the West, Temple's *The Thirty-Seven Nats*, was written over a century ago and while beautifully illustrated, the text provides no analysis of nat imagery. This is also true of local texts. The anthropological literature focuses on the ritual aspects of belief in the nats, with commentary on their statues limited to their presence in propitiation ceremonies. I found there were occasional mentions of them in the art historical literature, but no studies centred on why their images looked the way they did in the past, or how and why they have evolved into the images seen today. This is surprising given that representations of the nats are one of the country's most distinctive artforms, and many images are beautifully realised by their creators.

This lack of focus on their imagery is probably due to three principal factors: the difficulties accessing the country during the socialist era (1962-1988) to carry out scholarly research; a focus on the anthropological aspects of ritual surrounding the nats; and a preoccupation on the part of

³⁰ The white horse is an obvious and easily recognised icon for this nat, and he is not always portrayed in human form, as discussed later in the text.

historians with Buddhist texts and Myanmar's magnificent Buddhist art and architecture. These factors have pushed consideration of nat images as works of art into the historiographic shadows of Myanmar's material culture.³¹ There is also the present cultural position of the 'lower' nats to consider. Although their images are clearly visible, conversations about them are rarely volunteered, possibly due to embarrassment in a country which prides itself on the purity of its Theravada Buddhist history.³² Despite this, directional signs to the main nat shrine in major towns are made in the same size and font as signs marking the way to Buddhist pagodas. Additionally, although foreign private collectors have eagerly bought up older statues, they are more often viewed within Myanmar as locations of meaning in the anthropological sense, rather than as art objects.³³ Nevertheless, nat images form an integral part of Myanmar's cultural and artistic heritage, even if they are somewhat hidden in plain sight.

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT: THE NAT IMAGES OF MYANMAR

My thesis addresses this significant gap in the literature on Myanmar's material and visual culture. The nats are only understood at a superficial level in the West, and even in Myanmar they are usually spoken of in very general terms, with few people able to clearly explain their different typologies and function. While the general lack of information was apparent at the outset of my research, as this progressed a significant amount of misinformation came to light, along with primary sources not referenced in the Western literature. Clarifying the roles and

³¹ Elizabeth Moore argues that a focus on Buddhist text at the expense of material culture has led to inadequate descriptions of Myanmar's Buddhist culture. Elizabeth Moore, "Astrology in Burmese Buddhist Culture: Decoding an illustrated manuscript from the SOAS archives," *Orientalism* 38 (2007): 84.

³² Myanmar has a long tradition of valuing the purity of its Theravada Buddhist practice, ranging from King Anawrahta's legendary sacking of Thaton in the 11th century to obtain a copy of the Pāli canon, to its inscription on 729 marble stelae at Mindon Min's Kuthodaw *zedi* in the 1860s. This sense of pride is frequently expressed in the maxim 'To be Burmese is to be Buddhist', a maxim so prevalent it was used by Heinz Bechert as the title of his chapter in *The World of Buddhism*. Bechert argued Buddhism was an essential feature of Burmese efforts to preserve national self-determination in the face of the British occupation, giving the maxim a political dimension. Heinz Bechert, "To Be a Burmese Is to Be a Buddhist: Buddhism in Burma," in *The World of Buddhism*, ed. Heinz Bechert and Richard Gombrich (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 147-58. In her foreword to *Champions of Buddhism*, Kate Crosby noted a similar reticence on the part of people to talk about *weíza*, writing "... to speak of *weíza* may induce awkwardness, an embarrassed silence, a change of subject. People have to be confident of your genuine interest before speaking frankly of it." Crosby, *Champions of Buddhism*, xxi.

³³ The notion of a nat image having value was often expressed by those interviewed during my research in terms of the nat's power rather than the image's aesthetic qualities.

significance of the different typologies of nat became essential, and as a result, my thesis developed along parallel trajectories. On one level it unpacks the historiography of the nats to correctly identify their typologies and role of the different pantheons in Myanmar culture and history, as this is fundamental to an understanding of their appearance in art. On another level, my analysis of the development of nat imagery demonstrates that the way in which the nats have been portrayed over the centuries is a reflection of their typology. This, in turn, reflects the fundamental role of the nats as guardian spirits of very different physical and conceptual spaces, which explains not only their appearance, but also their placement in particular places within both natural and built environments.

“Hidden in Plain Sight: the nat images of Myanmar” provides the first art historical analysis of nat imagery. It proposes a stylistic chronology for the different types of nat in relation to their status in the cosmic and earthly realms from the Bagan era (1044-1287) through to the present day. Developments in iconography and style are examined and likely agents for these are proposed, to illuminate the course of change to the present time. The primary source material examined, much of which has never been published, provides a wealth of iconographic and historic detail that will enhance the understanding of nat imagery and the role of the nats in Myanmar culture — not only for art historians, but for academics in other disciplines as well, providing a more solid footing for future discussion of these important participants in daily life. My thesis will, therefore, highlight the limitations of the resources currently available, and dispel the misconceptions and ambiguity around the different types of nats — particularly the nat Lords and their relationship with Myanmar’s kings.

As my thesis will argue, all the nats are depicted visually in ways that underscore their position in the Buddhist cosmology and their guardianship roles of particular locations. Art is used to frame this narrative, and as nats have been made in such a wide variety of media and across all time periods, their imagery reflects how devotees — including Myanmar’s kings — have interacted with their temporal and spiritual worlds throughout history.³⁴

³⁴ I use the term ‘spiritual’ in preference to ‘religious’ in acknowledgement of Buddhism as a lived ideology as opposed to a religion in the Judeo-Christian sense.

Research methodology

My research began as an art historical analysis of nat imagery within a conceptual framework that emphasised three main agencies: cultural context, including where the nats appear in the natural and built landscape; iconographical content; and audience. My visual analysis of nat imagery was conducted in line with Erwin Panofsky's three stages of interpretation: a pre-iconographic description; an iconographic analysis, and the resulting interpretation. Close reading of texts and visual analysis of nat images were employed to identify the iconographic elements used in representations of the different typologies of nats. The limitations of Panofsky's methodology are obvious in that each stage must be correct before the next can be begin; and as the art historian — particularly one who grew up outside the producing culture — is always present in the construction she or he produces, a knowledge of literary sources, familiarity with specific themes and concepts, and how these were expressed historically, has been crucial to my approach.³⁵ Close reading of primary sources, many considered for the first time, and other Burmese-language texts has therefore informed these aspects and underpins my arguments.

My methodology was largely empirical, involving anthropological style fieldwork in the collection of data, which was then considered from an art historical viewpoint. In early 2014, I spent 10 weeks conducting field research, mainly in Upper Myanmar, particularly around the areas surrounding Mandalay and Bagan. My thesis therefore primarily examines nats of an ethnically Burman origin (see map on page 1 of Volume II). Fieldwork involved semi-structured interviews with local historians, the creators and sellers of nat imagery, the custodians of historically important pieces at *natnàn* — particularly those at the Shwezigon *pāyà* in Bagan — and image users. These included *natt'eìn*, *natkadaw* and devotees, whose oral histories played a large and important part. A list of participants, copy of my participant information sheet and the indicative list of questions asked during interviews is provided in Appendices J.1 and J.2.³⁶

³⁵ Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (New York: The Overlook Press, 1974), 28-41; Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 73 No 2, 1991, 175.

³⁶ My research in Myanmar was conducted with the approval of the Australian National University's Ethics Committee, protocol no. 2013_315.

In April 2014 I visited England to examine primary source material deposited in institutional archives by British colonial era scholars. My research there uncovered original manuscripts featuring both text and images of the nats in the British Library, the Cambridge University Library, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the relevant portions of these will be presented and discussed in the coming chapters. These manuscript sources are supported by a detailed visual analysis of the many nat images encountered during fieldwork, and of those in institutional collections including the British Museum, the Ashmolean Museum, and the Center for Burma Studies in Illinois.

My initial research trip to Myanmar was supplemented by shorter visits during 2015 and 2016, when I was able to fill some of the gaps in my knowledge and collect as many Burmese language books on the nats that I could find. Today, Burmese language texts on the nats and their legends are easily found in Myanmar bookstores and pagoda shops, but as far as I am aware, my thesis will be the first time the work of local scholars and lay authors has been incorporated in an English language academic discourse on the nats. I drew on all the material I could find: from inscriptions and manuscripts written in an archaic form of Burmese to modern paperbacks; from my own photographs taken in the field to those taken by British colonial scholars in the late 1800s and early 1900s, now considered in an art historical context; from Temple's *The Thirty-Seven Nats* to the more recent work of anthropologists, archaeologists and historians of Myanmar. My thesis is thus situated in a wider scholarly discourse through close examination of how and where the nats appear in the textual and material records.

Approaching the research material

Organising such an enormous amount of research material, in English and Burmese, into a coherent structure has been a daunting task. A chronological approach to the visual material was problematic given that many design elements have been carried forward throughout history and artists still work in traditional idioms today. 'Ancient' nat images have no recorded provenance, and there is usually no verifiable dating. An empirical methodology can be left floundering to a large degree when attempting to assess the historicity of images, as it is difficult to argue with a *nattein* who tells you that her statues are several hundred years old when she is

the fourth generation who has held that position in her village. Photographs of images that were orally dated are noted as such, but that is not to say I cavil with what my informants told me.³⁷

Myanmar's centuries of oral tradition often comes with the acceptance of legend or myth by informants as fact, and I found that what was related to me occasionally differed from accounts given by other writers or informants. For example, the colourful legends of many nats are dynamic and there is no agreed 'correct' version, although many differ only in the smaller details. Similarly, their names often vary from source to source. Some are known by the name they had when human, as well as the name and/or title they have as a nat. The use of kin terms to prefix their names further complicates matters for non-Burmese language speakers. One may encounter Maung Tinde, U Tinde, the Mahagiri Nat, the *eindwin* ('within the house') nat or Min Mahagiri — depending on what point he is in his existence in life or as a nat — in different versions of the blacksmith's legend presented at the beginning of this introductory chapter. There is similar disparity between sources regarding the name of the sister who died alongside him in the fire. I have generally used the names of the nat Lords from my oldest primary sources, and their alternative names, where known, are given in Appendix E, commencing on page 313 of Volume II.

A truly comprehensive art historical study of Myanmar's nats will encompass many decades of work, and many of the topics touched upon here are deserving of a far more focused study than I was able to undertake. It is not the intention of this thesis to cover imagery of *weíza*, *oússasaún* or the nats from Myanmar's many other ethnic groups. Further research may establish whether the conclusions I have drawn as to the development of nat iconography, the principles of meaning, and association with place apply more broadly across Myanmar.

³⁷ As the majority of the older images researched in Myanmar were placed in environments where they are actively venerated, it was not possible to obtain any samples for carbon dating.

T H E S I S O U T L I N E

The following chapters and images are arranged to make connections and highlight particular points important to an art historical narrative. Nats encountered in one chapter, where relevant, will make another appearance later on.

Chapter 2, “Records and Narratives: the nats in literature and oral history”, begins with an analysis of how the nats have been recorded in the Western literature. I then turn to source material from Myanmar itself, to examine how the nats are presented in local texts, from inscriptions through to modern paperbacks. This highlights the many disconnects between the way the nats are thought of in Myanmar in contrast to the West; although as will become clear, in both cases nat imagery is seldom considered.

Chapter 3, “Early Nat Imagery and the Thirty-Seven Buddhist Lords”, provides an analysis of early guardian imagery, followed by a discussion of Myanmar’s Buddhist cosmology, which is fundamental to understanding the placement of certain types of nat imagery in architectural contexts. I then introduce the Thirty-Seven Buddhist Lords, and analyse their presence in Bagan’s art.

Chapter 4, “Imaging Spirits”, is an analysis of nat images from an art historical viewpoint, and is presented in two parts. I begin with a survey of how nat imagery is created and decorated, which demonstrates how traditional methods have changed, and the resulting impact on iconography. The second section concentrates on the iconography of the nats. Major identifying features of the different typologies are presented, followed by an analysis of the main iconographical features that in many cases distinguish each nat’s unique identity.

Chapter 5, “Stylistic Chronology”, draws on the information presented in the preceding chapters to propose a stylistic chronology for the dating of nat images. This will show that technical and stylistic developments in the creation of imagery of the Buddha in Myanmar were largely paralleled in imagery of the nats. However, artists have always made clear distinctions between the ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ nats via the use of conventionalised motifs.

The following two chapters focus on the images of the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords and the Outside Thirty-Seven Lords. The history of each pantheon is examined, and the concepts and iconography introduced in Chapters 4 and 5 will be elaborated on in relation to their imagery in artistic, architectural and cultural contexts. Chapter 6, “The Inside Thirty-Seven Lords”, examines this unique pantheon of nat Lords at the Shwezigon *pāyà* at Bagan and the images held there. The entanglement of this particular pantheon in the mythology surrounding Anawrahta, the 11th century king credited with the establishment of Buddhism in Myanmar is analysed, to demonstrate how poorly this pantheon is understood, both within Myanmar and in the West.

Chapter 7, “The Outside Thirty-Seven Lords”, begins with an examination of primary sources on this pantheon of nat Lords, who, as noted earlier, are usually referred to by the misleading term the ‘Thirty-Seven Nats’. Historical texts are analysed with reference to the current misconceptions surrounding this pantheon and its role in Myanmar’s history. While this pantheon is viewed as the focus of a royal cult of spirit propitiation, it has also been characterised as the product of a royal religious policy designed to subjugate local beliefs to Buddhism.³⁸ Its members have also been portrayed as being transformed from potentially malicious to benevolent spirits via the king’s establishment of a local cult.³⁹ However, surviving court documents paint a more matter-of-fact picture of these nat Lords as traditional guardians of the royal cities, propitiated during their foundation alongside the ‘higher’ nats and Brahmanic/Hindu *Natgyi*.

The second part of this chapter provides a complete survey of the nat statuettes housed in the pavilion in the grounds of the Shwezigon *pāyà*. The Trustees of the Shwezigon graciously allowed me to closely examine and record these, and my findings are presented not only as a record of an historic collection of nat images, but as an example of styles spanning three centuries. I then examine two sets of intriguing six-armed statues currently identified as members of the Outside Thirty-Seven Lords. This is followed by an analysis of the illustrations

³⁸ See, for example, Maung Htin Aung, *Folk Elements in Burmese Buddhism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 4. A more recent example is given in Maxime Boutry, “How Far from National Identity?: Dealing with the Concealed Diversity of Myanmar,” in *Metamorphosis: Studies in Social and Political Change in Myanmar*, ed. Renaud Egreteau and Francois Robinne (Singapore: NUS Press, 2016), 114.

³⁹ See, for example, Brac de la Perrière, “The Taungbyon Festival,” 67.

used in Temple's *The Thirty-Seven Nats* and their influence on modern artists. My examination of Temple's primary sources reveals he misidentified several nats whose images were published in his book — errors that have had ramifications on how several nat Lords have been portrayed in both the literature and in their artistic representations.

Chapter 8, “Guardians of the Kingdom”, begins with a possible Bagan-era origin for an autochthonous counterpart to the Thirty-Seven Buddhist Lords, which may have begun the tradition of propitiating important local guardian nats at the founding of royal palaces and cities. The role of the different typologies of nats — Buddhist, nat Lords, *Natgyi* and local guardian nats — are then examined in light of the part they played in the foundation of Myanmar's last great royal city, Mandalay. Nat imagery from two surviving court *parabaiq* (concertina-style folding books), is presented that underscores how important their role was in protecting the palace and city from harm.

Finally, my conclusion reflects on the main points argued throughout my thesis. These include the importance of the nats' links with specific places; the original role of ‘The Thirty-Seven Nats’; how poorly the different nat typologies are currently understood; and how these have been expressed in artistic contexts throughout Myanmar's history.

LOCAL AND FOREIGN TERMINOLOGY

The literature on the nats, and Myanmar's art and archaeology, is peppered with non-Burmese language terms, in particular *dewa*, *dvarapala*, *yakkha*, and ogre. These terms are most often used when authors — particularly Western ones — are describing a nat in the context of the role it plays in a Buddhist artistic milieu.⁴⁰ *Dewa* appear in heavenly contexts, while *dvarapala*, *yakkha* and ogres — terms often used interchangeably — describe images guarding the entrances and stairways to Buddhist monuments. ‘Nat’ is a term usually reserved for discussion

⁴⁰ It seems that foreign terminology has gained currency simply due to the Western scholarly focus on Myanmar's material culture that required categorising in line with a predefined descriptive canon of artistic models. The absorption of these loan words no doubt occurred when the discourse on Southeast Asian imagery and iconography was based on the assumption of complete Indianisation of the region and little credence was given to the influence of local sensibilities or influences from the wider Southeast Asian area.

of nature spirits, local guardian nats and those in the pantheon of the Outside Thirty-Seven Lords. The non-Burmese language words can be useful tools to describe the different nats in terms of hierarchy and image styles, yet they can be highly contentious. When asked if a figure at one of the entrances to the Shwezigon *pāyà* was a *bilù* or a nat, U Win Maung Myint, Trustee of the Shwezigon and former Deputy-Director of the Bagan branch of the Department of Archaeology, replied: “No, no, only nat. Some people do not know about the history, they say *bilù*. No, it is not *bilù*, only nat, for defence of [the] precincts established by King Anawrahta.”⁴¹

A brief untangling of the introduced terminology is useful at this point, given the absorption of these loan words into the everyday vocabulary and the literature on Myanmar art and archaeology. ‘*Dewa*’ (in Pāli, *deva*) and *yakkha* have come into the language via the Buddhist scriptures.⁴² The Sanskrit term ‘*dvarapala*’ is often used for nat images set either side of a doorway, but the more correct Myanmar term used by informants and in my thesis is *dāga nat* (door nat), or alternatively *thathanasaún* nat (guardian of Buddhism). The term ‘*yakkha*’ is sometimes synonymous with ‘*dewa*’, and sometimes with ‘*bilù*’, depending on the context of its role and placement in the environment. However, as ‘ogre’ is a French term only absorbed into English in the 18th century, it really should have no place in a discussion of Myanmar art.⁴³

The terminology used for the different typologies of nat throughout my thesis reflects the original Burmese language terms found in primary sources, as noted in Table 1.1 on page 11. ‘*Dewa*’ is used to describe the ‘higher’ nats found in the Buddhist scriptures, while ‘*Natgyi*’ is used to distinguish the ‘higher’ nats from the Brahmanic/Hindu pantheon. The term ‘*bilù*’ is used as a collective noun to describe the other other types of ‘higher’ nats: the Four Great Kings and their followers, the *yakkha*, *gandabba*, and *gounban*, although ‘*naga*’ is retained for the supernatural serpent deities. ‘Lord’ is used to distinguish the nats in the pantheon of Outside

⁴¹ U Win Maung Myint (Trustee, Shwezigon *pāyà*, Bagan, and former Deputy Director of the Bagan branch of the Department of Archaeology), in discussion with the author, February 16, 2014 and March 8, 2015. This is a good example of the conflation of terms commonly encountered. The Department of Archaeology is now the Department of Archaeology, National Museum and Library.

⁴² The *Myanmar-English Dictionary* translates the Burmese rendering of ‘*dewa*’ as ‘nat’. *The Dictionary*, 210.

⁴³ For example, the term *bilumá* was used in the *Zabukoncha Chronicle*, which dates to the late 1300s or early 1400s, but the word ‘ogre’ was substituted when it was translated into English. I am grateful to Phyo Phyo Thet for confirming the translation from the original. On the *Zabukoncha*, see Bob Hudson, “The Origins of Bagan: The Archaeological Landscape of Upper Burma to AD 1300” (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 2004), 29-32. For the meaning of ‘ogre’ see T. F. Hoad, “The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology,” <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1027-ogre.html> (accessed June 26, 2015).

Thirty-Seven Lords, as this is the correct translation of ‘*min*’, the word used in the two court texts describing them. However, in the Royal Orders of Myanmar kings (official proclamations of the king's will), both the guardian spirits of royal cities and other locations in the kingdom are generically referred to as *āsaún*, literally ‘guardian spirit’.⁴⁴ To further distinguish between the two, I use ‘nat Lords’ for those who guarded the royal cities, and ‘local guardian nat’ for other *āsaún* nats.

Transcription of Burmese language terms

There is no definitive or agreed transcription or transliteration method for the Burmese language, and different sources use different Romanisation protocols. In both the text and footnotes I use the transcription convention developed by John Okell, with three exceptions. Firstly, in Okell's system the word ‘nat’ would be transcribed as ‘naq’, indicating a glottal stop. I chose to retain the more usual English spelling of ‘nat’, including its derivatives,— for example, *natsein* rather than *naqsein*.⁴⁵ Secondly, I have used *ch*, *ky* and *gy* rather than *c* or *c'* to more approximate English pronunciation. Thirdly, I have retained the customary English Romanisation of Burmese language proper nouns without diacritics — for example, Mandalay rather than Mandalè — for simplicity. A fuller explanation of all non-English terms is given in the Glossary commencing on page 347 of Volume II, which includes the Burmese script.

Honorific case is used for the Inside and Outside Thirty-Seven Lords to acknowledge their importance and place as discrete pantheons, and I have privileged the use of Burmese language terms over Pāli or Sanskrit, with a translation or brief explanation following in parentheses when these terms are first used. I had the benefit of excellent help with the Burmese language material from my teacher San Yu Wai Maung and translator Wai Phyo Maung, however, all the translations are my own. Given the dynamic nature of all languages, we cannot be sure that words used several centuries ago have the same meanings today; however the descriptions of the nats and their iconography in the primary sources does appear quite straightforward. As most of

⁴⁴ As translated by Than Tun. See, for example, Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma, AD 1598-1885, Part III, AD 1751-1781* (Kyoto: The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1985), 250 (Burmese version). For the definition of the noun ‘*asaún*’ (guardian spirit), see *The Dictionary*, 553.

⁴⁵ John Okell, (*Myanmar*) *Burmese: An Introduction to the Script* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010), 378-81. A further exception to my use of the Okell transcription is the need to faithfully reproduce the transcription used when referencing the work of others.

the primary source material is handwritten in an older literary style, using traditional abbreviations and non-standard spelling, I have reproduced this as faithfully as possible given the limitations of the software used for typing Burmese.

Many Western writers in recent decades have used ‘Burma’ and ‘Burmese’ when speaking of the country and its people. As pointed out by Okell, *Myanma naing-ngan* and *Băma-pye* are the formal and colloquial names, respectively, for the country some Westerners still refer to as Burma, the Anglicised version of *Băma* and the name the country’s British colonisers chose to employ.⁴⁶ Although I grew up with ‘Burma’, I have chosen to use ‘Myanmar’ when speaking of the country — unless quoting a source that used ‘Burma’ — and ‘Burmese’ as a descriptor. Additionally, as encounters with a different culture are invariably framed by reference to personal experience, early Western encounters with the nats were framed by analogy to Christianity. As noted by anthropologist Manning Nash (1924-2001), this is apparent in the language used for Buddhist concepts and events: ‘Lent’ is a term often used for the rainy season when men traditionally ‘retreat’ to the monastery; Buddhists are said to ‘worship’ and to offer ‘prayers’.⁴⁷ I have, however, used the words ‘appease’, ‘supplicate’, ‘venerate’ or ‘propitiate’ instead of ‘worship’ in relation to the nats, as ‘worship’ by implication makes all the nats gods, which is not the case.

Finally, for many people in Myanmar, making offerings to the nats to guard against harm, or to obtain good fortune, forms an integral part of daily life in conjunction with their Buddhist belief, and the many generalisations made in this thesis reflect this.

⁴⁶ John Okell, *(Myanmar) Burmese: An Introduction to the Spoken Language*, Book 1 (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010), 50.

⁴⁷ Manning Nash, “Burmese Buddhism in Everyday Life,” *American Anthropologist* 65, no. 2 (1963), 290.

ACCOMPANYING IMAGES

The images set out in Volume II are captioned with the name of the nat, the artist's name (if known) and the location of the image, with more complete details given in the *List of Images* commencing on page 243 of that volume. Most photographs have been resized or cropped to save space and to highlight the nats themselves, and if uncredited are the work of the author. Images taken from institutional websites or publications may have been originally published or captioned using different names or spellings; however, for the sake of consistency I have captioned images of the same nat with the same name, with the original caption, if different, noted in the *List of Images*. Artwork dimensions, where known, are given in centimetres, height x width x depth and include the bases of statues, but in many cases due to access difficulties I was unable to obtain exact measurements of nat imagery photographed *in situ* and only estimates are provided.

APPENDICES

The following Appendices, commencing on page 291 of Volume II, are included to illuminate and support my text:

- Appendix A provides a summary of nat typologies, where they are found and a generalised description of what they look like, in table form (A3 size)
- Appendix B lists the names of the nats included in the Thirty-Seven Buddhist Lords
- Appendix C lists the nats from the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords along with their locations in relation to the Shwezigon *zedi*, and their iconography, according to the sources consulted
- Appendix D.1 lists the nat Lords included in the different iterations of the Outside Thirty-Seven Lords recognised by Myanmar authors (A3 size)
- Appendix D.2 lists the nat Lords, guardians of the royal cities, from the primary sources consulted (A3 size)
- Appendix D.3 provides the alternative names for Min Mahagiri's sister/s, according to the sources consulted

- Appendix E provides a list of nat Lords and local guardian nats referred to in the text and their commonly found alternative names
- Appendix F provides the regnal dates for the kings referred to in the text
- Appendix G lists the *Natgyi* propitiated by Bagyidaw
- Appendix H provides the names of all the nats propitiated during the founding of Mandalay
- Appendices I.1 and I.2 are copies of original documentation sourced at Bagan
- Appendices J.1 and J.2 contain participant information, a copy of my participant information sheet, and the indicative list of questions asked during fieldwork interviews.

A bibliography of English and Burmese language sources is provided at page 295 of this volume, and a map showing the major sites referred to is given at the beginning of Volume II on page 1.

CHAPTER 2

Records and narratives: the nats in literature and oral history

Prologue II

Meanwhile, downriver, King Thinlikaung of the kingdom of Thiripyissaya [Bagan] was dreaming. Maung Tinde and his sister appeared in his dream and said, “We were burned alive by the King of Tagaung who has now cast our home into the Ayeyarwaddy River ... save us!” Several days later, the sagà tree reached the city's riverbank and was brought ashore. The King's woodcarvers fashioned images of the two nats from the wood of the tree trunk, then covered them with gold. They were carried in a golden palanquin, attended by the King himself, along the road to Mt Popa, and on the day of the full moon were set in a golden shrine on the summit of the mountain with great pomp and ceremony.

The King ordered the mountain and nearby village of Popa to be given as a perpetual fief to the two nats. Thereafter, Maung Tinde became known as Min Mahagiri, and his sister as Hnamedaw Taungyi Shin, the Lord and Lady of the Great Mountain. By royal decree Min Mahagiri was nominated as the eindwin nat, the guardian of every home throughout the land. The kings who followed Thinlikaung on the throne continued the royal patronage of the Lord of the Great Mountain and his sister, and their figures were carved on the pillars of the main gate to the city of Bagan in 849 CE, symbolising their guardianship of the city and its people.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ This is my own retelling of the well-known legend.

INTRODUCTION

Here, within call of the rattling trains, resides Pho-Pho, the guardian spirit of Thaton [Fig. 15]. He is an old man with a pointed beard and a kindly face ... [The images here] are venerated not alone by the Buddhists of the city, but by all classes and creeds ... when [the people] are in tribulation they make an offering at the shrines, and ask for succour or a sign. The smile that comes upon the face of the old man Pho-Pho on such occasions is a sure augury that all will be well.

V. C. Scott O'Connor, *Mandalay and other Cities of the Past in Burma*, 1907⁴⁹

The early English language literature is notably short on detail regarding nat images. Still, like Scott O'Connor, a handful of British colonial scholars resident in what was then British Burma recorded local nat legends, described their festivals and occasionally supplied brief descriptions or published photographs of nat statues in their memoirs or in academic journals.⁵⁰ R. Grant Brown, a British colonial civil servant stationed in Myanmar from 1899 to 1917, is a good example. Brown was a keen observer of Myanmar culture who published a wonderfully readable memoir of his time in the country, as well as three articles — including photographs — discussing nats he encountered during his time in British Burma.⁵¹ His articles, and those of his contemporaries, are highly useful evidence of how the nats discussed were viewed and understood in that period of history, and Brown himself is often referenced by later scholars. However, in the words of art historian Sarah Bekker, “Any review of studies of Burmese belief in the supernatural must begin with Sir Richard Temple and his publication in 1906 of *The Thirty-Seven Nats*.”⁵²

⁴⁹ V. C. Scott O'Connor, *Mandalay: And Other Cities of the Past in Burma*, (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1907), 341-2. ‘Pho-Pho’ was probably a Bo Bo Gyi. In April 1892, Temple noted that the guardian of the nat statues at Thaton had started a collection box for donations to the nats. Richard Carnac Temple, *Notes on Antiquities in Ramannadesa (the Talaing Country of Burma)*, (Bombay: Education Society's Steam Press, 1894), 19, footnote 58. Archaeologist and British colonial administrator Taw Sein Ko (1864-1930) also commented on the nat images at Thaton in Temple, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, 11-12.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Major C. M. Enriquez, *A Burmese Wonderland: A Tale of Travel in Lower and Upper Burma* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1922).

⁵¹ R. Grant Brown, *Burma as I Saw It: 1889-1917* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1926); R. Grant Brown, “The Taungbyon Festival, Burma,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 45 (1915): 355-63; R. Grant Brown, “The Lady of the Weir,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1916): 491-96; and R. Grant Brown, “The Dragon of Tagaung,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* October (1917): 741-51.

⁵² Sarah M. Bekker, “Burmese Traditional Views of the Supernatural: Past and Present Accounts,” (Cornell University Library, 1982), 1. Bekker's paper provided a review of nat literature as at 1982.

SIR R. C. TEMPLE'S *THE THIRTY-SEVEN NATS*

In 1894, following a distinguished career in British Burma, Richard Carnac Temple, the former administrator of Mandalay and Port-Commissioner of Rangoon, sailed home to England. He left behind a master carver named Maung Kyaw Yan, whose workshop was busy carving 37 teak statues of nats which would shortly follow Temple to England, and then on to his new posting as Chief Commissioner of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.⁵³

Aside from his military and civil service duties for the British Empire, Temple, whose portrait is shown at Fig. 16, was a prolific author who penned many articles for the *Indian Antiquary: a Journal of Oriental Research*, which he helped found. It was in this journal, and in the *Journal of Indian Art and Industry*, that he first published a series of articles on the ‘Thirty-Seven Nats’ in 1900.⁵⁴ These would later be included in what is arguably his most famous book, *The Thirty-Seven Nats: A Phase of Spirit-Worship Prevailing in Burma*, published in London in 1906 following his return to England and retirement.

For over a century now, anyone wishing to learn about the nats, or identify a nat image, has overwhelmingly turned to Temple’s publication — the first Western attempt to identify and categorise the nats. Notwithstanding the work of the anthropologists and historians outlined below, Temple’s contribution has indeed been profound, with *The Thirty-Seven Nats* invariably cited by Western — and many Myanmar — scholars who have themselves researched the nats and their impact on Myanmar’s history and culture.⁵⁵

⁵³ Temple’s collection of statues is now in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, with the exception of Medaw Shwe Zaga, and Hnamedaw Taungyi Shin (although her elephant stand and supporting *bilu* figure are there). A more complete biography of Temple is given in Patricia Herbert’s essay at the end of the 1991 Kiscadale republication of Temple’s book. Patricia Herbert, “Sir Richard Carnac Temple and the Thirty-Seven Nats,” in *Thirty-Seven Nats*, I-VI. For further details of Temple’s career see R. E. Enthoven, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004-16), www.oxforddnb.com (accessed May 14, 2016).

⁵⁴ Richard Carnac Temple, “Some Account of the Thirty-Seven Nats (Royal Ghosts) of the Burmese,” *The Journal of Indian Art and Industry* 9 (1900): 1-20; Richard Carnac Temple, “The Thirty-Seven Nats (Spirits) of the Burmese,” *Indian Antiquary*, (July to December 1900).

⁵⁵ To name just a few in the English language literature: Maung Htin Aung’s *Folk Elements*; Bekker’s, “Traditional Views”; and articles by Brac de la Perrière. All the Myanmar writers on the nats consulted also list Temple’s book as a source. Any casual internet search of the term ‘Thirty-Seven Nats’ returns multiple references to Temple’s book.

Temple provided no comment on nat images seen in the field himself, preferring to quote contemporaries like journalist James George Scott (1851-1935) and archaeologist Taw Sein Ko (1864-1930), both of whom were also British colonial administrators.⁵⁶ Temple's own descriptions of nat imagery are confined to the illustrations published in his book, and even then these are limited to a brief description following an outline of the nat's genealogy and legend — information gleaned from “vernacular information” collected during his time in Myanmar.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, his book remains an important source for art historians, given the richness of its contemporary illustrations and the photographs of his carvings, both of which show how the nats' images were visualised at the time by their creators.

Temple's sources

When Temple sat down to write *The Thirty-Seven Nats*, his first task was to decide exactly which nats were included in the pantheon he had heard so much about, and in this regard he commented, rather plaintively, that

Though everybody knows about the Thirty-Seven Nats and everybody talks about them glibly enough, I found that the books passed them over, so far as details were concerned, and I had much difficulty in hunting up vernacular information on the subject, and in obtaining named pictures and images of them.⁵⁸

Despite the rather elusive nature of his subject, Temple managed to gather together a limited collection of texts and illustrations, including an 1891 pamphlet copy of the *Mahagita Medanigyan*, a compilation of classical Burmese music that included the *natkyin* (special songs for and about the nats) sung at the nats' festivals. Although some of his sources had provided him with different names for the nats, he concluded

... that the various lists procured from all sorts of independent sources, were so nearly the same, both in the names of the Nats themselves and in the order in which they were given, that it may be taken for granted that there exists what may be called an authentic list. I have, therefore, taken that one which is to be found in a pamphlet containing a

⁵⁶ Taw Sein Ko, as well as Myanmar's first archeologist, was an officer in the British colonial administration, a linguist and a prolific writer. Penny Edwards, “Relocating the Interlocutor: Taw Sein Ko (1864-1930) and the itinerancy of knowledge in British Burma,” *South East Asia Research* 12, no. 3 (2004). Taw Sein Ko succeeded Charles Duroiselle as Director of the Archaeological Society. Schober, “Communities of Interpretation,” 258 footnote 11. For example quotes from Scott and Taw Sein Ko see Temple, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, 2-3, 5, 11 and 42-3.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 33. With the exception of Taw Sein Ko, Temple's sources on the nats, as listed in his Preface, were all Western. His “vernacular” sources, which included illustrations, are given in his book on page 34 and as part of Herbert's essay on pages II-III.

popular work, the *Mahagita Medanigyan* ... as my model and the most likely to be authentic.⁵⁹

Temple's concern to establish an 'authentic' list perhaps reflects a desire to pin down his largely oral sources in a Western scholarly manner. Taking for granted there was, in fact, a genuine list identifying the 'Thirty-Seven Nats', he became the first Western scholar to proffer one. He then concentrated his research on sorting out the chronology and genealogies of these nats, dividing them into 'cycles' according to their lineage and dynasty. This was a truly Herculean task given the confusion he records surrounding the identity of several nats and when they lived — a further indication of the uncertainty inherent in the narratives surrounding them.⁶⁰

However, Temple did in fact have an authentic list of nat Lords in his possession, which he overlooked at the time of writing his book. This important primary source is a handwritten copy of a royally commissioned inventory of the nats given to him by the woodcarver Maung Kyaw Yan, whose workshop created Temple's own collection of nat statues.⁶¹

The Inventory

This inventory of nat Lords (the *Inventory*), was undertaken by the Myawaddy Mingyi U Sa (1766-1853), who began his court career as a royal clerk and musician at the court of Bodawpaya (r. 1782-1819), and who himself composed many *natkyin* and *natthan* (songs recounting a nat's

⁵⁹ Temple, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, 34. The *Mahagita Medanigyan* is sometimes listed as another iteration of the Outside Thirty-Seven Lords by Myanmar authors (see Appendix D.1). Temple described the the *Mahagita Medanigyan* as "... [purporting] to be the book of odes to the Thirty-seven Nats, though, strictly speaking, it contains a series of short biographical and genealogical sketches in verse for recitation under spirit possession by female mediums (natkadaw) at the festivals. They are by way of being moralities, and are meant to impress on the audience the sins of treason, rebellion, and assassination." Richard Carnac Temple, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, vol. III (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), III, 36-7. For the different types of songs contained in the *Mahagita Medanigyan*, see University of Maryland Baltimore County, "The Maha Gita," <http://www.umbc.edu/eol/garfias/mahagita.html> (accessed February 2016). Pe Maung Tin provided an English translation of the *natkyin* for Yun Bayin Nat, the former King of Chiangmai in Pe Maung Tin, "Cultural Activities in Konbaung Period," *Myanmar Studies Journal* 3(2014): 13. A small selection of nat songs (in English and Burmese), including the musical notation, is given in Min Le Yi, *Myanmar Traditional Songs and Folk Culture* (Yangon: Thin Sape, 2014), 110-21.

⁶⁰ The nat Min Kyawzwa, no. 32 on Temple's list, is a good example. As Myanmar researcher Min Sithu notes, there are also nats known as Kyawzwange, Kyawzwa, Bo Min Kyaw, Min Kyawzwa and Mogaung Kyawzwa — any one of which may be the very popular nat now known as Pakhan U Min Kyaw. Min Sithu, *Myanmanaingngan Naqkòkwehmu Thamain Paunc'ouq* (Yangon, Pinya Shwe Taung, 2011), 292. The name U Min Kyaw also appears in the list of names of the Outside Thirty-Seven Nats displayed in the Shwezigon's nat pavilion. Min Kyawzwa is also commonly known as Ko Min Kyaw.

⁶¹ Maung Kyaw Yan, ၃၇မင်းနတ်စဉ်စာရင်း: (*Thouins'eh-k'niq Min Naq Sisayin*.) 1893, British Library, BUR MS 200. Hereafter cited as BUR MS 200.

previous life).⁶² Work on the *Inventory* commenced in 1805 and took 15 years to complete, and the result is the third of the four iterations of the Outside Thirty-Seven Lords recognised by Myanmar scholars, as shown in the table on page 11. The preamble to the *Inventory* states that the ancient traditions of the nat Lords were being recorded on the order of Crown Prince Thado Minzaw, in consultation with *natt'ein* and court musicians. These traditions included where and when their festivals were held, what the *natt'ein* wore, how they danced, and what the differences were for each nat.⁶³

Work on the *Inventory* appears to have been interrupted, possibly due to the deaths of both the Crown Prince and Bodawpaya. Then, after becoming Secretary Atinwun to Bagyidaw (r. 1819-37) in 1819, the Myawaddy Mingyi resumed work on the *Inventory* in collaboration with the Kawi Dewa Kyaw Thu (hereafter KDKT), who was the court's *Natt'eingyi* (head *natt'ein*), and two other historians. The preamble relates that together they compared accounts of four aspects of nat propitiation: the identities of the Thirty-Seven Nat Lords; the procedures followed at their offering festivals; the procedures followed by the festival musicians; and each nat's *nathan*. They eventually finalised their *Inventory* of these important cultural traditions in 1820, just prior to the moving of the royal capital from Amarapura to Inwa in 1821. The details they recorded were of grave importance, as the court specialists were concerned with ensuring the correct nats were propitiated for the safety of the new royal city — a concept discussed in Chapters 7 and 8.

It is highly likely that the list of nats given in the *Mahagita Medanigyan* that Temple used for his book followed the list given in the Myawaddy Mingyi's *Inventory*. Bekker also came to this conclusion, noting that the *Mahagita Medanigyan* was still available during her time in Myanmar. She wrote

“The Mahagita Medanigyan ... appears to have abstracted the nat songs from Myawaddy Mingyi U Sa's report. It is still the text used by natkadaws, mediums and singers in

⁶² U Sa became known as the Myawaddy Mingyi after Bagyidaw named him his Army Minister with Myawaddy as his fief. For a fuller biography of this remarkable man see Muriel C. Williamson, “A Biographical Note on Mya-wadi U Sa, Burmese poet and composer,” in *Musica Asiatica* 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), 151-4. See also Aung Moe, “Cultural: Konbaung Period Writers,” *Working People's Daily*, May 16, 1988. This is available online as part of the Burma Library, at <http://burmalibrary.org/docs3/BPS88-05.pdf> (accessed February 2016). A list of the Myawaddy Mingyi's achievements is also included in U Hpo Hlaing, *Rajadhammasangaha*, trans. L. E. Bagshawe (Myanmar: Sape U Publishing House, 1979), 18.

⁶³ BUR MS 200, 1.

Rangoon [Yangon]. The report also seems to be the basis for the many popular paperback books on the nats sold in great quantity in pagoda shops.”⁶⁴

Temple acquired his copy of the *Inventory* from Maung Kyaw Yan in 1893 and part of it was translated into English the following year, but whether this was done by Temple himself is unclear. Nevertheless, having come across the document after he had written *The Thirty-Seven Nats* and it had gone to press, Temple published the translation in the *Indian Antiquary* in 1906, in an article titled “A Native Account of the Thirty-Seven Nats: Being a Translation of a Rare Burmese Manuscript”. In his introduction he wrote

I very much regret that I overlooked the possession of this MS. and its translation when preparing [*The Thirty-Seven Nats*] as its contents would have been of material value to both. However, I now give the translation of the MS. in full for the benefit of students.⁶⁵

A puzzling aspect of Temple’s article lies in this last sentence, as what was published is far from being a full translation, nor a literally faithful one. While the translation’s faithfulness has more to do with the paraphrasing of the original Burmese into the style of English spoken at the time, a considerable amount of text from the *Inventory* was left out. In fact, only the first part of it was included in Temple’s article, and that was heavily abridged. Consequently, until now, a wealth of information on these nat Lords — including a comprehensive description of what their images looked like — has never been published in the Western literature.⁶⁶ These descriptions, and the consequences of Temple’s oversight of his carver’s manuscript, are discussed alongside Temple’s other visual sources in Chapter 7.

⁶⁴ Bekker, “Burmese Traditional Views,” 2 and 5. Myanmar scholar Khin Maung Than also records the same names in both sources. Khin Maung Than, *Yòya Naq Youncihmu*, 20-1.

⁶⁵ Richard Carnac Temple, “A Native Account of the Thirty-Seven Nats,” *Indian Antiquary* 35 (1906): 217.

⁶⁶ It is possible Temple intended to publish the rest of his copy of the *Inventory* in a future article, and simply never got around to doing so. His earlier *Indian Antiquary* article on the nats had been published in six separate issues. Similarly, his “Notes on Currency and Coinage among the Burmese” was also published in the *Indian Antiquary* across four separate issues. A bibliography of Temple’s writing on Burma is given in the 1991 Kiscadale republication of Temple’s book on pages VII-IX.

OTHER COLONIAL ERA WRITERS

At the other side of the temple, in a small wooden building, are two hideous stone figures of Nats, which appear to be also much revered. Mr Oldham said he could see no difference apparent between the worship offered to these figures, and that offered at the pagodas. Presentations were made of flowers, and food, and water, of gold leaf, &c., precisely as to the images of Gautama, and this by most of the worshippers who visited the large temple. Certain slaves are set apart for their care, and however contrary to the theory of Buddhist doctrine, they seemed to have more of reverence than the holy tooth in the adjoining pagoda.

Henry Yule, *A Narrative of the Mission Sent by the Governor-General of India to the Court of Ava in 1855*, 1858⁶⁷

Henry Yule was not the only Western visitor to Myanmar to be struck — and puzzled by — the apparent lack of separation between canonical Buddhism and the lived spiritual practices of the people, but he was one of the first to commit his thoughts to paper.⁶⁸ Other early colonial era memoirs, and papers published by scholars from the mid 1800s through to the present time, have also sought to define the place and role of the nats in relation to Buddhism, and whether or not the nats belong in discussions of Buddhism or its practice was, and still is, contested.⁶⁹ Regardless of the complexities of this particular discussion, the recording of different types of nat by colonial era writers provides an overview of how they understood these nats were viewed by local people.

⁶⁷ Henry Yule, *A Narrative of the Mission Sent by the Governor-General of India to the Court of Ava in 1855*, (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1858), 199. Yule saw these two nats at the Shwezigon at Bagan. They were probably Shwe Nyo Thin and Shwe Zaga, two of the guardians of the Shwezigon, whose images are discussed in Chapter 6.

⁶⁸ Paul Ambroise Bigandet's *The Life or Legend of Gaudama: The Buddha of the Burmese*, recognised, even in its title, that the Buddhism practised there was peculiar to the country. The local texts Bigandet translated are notable for their unremarked incorporation of *naga* within local Buddhist belief, alongside good and benevolent *dewa*, who are referred to throughout simply as 'nats'. Bigandet's translation also contains lengthy footnotes illuminating the original texts, drawn from his knowledge of local practice with an occasional quote from local informants. These make clear the belief in the existence of local malicious spirits that could, for example, cause illness. Paul Ambroise Bigandet, *The Life or Legend of Gaudama: The Buddha of the Burmese*, Vols. I and II (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1911 and 1912). The anecdote referred to is recorded in Vol. I, 130, footnote 1. In her discussion of Bigandet's translation, Schober remarked it was "significant because it recognised implicitly the 'local construction of meaning ... throughout Burma ... it was perhaps a first recognition of the local production of religious meaning, of lived religious practices as significant as the textual custodianship of Pāli orthodoxy." Juliane Schober, "Communities of Interpretation in the Study of Religion in Burma," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 39, no. 2 (2008): 257.

⁶⁹ Melford Spiro's dual religion hypothesis, which asserted the nat 'cult' is completely distinct from the practice of Buddhism in Myanmar, is probably the most discussed in the literature. Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism*, 264-80. Spiro argued that the belief in nats, their rituals, festivals and *natkadaw* comprised a distinctive religious system incompatible with Theravada Buddhism, and viewed them as two completely separate systems. In his later work, 1982's *Buddhism and Society*, he argued that the practice of Buddhism itself served as a general protection in a world viewed as dangerous, populated as it is with ghosts, demons, evil spirits and evil people. Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism*, xxx-xxxii; Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*, 11-12, 140-1, and 187 footnote 28.

The most comprehensive account of “Nats and Spirit Worship” during the British colonial era is given in the chapter by that name in *The Burman: His Life and Notions* by James George Scott, published in 1896. Using the pseudonym Shway Yoe, Scott described the local distinction between ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ nats:

As a simple matter of fact, it is undeniable that the propitiating of the nats is a question of daily concern to the lower class Burman, while the worship at the pagoda is only thought of once a week. For the nat may prove destructive and hostile at any time ... [there are] two distinct kinds of individuals ... the inhabitants of the six inferior heavens, properly called dewahs ... Perfectly distinct from these are the nats of the house, the air, the water, the forest — the spirits of nature ...⁷⁰

Within his second “distinct” kind, Scott provided the earliest mention in the Western literature I have found of the ‘Thirty-Seven Nats’, writing “... they say there are thirty-seven distinct varieties, but Min-mahgayee [Min Mahagiri] rules them all.”⁷¹ In a rare comment on nat images from this period of Myanmar’s history, he observed that they were considered aesthetically unappealing by Western observers and “educated” local people alike:

It is particularly irritating to an educated Burman to see these absurd figures, which remind one of nothing so much as the fetiches of the prognathous African. Two gaudily dressed puppets, masquerading with spire-like crown, and royal, sharp-pointed swords, represent the much-feared nats, Shway Pyin-gyee and Shway Pyinngge, the Nyee-daw, Noug-daw, the Royal Younger Brother and the Royal Elder Brother, who command much respect in the neighbourhood of Mandalay and in Upper Burma generally. A still more dreaded spirit is one whose representation figures in a shrine at [Tagaung], one of the ancient capitals of the country, half way between Mandalay and Bhamaw. He appears simply as a head on a post, four feet high or thereabouts. A spire-like crown rests on his head, his eyes protrude and goggle in semi-globular wrath, asinine ears and a Punch-like nose complete the likeness, for he has no mouth, and his body is that of a dragon.⁷²

Although it appears Scott was rather contemptuous of the respect and fear felt by local people towards this nat, his description does reflect the cultural milieu in which nat images like these operated. A more comprehensive description was given by Brown, who photographed this “dreaded spirit” (Fig. 17). He recorded the nat’s image as a huge log rising from the ground, measuring over four feet and covered with gold leaf, writing

⁷⁰ Shway Yoe, *The Burman*, 229-30.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 232.

The features are grotesque in the extreme: bulging eyes, a long-bridged nose with exaggerated nostrils, a very short chin, and no mouth. Between the eyes, one below another, are three leaf-like ornaments curling forwards and suggestive of a dragon's crest. Below the chin is what may be the conventional representation of a beard. The ears are also conventional, somewhat in the shape of tails. The headdress is a five-storied tiara.⁷³

This same image was recorded in the 1922-23 *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India* as “one of the most powerful nats or spirits in the whole country.”⁷⁴ It was said to be an exact replacement for the “previous and ancient one” that had perished, carved from a thick teak post and partially buried, with its tail coming up through the ground some way from its shrine.

These records of nats important to their communities highlight the centrality of spiritual imagery in the culture of the period, a feature of life in Myanmar that continues today. There is still an image in the shrine at Tagaung, shown at Fig. 18, showing how closely this newer image again has followed the earlier prototypes. The carvers of many modern nat images continue to follow in their predecessor's footsteps, a tradition examined more closely in Chapter 4.

20TH CENTURY ENGLISH LANGUAGE LITERATURE

Later English language literature continued to frame discussion of the nats in relation to canonical Buddhism, while further teasing out local understanding of the different kinds of nat. For example, local scholar and President of the Burma Research Society, Dr Htin Aung, observed that although people in Myanmar practised Buddhism, many resorted to nat propitiation for safety and success in their mundane life. His book on Burmese spiritual views, *Folk Elements in Burmese Buddhism*, was published in 1959 under the name Maung Htin Aung. Like Temple, Htin Aung concentrated on the nats listed in the Myawaddy Mingyi's *Inventory*, citing it as “the final official list.”⁷⁵ He gave descriptions of iconography and attributes familiar

⁷³ Brown, “The Dragon of Tagaung,” 741-2. Brown recorded the legend of the nat and how afraid of it the local people were. Prior to the British annexation of Upper Myanmar, the Tagaung Bo Bo Gyi's *natt'ein* was appointed by the king. This office, along with the nat's annual festival, fell into abeyance with the loss of royal patronage.

⁷⁴ *Annual Report (Archaeological Survey of India)* (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1923), 121-2.

⁷⁵ Maung Htin Aung, *Folk Elements*, 4-5 and 84. Htin Aung considered nat propitiation to be a ‘folk element’ existing within Myanmar Buddhism, practised alongside astrology and alchemy. The content of *Folk Elements* was originally given as lectures to the Burma Research Society between 1952 and 1957. *Ibid.*, vii.

from Temple's publication (which he cited), such as the convention of portraying the nat Lords Taung Magyi and Myauk Min Shin Hpyu with six arms each, but assessed the nat images he believed were set up on the platform of the Shwezigon by Anawrahta as "crude and primitive."⁷⁶ As *Folk Elements* is also invariably included in bibliographies and reference lists of Western writers on the nats, the list of nats given by both Htin Aung and Temple appears, on face value, definitive as the Thirty-Seven; however Htin Aung did provide the names of 12 other nats recognised by the hereditary attendants of the Shwezigon's nat pavilion, and, like Temple, recognised the dynamic nature of their identities.⁷⁷

One of the other sources cited in Htin Aung's bibliography, Po Kya's *Thòuns'eh-k'niq Mìn* (37 Lords), provides greater detail on the different pantheons and nat iconography, but has been overlooked by Western scholars, probably because it is written in Burmese.⁷⁸ Myanmar scholar Po Kya (1891-1942) was a prolific writer, educator and the Inspector of National Schools between 1922 and 1942. His book on the nats was first published a mere 20 years after Temple's *The Thirty-Seven Nats*. Unlike Temple, Po Kya provides a succinct account of the three different pantheons written in the vein of a simple descriptive study. Po Kya lists the names of the nats included in each, provides an explanation of where they were drawn from, and where the images of the Inside and Outside Thirty-Seven Lords at Bagan's Shwezigon *pāyà* were placed in relation to the *zedi* itself. He also gives an account of the iconography of the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords, and of the Outside Thirty-Seven written about by Temple and Htin Aung. Po Kya's *Thòun-s'eh-k'niq Mìn* is the earliest Burmese language text I am aware of that clearly explains the three different pantheons of Buddhist, Inside and Outside Thirty-Seven Lords, but unfortunately this information was not included in Htin Aung's *Folk Elements*.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 84.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 84 and 107-9. Htin Aung gave the list of nat names in their English translations, rather than the original Burmese language name. Their corresponding Burmese names are given in Appendix E.

⁷⁸ Po Kya, *Thòuns'eh-k'niq Mìn*, (Yangon: Parami Sape, 1999). I thank Wai Phyo Maung from Yangon's Inya Institute for sending me a copy of this text. U Po Kya consulted a range of material to support his research, from palm leaf manuscripts penned by court officials to Buddhist scriptures, as well as Temple's book and magazine articles, and his book is cited by most of the Myanmar writers and scholars I consulted. As I found with many other Burmese language texts, Po Kya's sources, listed on pages 143-6, are not cited in endnotes or footnotes. Unfortunately the 1999 edition does not give the date of the original publication, but Po Kya is known to have been active as a writer from the 1930s up to his death. I presume a date of 1937, as an edition of that date is listed in Htin Aung's bibliography. Maung Htin Aung, *Folk Elements*, 140.

Had Po Kya's record of the different pantheons been included in *Folk Elements*, the conclusions drawn by anthropologist Melford Spiro (1920-2014) may well have been very different. *Burmese Supernaturalism*, Spiro's comprehensive study of an Upper Myanmar village in the early 1960s, is the most widely known and cited anthropological work on the nats. Like many other scholars, Spiro cited Temple and Htin Aung on the 'Thirty-Seven Nats', but emphasised that the term 'thirty-seven' was not to be taken in a literal, numerical sense. Spiro was, however, the first Western scholar to record the difference between the Inside and Outside Thirty-Seven, explaining "a further distinction must be made between the "inside" (*ātwin*) and the "outside" (*āpyin*) Thirty-Seven nats." Yet only a few of Spiro's informants were able to explain the differences between them, and those that did have an explanation told him that the Inside Thirty-Seven consisted of those included in the "royal list of nats, and whose cultus, therefore, was ordained by the kings", while the Outside Thirty-Seven were nats not included on "one of the royal lists of nats." Some of Spiro's informants added a further distinction — that although both Inside and Outside nats died violently, the latter were not murdered; some drowned, some fell from trees or died from other accidents.⁷⁹ Spiro found, as did I, that both the concept and explanation of 'the Thirty-Seven' can vary considerably from informant to informant.

Spiro was one of the first scholars to highlight the similarities between the structure of Myanmar's traditional government and that of the nat hierarchy (as he understood it). Because the "fully elaborated cult" of the 'Thirty-Seven Nats' had, he believed, developed after the traditional state, he concluded that the "nat structure" (ie, the 'Thirty-Seven Nats'), was patterned after the political structure.⁸⁰ Spiro's view was strengthened after reading H. L. Shorto's analysis of the Lower Myanmar Mon kingdom centred on Thaton, whose structure Shorto argued was modelled on *Tawadeintha* heaven, the home of 33 *dewa* nats headed by Thakya Min.⁸¹ Spiro argued that as the political order for Upper Myanmar was modelled on Hindu/Buddhist cosmology, which places Mt Myinmo (in Pāli, Sineru, or more commonly Mt

⁷⁹ Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism*, 8, 25 and 52. Spiro's study was of a small village of 146 households about 10 miles from Mandalay, to which he gave the pseudonym "Leigy".

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁸¹ H. L. Shorto, "The "Dewatau Sotapan": A Mon Prototype of the 37 "Nats", " *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* (1967): 131. Although Shorto's analysis was of a Mon text, the context here is about similarities between Upper and Lower Myanmar. Whether the Mon kingdom's *dewatau sotopan* were actually the forerunners of the 'Thirty-Seven Nats', or vice versa, is not determinable on the extant evidence. It is rather a moot point given belief in terrestrial spirits was, and still is, widespread throughout Southeast Asia and the wider Asian region.

Meru), at the centre of the universe, the political order became the model “for the nat order”. Following Htin Aung, Spiro also suggested that the “nat structure” — the “Thirty-Seven Nats” — was instituted by Myanmar’s kings. This suggestion came from two cited instances of a king bestowing a fief on a nat, from which rather flimsy evidence he proposed that “each of the Thirty-Seven nats acquired an extensive region in fief through a royal edict.”⁸² In contrast, when writing in the context of the nat Lords’ “overlordship”, Htin Aung had noted that although Min Mahagiri, the Taungbyon Brothers and Aung Pyi were given their fiefs by Myanmar kings, all the others were made Lords by popular consent, a view supported by the royal commissioning of the *Inventory* and the more modern definition in the *Myanmar-English Dictionary*.⁸³ Nevertheless, Spiro’s conclusions have reverberated through subsequent lay and scholarly writing on the nats, and will be analysed in greater detail later in the text.

When it came to nat imagery, Spiro had little to say, beyond recording the existence of the customary white horse statue representing Myin Hpyu Shin, the well-known nat Lord from Upper Myanmar and the guardian nat of the village he studied. This is also the case with other anthropological studies, which generally only mention nat images in passing, with no description or analysis of their iconography, despite their centrality in ritual practice.⁸⁴ One exception is Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière’s 1989 publication, *Les Rituels de Possession En Birmanie*. She included an table recording, in brief, the iconographical elements of the principal nats discussed in her text: their costume; what colour it was; the attributes each nat held; their hairstyle; and whether they stood or sat on a mount.⁸⁵ However, her later articles concentrate on

⁸² Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism*, 131-38.

⁸³ Maung Htin Aung, *Folk Elements*, 105; *The Dictionary*, 236. To date, Maung Htin Aung’s view on how the nat Lords were appointed has not been adopted by Western scholars.

⁸⁴ See, for example: Manning Nash, “Ritual and Ceremonial Cycle in Upper Burma,” in *Anthropological Studies in Theravada Buddhism* (Yale: Yale University, 1966); E. Michael Mendelson, “A Messianic Buddhist Association in Upper Burma,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London 24, no. 3 (1961): 560-80. More recently, Robert deCaroli argued that all evidence of contact between Buddhism and spirit religions has had to be explained in terms of conflict or reluctant concessions to the masses. He argues that the primacy of Buddhist text was achieved at the expense of the problematic physical evidence of spirit cults — such as their abundant images. Robert DeCaroli, *Haunting the Buddha: Indian Popular Religions and the Formation of Buddhism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 7.

⁸⁵ Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière, *Les Rituels De Possession En Birmanie: Du Culte D’etat Aux Ceremonies Privees* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1989), 197.

the modern rituals conducted for the nats (whether members of the Outside Thirty-Seven Lords or not), and if mentioned, the statues are only briefly described.⁸⁶

Situating discussion of the nats firmly in relation to textual Buddhism is an approach critiqued by later scholars, including Brac de la Perrière. Interpretations of Myanmar's spiritual practices now emphasise a more indigenous expression of Theravada Buddhism, encompassed by a wider anthropological and historical discourse.⁸⁷ Certainly the ongoing dynamism of Buddhist belief across Southeast Asia is recognised by scholars of neighbouring Southeast Asian countries. Several have viewed the spiritual field of the countries they studied as a whole, and included autochthonous spirit recognition and propitiation in their analyses. For example, Humanities Professor John Holt researched the spirits of place woven into Laos Buddhism; Elizabeth Guthrie's doctoral thesis examines belief in Wathoundaye, the Buddhist earth deity, throughout Southeast Asia; and anthropologist Marlane Guelden has published two books examining Thailand's spirits.⁸⁸ The work of these scholars not only allows us to understand the nats as part of a wider Southeast Asian spiritual phenomenon, but as one that has a unique expression in the material culture of the region, as recorded in the art historical literature.

THE ART HISTORICAL LITERATURE

Although the two World Wars and the socialist era between 1962 and 1988 had a negative impact on scholarship in Myanmar, and access to the country was extremely limited prior to

⁸⁶ See, for example, Perrière, "Royal Images," 99-106; and Perrière, "The Taungbyon Festival," 65-89. This is not unexpected as Brac de la Perrière's research is focussed on the sociological/anthropological aspects of modern nat ritual, rather than the physical appearance or creation of nat images.

⁸⁷ See, for example, Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière, "An Overview of the Field of Religion in Burmese Studies," *Asian Ethnology* 68, no. 2 (2009): 196. Brac de la Perrière's objective for this paper, given on page 188, was "to show not only that the scholarly construction of Burmese religion diverges from the current trend of anthropological studies of Buddhist societies, but also that it coincides with the dominant Burmese discourse on identity and religion." She argues that the dynamism and complexity of religious practice in Myanmar has been concealed by the pervasive model that Myanmar identity and authority is situated in orthodox Buddhism. Juliane Schober argues that following on from colonial constructions of animism, the interpretation of Myanmar religious belief moved to anthropological and historical discussions, from which emerged an emphasis on localised articulations of Theravada Buddhism. Schober, "Communities of Interpretation," 255.

⁸⁸ John Clifford Holt, *Spirits of the Place* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009). Holt argues that a distinction was made between religion and superstition based on political considerations. Elizabeth Guthrie, "A Study of the History and Cult of the Buddhist Earth Deity in Mainland Southeast Asia" (PhD diss., University of Canterbury, 2004). Elizabeth Guelden, *Thailand: Into the Spirit World* (Singapore: Times Editions Pte. Ltd., 1995). Elizabeth Guelden, *Thailand: Spirits among Us* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish International (Asia) Private Limited, 2007).

1994, a surprising amount of art historical material relating to Myanmar was produced by Western scholars in the latter half of the 20th century.⁸⁹ Today, easier travel to and within the country and the growing interest in its culture is reflected by the publication of a number of recent texts, although nat imagery is still considerably overshadowed by a focus on the country's archaeology, Buddhist art and architecture, or on specialist artforms such as lacquerware and textiles.

The art historical literature produced by British and Myanmar colonial era scholars overwhelmingly focused on Myanmar's epigraphy and its Buddhist monuments and art. Their work was published in countless journal articles, and in volumes of the *Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)*. Undoubtedly the best-known publication is historian Gordon H. Luce's (1889–1979) *Old Burma – Early Pagan (OBEP)*, published in 1969.⁹⁰ Images of the 'lower' nats do make occasional appearances in these texts, usually in the context of wider archaeological enquiries, and other images will be discussed in coming chapters. It is notable, however, that even prominent Myanmar researchers writing and publishing in English overlooked the nat imagery that was so much a part of daily life. This could well reflect the academic environment of the time and the primacy of Buddhism over the belief in local spirits, as exemplified by Htin Aung's *Folk Elements*; or it may be that these examples of Myanmar's material culture were simply not seen as important. This lack of focus, and the absence, until now, of an art historical

⁸⁹ The difficulties of surveying Myanmar's art during the 20th century in comparison to neighbouring countries is reflected in Sherman E. Lee's 1988 publication, which omits Myanmar entirely. Sherman E. Lee, *A History of Far Eastern Art*, Fourth ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1988). Note in particular the absence of Myanmar in his comparative timeline and map on pages 10-11 and 14-15.

⁹⁰ G. H. Luce, *Old Burma - Early Pagan*, Vols. I, II and III, New York: J.J. Augustin, 1969. Hereafter cited as *OBEP*. This focus continued into the 1990s and beyond, in Paul Strachan's *Imperial Pagan*, Pierre Pichard's *Inventory of Monuments at Pagan*, and in doctoral theses such as Charlotte Galloway's "Burmese Buddhist Imagery of the Early Bagan Period (1044-1113)" and Bob Hudson's "The Origins of Bagan", to mention just a few. Paul Strachan, *Imperial Pagan: Art and Architecture of Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1990); Pierre Pichard, *Inventory of Monuments at Pagan* (Gartmore: Kiscadale, 1992); Charlotte Galloway, "Burmese Buddhist Imagery of the Early Bagan Period (1044-1113)" (PhD diss., Australian National University, 2006); and Bob Hudson "The Origins of Bagan: The Archaeological Landscape of Upper Burma to AD 1300" (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 2004).

survey of nat imagery, has meant nat images in institutional collections are often poorly documented and understood.⁹¹

A case in point is a small image of what appears to be Popa Medaw, adorning a stupa-shaped offering vessel which forms part of a multi-piece shrine in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) (the figure appearing at the right of Fig. 19 and left of Fig. 20). This beautiful shrine, shown in its entirety at Fig. 21, was comprehensively analysed by art historian John Lowry for a V&A publication in 1974, however, his analysis lacked familiarity with nat iconography.⁹² Accordingly, artistic elements commonly found in representations of Popa Medaw — her distinctive *bilùmá* headdress and seated position on a representation of her home, Mt Popa — was not considered, and her image, and those of her companions on the two offering vessels, were all identified as traditional alchemists. Another example, from the collection of the Indian Museum in Kolkata, is shown at Fig. 22. This marble sculpture, seated in the conventionalised posture of guardianship known as *bilùt'ain* (literally, *bilù* sit), and holding an implement to his right shoulder, can be identified as one of the thousands of protective nat figures installed at Mandalay to protect the royal city and palace, as discussed in Chapter 8. It was, however, identified as a “royal or rich devotee” in the 2006 publication on the Museum’s collection.⁹³

Survey publications of Southeast Asian art also rarely include nat images, although Eastern art specialist Philip Rawson’s (1924-1995) *The Art of Southeast Asia*, first published in 1967, does include photographs of two of Temple’s carvings.⁹⁴ More recently, art historians researching Myanmar have concentrated on the culture and art of particular ethnic groups, on specialist

⁹¹ As much of the Myanmar art found in institutional collections, particularly in the United Kingdom, is the result of donations, institutional holdings naturally reflect the predilections of those donors who may not necessarily have been interested in nat imagery. See, for example, *Eclectic Collecting*, which features Myanmar art from the Denison Museum in the USA. It has seven chapters on textiles from different ethnicities, one chapter on lacquer and one on Buddha imagery. As the introduction notes, much of the collection is the result of “Denison’s Baptist past when many missionaries went out to Burma ...” Alexandra Green, ed., *Eclectic Collecting: Art from Burma in the Denison Museum* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), 1.

⁹² John Lowry, “A Burmese Buddhist Shrine,” *Victoria & Albert Museum Yearbook* 3 (1972): 117-32. See also John Lowry, *Burmese Art* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1974), 1.

⁹³ Asok K. Bhattacharya, *The Arts and Crafts of Myanmar* (Kolkata: Indian Museum, 2006), 27.

⁹⁴ Philip Rawson, *The Art of Southeast Asia* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2002), 164-5. Thames & Hudson’s more recent survey does not feature any nat images. Fiona Kerlogue, *Arts of Southeast Asia* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2004).

practices such as lacquer and textiles, or on particular aspects of Buddhist art. For example, in *The Shan: Culture, Art and Crafts* (2006), Susan Conway, art historian and Research Associate at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, examines the distinctive body of cultural material produced by the groups of ethnicities collectively referred to as the Shan, with an emphasis on dress and textiles. Although this comprehensive text explains the role of guardian and ancestor spirits and spirit doctors, and includes a detailed section on the use of protective tattoos and cloths — some of which feature nat figures — these are not described.⁹⁵ Similarly, art historian and educator Sylvia Fraser-Lu's seminal *Burmese Crafts: Past and Present* (1994), also includes an explanation of belief in the supernatural, and its contribution to the foundation of artistic traditions in Myanmar.⁹⁶ Several nat images accompany her text, some with brief descriptions of their identifying iconography — such as the characteristic buffalo headdress worn by the Lower Myanmar nat Nan Karine Medaw (Fig. 23).

Art historian and curator Alexandra Green has written extensively on Myanmar's wall paintings — in which largely anonymous *dewa* nats feature prominently in support of the Buddha — since 2001.⁹⁷ In her doctoral thesis she argued that there is a high level of correspondence between wall paintings and other art forms such as *Jātaka* plaques in the Bagan era; with similar construction of narrative displayed in murals, manuscripts and on lacquerware in later eras. This observed standardisation across media revealed, she argued, an emphasis on the spiritual content of the representations rather than the specific art form.⁹⁸ This emphasis on spiritual content is apparent too in Myanmar's three dimensional art, where posture and gesture referencing biographical narrative is a feature of statues of both the nats and the Buddha, as discussed in Chapter 4.

⁹⁵ Susan Conway, *The Shan: Culture, Art and Crafts* (Bangkok: River Books, 2006), 73-7. Conway provides an explanation for using the term 'Shan' as being geographically convenient in her Preface on page 7. For further discussion of ethnic textile traditions in Myanmar, see also Elizabeth Dell and Sandra Dudley, *Textiles from Burma* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2003). Myanmar's famous lacquerware has been well researched in the past decade. See Sylvia Fraser-Lu, *Burmese Lacquerware* (Bangkok: White Orchid Books, 2000); R. Isaacs and T. Richard Blurton, *Visions from the Golden Land: Burma and the Art of Lacquer* (London: British Museum Press, 2000); and Than Tun, *Lacquerware Journeys: The Untold Story of Burmese Lacquer* (Bangkok: River Books, 2013).

⁹⁶ Fraser-Lu, *Burmese Crafts*, 5-7.

⁹⁷ Green is currently the Henry Ginsburg Curator for Southeast Asia at the British Museum.

⁹⁸ Alexandra Green, "Buddhist Narrative in Burmese Murals," (PhD diss., University of London, 2001), 63-4.

The ‘lower’ nats have begun to make their presence felt in more recent art historical literature. In *Burmese Painting* (2009), writer and educator Andrew Ranard discusses the potential presence of the ‘lower’ nats in Bagan’s wall paintings, a possibility considered further in Chapter 5.⁹⁹ Art historian Donald Stadtner’s *Sacred Sites of Burma* (2011), makes multiple references to ‘lower’ nats and other supernaturals. He includes several nat images, but again these are only discussed within the context of the development of sacred sites and spiritual myths throughout Myanmar’s history. In *Ancient Pagan: Buddhist Plain of Merit* (2013), Stadtner further acknowledges the place and importance of the nats by including several shrines and images, but again these are presented as part of the overall religious setting rather than analysed as artworks in their own right.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, *Buddhist Art of Myanmar* — co-edited by Stadtner with Fraser-Lu and published in 2015 — includes captioned photographs of the Sule *pāyā*’s Bo Bo Gyi statue, the *weiza* Bo Min Gaung and one of the Buddhist nats, as well as explanatory text, but does not feature any images of nat Lords or other local guardian nats, possibly because these are so poorly understood.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, as in Green’s articles on temple paintings, and in so many other publications on Myanmar’s Buddhist art, the *dewa* nats are there, hidden in plain sight as supporting cast members within scenes where the Buddha is the focus.

Sarah Bekker (1923-2013) is the only art historian I have found who considered nat imagery as a corpus of artistic output and discussed their stylistic evolution. Bekker surveyed the statuettes within the Shwezigon’s nat pavilion in the 1980s, noting that they all appeared to be from different periods and made in different styles — observations supported by my own research, presented in Chapter 7. Her resulting article, “Transformation of the nats”, provided a brief, but classically art historical comparison of Temple’s nat statues with their predecessors in the Shwezigon’s pavilion. Bekker argued that changes in the way the nats were represented in art reflected a gradual process of humanisation. She concluded that by the time Temple’s carvings

⁹⁹ Andrew Ranard, *Burmese Painting: A Linear and Lateral History* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2009), 13-14.

¹⁰⁰ Stadtner, *Sacred Sites*, 2011; Donald Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan: A Plain of Merit*, (Bangkok: River Books, 2005). On page 39 of *Sacred Sites*, Stadtner writes that “To do justice to nat-worship and the countless nat-shrines would demand a separate book”, and invites readers to follow up the work of Brac de la Perrière and Francois Robinne.

¹⁰¹ Sylvia Fraser-Lu and Donald M. Stadtner eds., *Buddhist Art of Myanmar* (New York: Asia Society Museum, 2015). This publication accompanied a major exhibition at New York’s Asia Society Museum in 2015. The inside front cover features the scene usually known as The Great Departure, showing the *dewa* nats holding up the hooves of the horse the Buddha is riding as he departs his palace to seek enlightenment. The exhibition did include a modern (2004) statue of one of the nat Lords from the collection of the Northern Illinois University, and this was featured on the Asia Society’s website. Asia Society, “Buddhist Art of Myanmar,” <http://asiasociety.org/new-york/exhibitions/buddhist-art-myanmar> (accessed 11 March 2016).

were created in 1894, the nats had lost much of their “strangeness and fearfulness”, and had undergone a transformation into a more human, indigenised, and therefore a “more tractable and predictable” set of beings. Whether this is how these images were viewed in the past is uncertain, but the iconographical development of the images themselves is informative. Bekker described the Shwezigon’s statuette of the nat Thonban Hla, Fig. 24, as sitting “in a sad attitude, with her right hand held to her breast, the traditional gesture for grief”, an illusion to her legendary death from a broken heart. In contrast, she described Temple’s carving, Fig. 25, as having “an extraordinary majesty. Her shoulders have the flame emblems of royalty, and she stands supported by a stocky, elephant-headed human, kneeling on his right knee. Though she still shows the gesture for grief, she stands proudly and regally.”¹⁰²

This rather dramatic stylistic evolution from the earlier Nyaungyan era figure in Fig. 24 reflects the iconography recorded in the Myawaddy Mingyi’s *Inventory*:

ဆင်ဘီလူးခံ။ နတ်ရုပ် မတ်တတ်။ လက်ယာကရင်ကိုပိုက်မဟန်။ လက်ဝဲက ကိုယ်မှါမြောင်ဟန်
ဆံကျင် မြိတ်ရစ် မြိတ်ခံများနှင့်။

Elephant *bilu* stand. Nat image stands upright. Right hand held to breast. Left hand down alongside body. Has a hairpin and a loose tress of hair.¹⁰³

These brief notational phrases summarise an accumulation of knowledge and understanding of the nat is to be depicted, while the style this has been expressed in developed over centuries. To fully understand this image and its stylistic evolution, we must turn to the historic and contemporary Myanmar texts on the nats, which reveal how the nats were conceptualised locally, rather than interpreted by outsiders.

¹⁰² Sarah M. Bekker, “Transformation of the Nats: The Humanisation Process in the Depiction of the Thirty-Seven Lords of Burma,” *Crossroads* 4 (1988): 40-5.

¹⁰³ BUR MS 200, 44.

BURMESE LANGUAGE PRIMARY SOURCES

Different types of nats feature in a wide range of Burmese language materials. These range from brief mentions on votive tablets and in temple glosses to the Royal Orders of Myanmar's kings and their court sponsored *yazawin* (Chronicles); from modern paperbacks relating the fabled exploits of the most popular nats to publications utilising primary sources. Although the oldest extant texts are unillustrated, they do provide a framework for understanding how the different types of nat were conceptualised in the past. This is particularly evident in the relationship Myanmar royalty had with the nats, as the country's kings and other elites were largely responsible for the creation of the material culture in which many of the nats are mentioned.

When concepts of heavenly deities, such as Thakya Min, or Man Nat (Mara, the tempter of the Buddha), arrived with the introduction of non-indigenous ideas, it appears that *dewa* and *yakkha* were originally reinterpreted in local, and hence more meaningful terms, simply as 'nats'.¹⁰⁴ The earliest textual evidence for the use of the word is found in an inscription containing eight lines of handwritten Archaic Burmese, on the reverse of a votive tablet made in the 12th century (Fig. 26). This was translated as 'spirit' by Luce:

| o | na lu so chu' te ..|.. siy (phla)n ka | lu te phle|t lu tecka e pucaw ra | **nat** te phlet ka
nat (..) | (e) pucaw ra | sansara |aphlet (phlet a)syak |yut ma su(i') ma |phlet (ph)lat (so) .

The boon I desire is this. When I die, if born as a man, (may I be) the object of worship by all men. If born as a spirit, (may I be) the object of worship by spirits. So often as I am born in Samsara, may I never be born to a mean existence (?).¹⁰⁵

The donor of this tablet wished to be reborn a 'higher' nat, worthy of worship by 'lower' nats, indicating a clear understanding of the existence of a hierarchy. Additionally, what is apparent from the votive tablet's inscription is that there was no need to use the Pāli loan word *dewa*, as there was a meaningful local word available to describe the concept of a supernatural being. Other Bagan era inscriptions commemorating the foundation of Buddhist monuments by

¹⁰⁴ On the interpretation of introduced religious notions, see John Brohm, "Buddhism and Animism in a Burmese Village," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 22, no. 2 (1963): 164.

¹⁰⁵ Luce, *OBEP*, Vol I, 76; Vol II, 23; Vol III plate 31. I am grateful to archaeologist Tilman Fräsch, who kindly confirmed Luce's reading of the inscription. DeCaroli also noted the early date of this inscription in DeCaroli, *Haunting the Buddha*, 150.

Myanmar royalty reference *dewa* nats too.¹⁰⁶ The ‘lower’ nats are also present in the literature of the Bagan era, with the female nat of Mount Popa having a *linga*, a style of verse with exact metre, rhyme and rhythm, composed in her honour by an unknown author. Although she is not named, the *linga* corresponds to the legend of Popa Medaw, the flower-eating *bilùamá* living on Mt Popa who falls in love with a servant of the king and is still widely propitiated in Upper Myanmar today (Fig. 27).¹⁰⁷ These examples from the Bagan era confirm a contemporary understanding of very different kinds of nats, even if we cannot be certain exactly how people at the time interacted with them.

A later but still early textual reference to nats at Bagan is given in an ink gloss written on one of the entrance walls to the Thetdaw *gu* (temple), Fig. 28 and detail. Dated to 1574, it gives an account of Kyanzittha (r. 1084-1112) and his queen, Abeyadana, and their encounter with a *nagà* who protected the King. Four sentences in this gloss refer to nats:

[The king and queen] also paid homage to the Triple Gems, and they requested Thakya Min who protects the Buddhist *Thathana* to bless them. The Nat Mahagiri, [Min Mahagiri] who resides on Mt Popa, and the monk Ashin Arahan, who lived at the Tuyin mountain, blessed the king and queen. Hence, the royal couple were so powerful and blessed with happiness ... The royal couple were so powerful because the Nats blessed them.¹⁰⁸

This coupling of Min Mahagiri with Shin Arahan, the monk credited with assisting Anawrahta in reinvigorating Buddhism as the predominant belief system in Myanmar, provides a link

¹⁰⁶ One such example is found in an early 15th century inscription regarding the building of a monastery and the dedication of land and trees in its support. The donor, the Queen of Mingaung I (r. 1401-22), shared the merit accrued by her meritorious act with all the nats: “May every creature inhabiting every region, from the highest abode of nats to the lowest *avici* hell, be benefited by this good deed. May our guardian nats also, and the guardian nats of the Religion, the earth, the trees, and all other nats of the universe, have their share of the merit.” Archaeological Survey of India, *Inscriptions of Pagan, Pinya and Ava* (Rangoon: Burmese Secretariat, 1899), 31-4. Mingaung I’s Queen was firstly the Queen of King Tarabya (r. 1401), then of his usurper Mingaung I (r. 1401-22), and finally Mohnyinthado (r. 1427-40).

¹⁰⁷ Khin Maung Nyunt gives an English translation of the *linga* to Mt Popa’s nat in Khin Maung Nyunt, *An Outline History of Myanmar Literature: Pagan Period to Konbaung Period* (Yangon: Sape Biman, 1999), 11. It is also included in Min Rama’s book on the nats, along with his interpretation (in Burmese). Min Rama. *Myanmahmu Ap’yaw-p’yaw Thòuns’eh-k’niq Min Nat Thihmouq P’weh Hnin Puzaw Pathaneh* (Yangon: Athaiq Awun Sa-pe, 1992), 19.

¹⁰⁸ The Thetdaw *gu* is numbered 1203 in Pierre Pichard, *Inventory of Monuments at Pagan, Vol. 5* (Gartmore: Kiscadale, 1992). The dating of the inscription is by reference to a second, contemporary ink gloss in the temple which is dated. My thanks to U Min Swe from the Archaeological Museum of Bagan, who brought it to my attention. A copy of the full text of the gloss, and its translation, is included in Appendix F.1. This is excerpted from Mya, *Apehyatana Loungu P’aya Ácaun Hnin Lăgàun Gu P’aya Átwinp’eqshi Mahayayingain Pànc’is’èyèyouqmyà Ácaun* (Bagan: date unknown). A translation was kindly provided by Maung Ne Lynn Aung, personal communication, December 17, 2015.

between powerful nature spirits and Buddhism. Both are situated on mountains — Mt Popa being famous as the home of Min Mahagiri and the home of the nat Popa Medaw, while Mt Tuyin is one of the four sites on which Anawrahta is believed to have enshrined replicas of a tooth relic given by Dhatusena, the Sri Lankan king.¹⁰⁹ Equally, the gloss is of interest as it describes the royal couple's happiness being due to the blessings of the prominent Buddhist monk alongside a 'higher' nat, Thakya Min, and a 'lower' nat, Min Mahagiri. This indicates that the 16th century donor responsible for the inscription was concerned with acknowledging the three different spheres of spiritual influence operating at the time.

Spiritual influences on the kingdom's affairs are also apparent in Myanmar's *yazawin*, the court-sponsored histories of the country's monarchs and kingdoms. These focus on the lineage and biographies of kings and place, with a strong fantastical element referencing magical objects and events. As noted by archeologist Elizabeth Moore, all the *yazawin* emphasise the lineage of place over familial descent, and this focus on retention of place has, in fact, provided a pointer for archaeologists' excavations of Myanmar's early urban settlements.¹¹⁰ Despite the late provenance of the more comprehensive *yazawin* such as the *Mahayazawingyi* (1724), and the *Hmannan Yazawin* (commissioned in 1829), they have been assessed by several historians and scholars as providing much factual evidence, and have formed the basis for many written histories of Myanmar. Royal interaction with Thakya Min and several prominent nat Lords

¹⁰⁹ The account of the arrival of Shin Araham at Anawrahta's court, and of the obtaining of the tooth relics from Sri Lanka, are related in the *Hmannan Yazawin*, known in its English translation as the *Glass Palace Chronicle*. The three sites enshrining the other tooth relic replicas are Mt Tangyi, and the Shwezigon and Lokananda *pāyà* at Bagan. *The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma*, trans. G. H. Luce and Pe Maung Tin (Rangoon: Rangoon University Press, 1960), 71-75 and 88-92. Hereafter cited as the *GPC*.

¹¹⁰ Elizabeth Moore, *Early Landscapes of Myanmar* (Bangkok: River Books Co. Ltd., 2007), 25. On the usefulness of the Chronicles to historians, see Colonel Henry Burney, who translated portions of the *Mahayazawingyi*, and observed that "the Burmese chronicles bear strong internal marks of authenticity." Cited in Arthur P. Phayre, *History of Burma* (London: Trubner & Co, 1883), v-vi. When writing his *History*, Phayre compared the annals of adjoining countries with contemporary events in the Chronicles, but noted, on page x, that "there are numerous events recorded in the histories of the countries that once formed the Burmese empire which no doubt are historically true, but which in the several chronicles have been hopelessly deranged in time." *Ibid.*, ix. G. E. Harvey found the chronology of the Chronicles reliable after the 11th century, and stated they were his main authority, commenting "It is impossible to study these, especially in conjunction with the other native records, without acquiring considerable respect for them." G. E. Harvey, *History of Burma: From the Earliest Times to 10 March 1824, the Beginning of the English Conquest* (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1967), xvi and xix. More recently, Victor Lieberman, in his assessment of the veracity of the *Mahayazawingyi*, concluded "that at least for the period c. 1580-1608, [it] enjoys a reassuring level of factual authenticity." Victor Lieberman, "How Reliable Is U Kala's Burmese Chronicle? Some New Comparisons," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 1986, no. 17 (1986): 247. Pe Maung Tin provides an overview of the various Chronicles extant at the time and a precis of their contents in his introduction to the *Glass Palace Chronicle*. Luce and Pe Maung Tin, *GPC*, ix-xxiii.

feature in both. They include the famous legend of Min Mahagiri and his sister, and record dialogues between Min Mahagiri and two kings — Kyanzittha and his grandson and successor, Alaungsithu (r. 1112-67), for whom Min Mahagiri acted as a teacher.¹¹¹ The *Hmannan Yazawin* relates that Min Mahagiri had once been a rich man's son; that Kyanzittha 'worshipped' the spirits when he ascended the throne; and that on three occasions the king was protected from danger by Min Mahagiri.¹¹² It also records the magical lineage and birth of the nat Lords Shwe Pyin Gyi and Shwe Pyin Ngeh, known as the Taungbyon Brothers, along with the legend of their death by Anawrahta's order and the establishment of their *natnàn* at the village of Taungbyon.¹¹³ This recording of the establishment of a *natnàn* suggests nat imagery may have been in place at Taungbyon during Anawrahta's reign in the 11th century, or the nats may of course have been represented aniconically or not at all.

Other nat Lords, along with *dewa*, *bilù* and local guardian nats, feature frequently in Myanmar's Royal Orders. The earliest extant Order referring to nats was issued by Bayinnaung (r. 1551-1581) on 6 September 1573, instructing that offerings be made to all local guardian spirits at every stop on the army's march to suppress a Karenni rebellion.¹¹⁴ Again, we cannot be sure that images or even shrines existed at that time, but it seems likely, given information as to the location of these guardian spirits would be required prior to the army's offerings being made.

Ensuring the royal city's guardian nats were well taken care of was the responsibility of the king right up until the demise of the monarchy in 1885 when images were very much present. In 1878, when Myanmar's last king, Thibaw (r. 1878-85), had been on the throne for only two months, one of his Ministers, the Yaw Mingyi U Hpo Hlaing, presented him with a treatise. Titled the *Yazadhammathingaha*, U Po Hlaing's discourse was on how government of the country should be undertaken. It advised the young king thus:

Whatever may be the spirits that protect the city, they only desire the prosperity of its king and officials and they rely upon the offerings of nat food that these kings and

¹¹¹ Kula, *Mahayazawincyi Pat'ama-ouq*, (Yangon: Myanma Thutethanathin, 1961); 145-6; 234; 229-30; *GPC*, 45-6, 107, 112.

¹¹² *GPC*, 105, 107.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 83-4.

¹¹⁴ Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma, AD 1598-1885, Part II, AD 1649-1750* (Kyoto: The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1985), 6-7. Although this volume was the second published, earlier orders omitted from Volume I were included at the beginning of Volume II. Other Royal Orders naming different nats are discussed in Chapter 6, in the context of the role the nats played in the affairs of the kingdom.

officials make to sustain their life. Along with the king and officials, such spirits protect the country's welfare in whatever business is being carried on ... the provision of the customary food offerings for the spirits must not be allowed to be neglected.¹¹⁵

These nat guardians were housed in a variety of locked *natkùn* in and around Mandalay Palace. The location and design of these *natkùn*, and the images inside them, were the result of careful enquiries by the Kawi Dewa Kyaw Thu (KDKT) — by then an elderly official in the court of Mindon Min — into their predecessors at Inwa and Amarapura. This strongly suggests three dimensional nat imagery was in existence at those locations, possibly as early as the 17th century.¹¹⁶

TEXTUAL CANONS FOR NAT IMAGERY

ဆင်ဖြူရှင်ကိုပိ တခုထွင်။ ခေါင်း၅လုံးနှင့် တလုံးခေါင်းမှာ ပေါက်ဆင်မျိုး တလုံးခေါင်းမှာ
ဟိုင်ဆင်မျိုး တလုံးခေါင်းမှာ ဟံဆင်မျိုး တလုံးခေါင်းမှာ တံဆင်မျိုး တလုံးခေါင်းမှာ
တယ်ဆင်မျိုး ထုလုပ်၍ ဆင်ကျော်ကုံးမှာ ကြာပွင့်ကြာပေါ်တွင်သစ်သာပွတ်လုပ်သည်။
ရွှေချမှစီဘူးတကောင်းတင်သည်။ ၎င်းအပေါ်ဗောင်သရဖူတင်သည် ကြာပွင့်အနား တီဖြူ
၄စင်းစိုက်သည်။ ဆင်အနားတွင်လည်း ရွှေမြူတာ ၄လုံးတည်ထားသည်။

White elephant image with five heads, one head a young kind of elephant, one head a tuskless kind of elephant, one head a kind of elephant with tusks just protruding, one head an elephant with a single short tusk, one head a long tusked kind of elephant; on the back of the elephant a lotus blossom made with smooth wood; place a long-necked water pot with glass mosaic embedded in gilding. Above this place a king's crown lotus

¹¹⁵ Hpo Hlaing, *Rajadhammasangaha*, 74 and 93. The *Yazadhammathingaha* (Rajadhammasangaha) was first published in 1915. The English translation cited was made in 2004 by L. E. Bagshawe of Maung Htin's 1979 edition, which includes Maung Htin's biographical preface of Hpo Hlaing. Maung Htin cited the *Mahanibbana Sutta* as the basis for seven rules for progress: consultation in a body; acting by consensus; behaviour in accordance with the law; respect for the admonishments of superiors; no oppression of women; respecting the rites of the spirit guardians of the towns and villages; and protection for the *saṅgha*.

¹¹⁶ Sithu Maung Maung Kyaw, *Mandalé-myó Teh-nànti Sadàn*, (Mandalay, Yadanadipan Press, 1959). Hereafter cited as SMMK, *Foundation Report*. My thanks to Francois Tainturier for supplying me with a copy of the relevant parts of this report. As he notes in his thesis, this text appears to reproduce the *parabaiq* written by the KDKT, but the numbering system used by the library seemed to have changed since the *parabaiq* was first consulted by Brac de la Perrière in 2005, making the identification of its whereabouts difficult. Tainturier, "The Foundation of Mandalay," 91 footnote 65. Brac de la Perrière analysed the original *parabaiq* in relation to the ritual surrounding the 'Thirty-Seven nats' and my reading of the text differs from hers at times. For example, she writes of a *tazaung* containing 14 bronze images at an unspecified entrance to the city; my reading of the same passage in the *Foundation Report* describes images of Sandi Nat, made from pure copper, placed at each of the 12 gates to the city. A more focused comparison of the two texts would be useful. Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière, "A Presentation of a Parabaiq Written by Kawi Dewa Kyaw Thu, Ritual Officer at King Mindon's Court," in *Myanmar Historical Commission Conference Proceedings* (Yangon: Myanmar Historical Commission, 2005): 221.

blossom, at the edge place four white umbrellas. Place near the elephant four golden toddy pots.¹¹⁷

ဆင်ဖြူရုပ်ကိုယ် တခုတွင်။ ခေါင်း၅လုံး။ ခေါင်းမှာပေါက် ဆင်မျိုးတလုံး ခေါင်းမှာ ဟိုင်းဆင်မျိုးတလုံး ခေါင်းမှာ တံဆင်မျိုးတလုံး ခေါင်းမှာ တယ်ဆင်မျိုးတလုံး တုလုပ်၍ ဆင်ကျောက်ကုန်မှာ ကြာပွင့်ကြာပေါ် သစ်သားကိုပွတ်လုပ်သည်။ ရွှေချမှံစီဘူးတကောင်း တင်သည်။ ၎င်းအပေါ်။ ပေါင်းသရဘူတင်သည်။ ကြာပွင့်အနား။ တီဖြူ ၄စင်းစိုက်သည်။ ဆင်အနားတွင်လည်း။ တီဖူး ၄စ။ ရွှေမြူတာ ၄လုံးတားသည်။

On a white elephant body, five heads. One kind a young elephant, one kind a tuskless elephant, one kind an elephant with a single short tusk, one kind an elephant with a single long tusk, then on the back of the elephant make a smooth wooden lotus blossom, put a long necked water pot with glass mosaic embedded in gilding. Then put a turban crown. Near the lotus blossom set up four straight white umbrellas. Near the elephant four white umbrellas, place four golden toddy pots.¹¹⁸

ဆင်ခေါင်း ၅လုံး အနက် တလုံးဟန်၊ တလုံတန်၊ တလုံ ပေါက်၊ တလုံး ဟိုင်း၊ တလုံးတည် အစဉ်အတိုင်း ထုလုပ်၍ဆင်ငွေပိန်းချ။ ခြေသည်း လက်သည်း အာပေါင် အစွယ် ဟသီပဒါးသုတ်။ ကြိုးတန်းဆာရွှေချ။ ဆင်ကျောပေါ်တွင် ကြာပွင့်ရွှေပိန်းကျ။ ကျောပေါ်တွင် ယမနေသားကိုလုပ်သည့် နတ်ဘူးတကောင်းလည်တန်ရှည် ၁ မိုက်၊ ၄ လက်သစ်။ ရွှေပိန်းချ။ ဘူးတကောင်းပေါ်တွင် သိကြားတန်ဆာမိုဋ်သရဖူမှန်စီရွှေပိန်းချ။ ကြာပွင့်တွင် ငွေပိန်းချ။ ထီးဖြူ ၄စင်း...

Elephant has five black heads, one head tusks just protruding, one head with a single tusk, one head young, one head tuskless, one head a single long tusk in order, image painted silver colour. Fingers and toes, tusks painted with *hinthapada*. Elephant harness *shwekya*. On top of the elephant a golden lotus blossom. Make from *yamane*, long necked nat pots 1 *maiq* 4 *leqthiq*. Paint gold. On top of the pots Thakya crown painted golden with mirror decoration. Lotus blossom painted silver. Four white umbrellas ...¹¹⁹

At 3.00 p.m. on the second day of the waxing moon of the month of Nattaw, Myanmar Era 1196 (1834 CE), towards the end of Bagyidaw’s reign, an unknown person copied a Burmese language treatise titled *၃၇မင်းနတ်စည်စာရင်း* (*Inventory [or Account] of the Thirty-Seven Nat Lords*), from which the first extract quoted above, recording the iconography of the nat Lord, Ngazsishin, is taken. A copy of this treatise on European paper forms part of a document now included in the Cambridge University Library’s collection of the papers of Colonial Henry

¹¹⁷ “*Thoùns’eh-k’niq Min Nat Sisayin*,” in the Collection of Col. Henry Burney (Cambridge: Royal Commonwealth Society, Cambridge University Library, RCMS 65/8/35, 1834), 4. Hereafter cited as the Burney MS.
¹¹⁸ BUR MS 200, 45. Maung Kyaw Yan’s copy of the *Inventory* omits the fourth kind of elephant, the one with tusks just protruding.
¹¹⁹ SMMK, *Foundation Report*, 247.

Burney (1792-1845), the British Resident to the Inwa Court from 1830 to 1837 (the Burney MS). As the document begins with a copy of a *lùtā* (a style of literary verse) and ends with a copy of the first folio of a *parabaiq* on Bagyidaw's 15 *Natgyi*, I suspect the unknown copyist — probably Burney himself — was making a fair copy from an original Burmese source.¹²⁰ As Burney was fluent in Burmese and well acquainted with the Myawaddy Mingyi, it is likely he was working from the Myawaddy Mingyi's own documents. The text is almost identical to Maung Kyaw Yan's 1893 copy of the Myawaddy Mingyi's *Inventory* — from which the second extract given above is taken.

These are the nat Lords made famous in Temple's *The Thirty-Seven Nats*. The design of their bases, the type of wood used, the postures, iconography, and decoration accorded to each are all recorded in these documents, in what amounts to the first art historical survey of nat imagery ever undertaken. Both documents contain a wealth of fascinating detail for art historians, as there are notes for every nat Lord included in the 1820 iteration of the pantheon (see Table 1.1 on page 11). These notes not only prescribe the design of each nat image, but in some cases the measurements for the height and circumference of each statue. They also record the location of each nat's primary *natkùn* in 1820, including the locations of those at Amarapura, the royal capital at the time, and the direction they faced, an important consideration in a culture that places a great deal of weight on the underlying meanings of the cardinal directions.

The Burney MS provides a precis of the nats' legends, similar to what was translated and published by Temple in 1906. Maung Kyaw Yan's copy of the *Inventory* differs in that its first part contains far more detail on the legends and ceremonies for each nat, with the details on how each nat's statue was made provided separately, in what amounts to a second part. Even the preamble to this second part of the *Inventory* is significant, as it distinguishes the types of wood traditionally used for making nat sculptures. In particular it specifies that *sagàthà* (*sagà* wood), be used for images of “Mahagiri Maungdaw Hnamedaw” — the famous Brother and Sister nats

¹²⁰ The *lùtā* was composed during the reign of Mahadamayaza Dhipati (r. 1733-1752). The *parabaiq* listing Bagyidaw's 15 *Natgyi* is titled နတ်ကြီး၁၅ ပါ အမ်သညာ ဝရိဗာယ် (British Library, BUR MS 2 (formerly BUR MS 132)). Hereafter cited as BUR MS 2. I viewed this *parabaiq* and made a handwritten copy of it in April 2014.

usually known as Min Mahagiri and Hnamedaw Taungyi Shin — while the other nats were carved from three other types.¹²¹

Both documents are iconographical blueprints for 19th century artists creating imagery of the nat Lords, as seen in the painted illustration of Ngazishin's statue included in Temple's *The Thirty-Seven Nats* (Fig. 29). For today's art historians, they provide a securely dated description of how the nats were portrayed in at least one set of wooden carvings in the early 1800s — those at the locations listed in these texts. The 1820 iteration of the nat Lords was not, however, the last. As noted earlier, in 1856 the KDKT was again tasked with drawing up an inventory of nat Lords who would play a vital role in the protection of the new royal capital, Mandalay. The resulting *parabaiq* (hereafter the KDKT's *parabaiq*), records precise measurements for the building and placement of each *natkùn* in relation to the city's walls, including the direction they faced, underscoring the important links between the nats, direction and place.¹²²

The KDKT's *parabaiq* and the *Inventory* are known to Myanmar scholars and their contents have been partially published, although once again not in the context of an analysis of nat imagery or its surrounding visual culture. As the KDKT's *parabaiq* also records the iconography and measurements of several nat statues featured in the *Inventory*, a comparison can be made. This reveals the development of Ngazishin's decoration, as seen in the third extract quoted above. Descriptions of many of the nat images recorded in these documents will be discussed in greater detail in coming chapters.

20TH CENTURY BURMESE LANGUAGE LITERATURE

The main difference between Western and local publications is that Myanmar's scholars have been able to research and incorporate older local texts, such as those described above, into their work, and frequently name the people with specialist knowledge, such as *natt'ein*, who they consulted during their research. Unfortunately, although many of the 20th and 21st century

¹²¹ BUR MS 200, 40. The *sagà* tree, *Michaelia champaca*, is the tree that Min Mahagiri and his sister were tied to then burned alive, subsequently becoming nats. This information may be useful in the future in assessing the time period in which carvings of nats were created.

¹²² SMMK, *Foundation Report*, 242-68.

publications I obtained gave their sources, this was not done in the usual Western academic manner via footnotes or endnotes, making it extremely difficult to filter the information and assess its provenance.

Not surprisingly, the modern Myanmar literature on the nats provides a very different viewpoint to that of the foreign observers and scholars surveyed earlier. Local texts write about the nats as a traditional and commonplace aspect of Myanmar culture, but the focus is still more on their creation legends and the characteristics of the rituals surrounding them, rather than their images, and many are unillustrated. Most name the Thirty-Seven Buddhist Lords, and clearly spell out the distinction between the pantheons of Inside and Outside Thirty-Seven Lords, important detail sorely lacking in the Western literature. Most provide lists of the nat Lords as far back as Pindale Min's mid-17th century pantheon (see Table 1.1 on page 11), and provide information on the many important nats not included in any of the pantheons. However, the information presented is rarely commented upon or analysed. For example, most of the authors cited throughout my thesis name the nats and note the changes made in the iterations of the pantheon, but do not speculate why the changes were made or how the pantheon evolved.¹²³ This may indicate tacit acceptance of the lack of certainty around how the pantheons came into existence and how they were understood in the past.

When Sarah Bekker was conducting her research in Myanmar in the 1980s, she noted that the *Mahagita Medanigyan*, Temple's primary textual source, was still being used by *natkadaw*, and it seemed to be "... the basis for the many popular paperback books on the nats sold in great quantity at pagoda shops", thereby perpetuating the 1820 iteration of the pantheon as definitive.¹²⁴ Indeed, one of the books available at that time, *Nat Thamain*, included a partial translation of Temple's *The Thirty-Seven Nats* into Burmese, although this was first published, in 1981, without the illustrations in Temple's original.¹²⁵ The more recent second edition of *Nat Thamain*, published in 2013, features small black and white outline illustrations taken from the

¹²³ The information included varies from publication to publication, with Min Sithu's and Khin Maung Than's the most comprehensive books consulted. Both provide the legends of the main nats propitiated in Myanmar, their *natkyin* and *natthan*, accounts of the paraphernalia required to host their *natpwèh*, and a discussion of the *Natgyi*. Min Sithu, *Naqkòkwehmu Thamain*, 2011; Khin Maung Than, *Yòya Naq Youncihmu*, 2001.

¹²⁴ Bekker, "Burmese Traditional Views," 5.

¹²⁵ Herbert in Temple, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, I.

parabaiq featured as the front endpapers of Temple's book, as well as the black and white illustrations featured as the endpapers, as well as black and white drawings of other featured images.¹²⁶

The text and illustrations included in Temple's book — now widely available in Myanmar as a pirate photocopy — have gone on to become an important source for both local authors and artists. The front endpapers of local author Khin Maung Than's 2001 book features a set of black and white illustrations made by artist and author Noel Singer, described as being based on those in Temple's book, but combined with a traditional Myanmar style (Fig. 30).¹²⁷ These are almost identical to those drawn by Singer for the front endpapers of *Nat-Pwe* (1992), an account of the nats written by Yves Rodrigue (1923-2016), the French Ambassador to Burma between 1984 and 1987.¹²⁸ Local author Pyo Thara's 2010 book on the nats also includes Singer's illustrations, but are a direct copy of those in *Nat-Pwe*.¹²⁹ The likely model for Singer's interpretation of Min Mahagiri, another image included in Temple's *The Thirty-Seven Nats*, is discussed further in Chapter 7, in my analysis of Temple's visual sources.

Alongside Khin Maung Than's 2001 text, Min Sithu's *Myanma Nainngan Naqkòkwehhamu Thamain Paùnc'ouq* is probably the most thoroughly researched text by a local author, with an impressive bibliography. It also draws on the imagery used by Temple — the front endpapers to the second edition, published in 2011, are full colour reproductions of the *parabaiq* paintings from Temple's book's front endpapers. It also includes black and white line drawings of these

¹²⁶ *Nat Thamain: Myanmá Miyòp'aladalé*, Bathapyan Û T'wè Han, Thútethi Û Ba Nyún. Yangon: Û Aun Kyi, Shwe Púrabaiq Sape, 2013. It also features drawings made in two different styles, but these are uncredited. The foreword to this second edition describes Temple's book as being rare, and because of this, and its size, people were not able to borrow it from a library. The translation was therefore done for the use of students and researchers, and the authors noted the difficulty of reproducing the pictures in Temple's book.

¹²⁷ Khin Maung Than, *Yöya Naq Youncihmu*, 3. Khin Maung Than's 2006 book features black and white photographs of modern nat statues, and he makes the point that most of the nats propitiated do not feature in the pantheon of Outside Thirty-Seven Lords. Khin Maung Than, *Ayuthihmu Naqkòkwehhamu Hnin Seiqpanyashät'aun*. Yangon: *Pinwàyoún Sape* (2006); Khin Maung Than, "Outside Thirty-Seven," 47-53.

¹²⁸ Yves Rodrigue, *Nat-Pwe: Burma's Supernatural Sub-Culture* (Scotland, Kiscadale Publications, 1991). Rodrigue's book draws heavily on Temple's *Thirty-Seven Nats* and Maung Htin Aung's *Folk Elements*. Noel Singer has contributed several articles and illustrations to the journal *Arts of Asia*, which he helped found. See, for example, Noel Singer, "The Ramayana at the Burmese Court", *Arts of Asia* 6 (1989); and Noel Singer, "Royal Ancestral Images of Myanmar," *Arts of Asia* 24, no. 3 (1994). Yves Rodrigue's biography is given at "Rodrigue Yves", Académie des Sciences d'Outre-Mer, accessed 2 May 2018, <http://www.academieoutremer.fr/academiciens/fiche.php?ald=197>

¹²⁹ Pyo Thara. *Nat A'caun Thikaùn P'weya*. (Yangon: *Seiqkùc'oc'o Sape*, 2010). Pyo Thara's sources are listed, on pages 283-4, as the 1992 edition of Min Sithu's book, Po Kya's book, both Khin Maung Than's books, and "Paul Straehan [sic] Nat Puse [sic] - Rodrigues' Nat-Pwe."

scattered throughout the text.¹³⁰ In contrast, Sithu Myain's 2010 book on the nats, *Thòùns'eh-k'niq Mìn Hnín Tainyìntha Yòyanaqmya*, features original black and white drawings done by two of his daughters, which nevertheless adhere to the conventional iconography for each of the nat Lords, as prescribed in the *Inventory* and portrayed in Temple's book (Fig. 31).¹³¹ Yet despite the influence of this iconography, local artists are now interpreting the nats in more individualised terms, as discussed in Chapter 5.

S U M M A R Y

The academic gaze has focused primarily on understanding Myanmar's early societies, their adoption and localisation of Buddhism within the existing cultural base, its relationship to Buddhist scripture, and how this has been expressed in Buddhist art and architecture. Much of the early discourse on Myanmar spiritual practice was framed in reference to canonical Theravada Buddhism. This privileged doctrine over lived spiritual practice, and downplayed the importance of the role of the nats, other supernaturals and astrology played — and continue to play — in day-to-day life.¹³² Western anthropologists recorded and analysed the self-identity of their subjects, largely framed by reference to Buddhist belief, and the discourse on the nats became entangled in one of Buddhist self-identity. Yet locating the nats at the margins of Buddhism, as an animist superstition or a folk religion, obscures the important guardianship role they play in the lives of both the historic and contemporary people of Myanmar.

For the early Western visitors to Myanmar, the nats formed only a small part of the cultural background of a country saturated in Buddhist material culture. With the notable exception of Scott, Temple and Brown, most civil-servant scholars focused on Myanmar's history and archaeology, with the nats making only brief anecdotal appearances. While Scott was the first to

¹³⁰ Min Sithu, *Naqkòkwehmu Thamain*, 2011. Min Sithu's book was first published in three different parts in 1992.

¹³¹ Sithu Myain, *Thòùns'eh-k'niq Mìn hnín Tainyìntha Yòyanaqmyà* (Yangon: *S'upyisoúnt'un Sape*, 2010), 68.

¹³² In this regard, I found a notable parallel across the Bay of Bengal in W. T. Elmore's 1925 thesis on Dravidian deities. In his introduction, he lamented "... it seems somewhat strange that a great branch of nominal Hinduism has been very largely neglected ... the worship of local and village deities. It is estimated, and probably conservatively, that eighty per cent of the people of South India address their worship almost exclusively to such minor deities, and yet these deities receive little attention in studies of Hinduism. Often they are dismissed with a page or two, while the remainder of the treatment is given to the Brahmanic deities." W. T. Elmore, *Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism* (New Delhi : Asian Educational Services, 1984), ix.

record the cast of nats involved in people's lives, and recorded the "thirty-seven distinct varieties" with Min Mahagiri at their head, Temple was the first to define the 'Thirty-Seven Nats' as a 'royal pantheon' headed instead by Thakya Min.¹³³

Given the nats popularly referred to at the time as 'The Thirty-Seven Nats' were the focus of Temple's research, he was naturally concerned with obtaining what he believed existed — an authentic list. Although in 1820 and 1857 there were in fact two lists drawn up by court officials that can be deemed 'authentic' — the *Inventory* and the KDKT's *parabaiq* — outside the court setting the narratives of the nats were largely passed down orally.¹³⁴ This led to a considerably more fluid understanding of the identities and role of 'the Thirty-Seven', as recorded by both Temple and Spiro, which continues today. Yet while Temple's list reflects his understandable concern for academic accuracy, the line he drew in the scholarly sand as to 'The Thirty-Seven Nats' has largely been perpetuated as the definitive pantheon to this day in the Western literature. This has come at the expense of not only Mindon Min's later pantheon as recorded in the KDKT's *parabaiq*, but also the Buddhist Thirty-Seven Lords and the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords, and the important roles they too play as spirits of place.

As demonstrated in this chapter, Temple's observations and the conclusions he drew informed much of the subsequent Western literature on the nats. Until now, this has therefore been written with reference to limited source material, relying primarily on texts in the English language. As a result, Western perception of the nats is skewed, and the many other important nats propitiated in Myanmar throughout history are largely ignored.¹³⁵ In contrast, the Burmese language literature provides a fuller account of the different types of nats and where their images are found. Yet despite this information being available, it remains largely overlooked by local scholars writing in English, and is completely overlooked in the Western literature.

As far as I am aware, the *Inventory*, the Burney MS, the *Mahagita Medanigyan* and the KDKT's *parabaiq* — all early 19th century texts — are the earliest extant primary sources that provide

¹³³ Shway Yoe, *The Burman*, 233. Temple, "Thirty-Seven Nats," 119. It seems that Scott's (Shway Yoe's) informants were aware of Mindon Min's pantheon of nat Lords (see Appendix H).

¹³⁴ See Appendix D.1 for the two lists of names.

¹³⁵ A notable exception is Francois Tainturier's 2010 doctoral thesis on the founding of Mandalay, which is discussed in Chapter 8.

the names of the nat Lords propitiated at the royal cities, their legends, and/or an account of their iconography. These texts therefore marry historical fact, in terms of the nats' names and the location of their shrines, with ancient and very dynamic cultural traditions. In art historical terms, the iconography recorded in the *Inventory* and the KDKT's *parabaiq* reflects a desire to accord each nat its own distinctive appearance. This was obviously thought to be important, and may be a way of paying homage, via art, to the nat itself — just as images of the Buddha became more and more decorative over the centuries. Yet while some of the local publications reproduce the iconography of the nat Lords as illustrated in Temple's book and — coincidentally — given in the *Inventory*, there is no analysis of this in relation to historic or contemporary images. Similarly, there has been no examination of how closely the iconographic canon was followed or how it developed. To understand how the depiction of the nats developed to the point of the iconography recorded in the *Inventory*, we first have to turn to the few extant images from earlier eras.

CHAPTER 3

Early nat imagery and the Thirty-Seven Buddhist Lords

Thonban Hla — the Lady Three Times Beautiful — was a country girl, whose beauty was said to change three times a day, at dawn, at midday, and at dusk. News of her beauty reached the ears of King Duttabaung, who sent a nobleman from his court to find her in order to make her the Queen. But on the way back to the royal city, the Lady and the nobleman fell in love. As they approached the city, they devised a plan to ensure they could always be together.

Leaving the Lady outside the royal city, the messenger went before the King. “Great King”, he said, “her face is indeed beautiful, but her body is so big she cannot possibly fit through the gates to the city!” The King believed him, and ordered that the Lady be abandoned. A hut was built for her outside the city gates under a tamarind tree, and there she dwelt, forgotten by the King and eventually forsaken by the nobleman, earning her living as a weaver. By and by, she bore a daughter, Shin Nemi.

Eventually the Lady died of grief, and she became a nat. Her daughter, Shin Nemi, was filled with sorrow and took to playing the flute for solace. Then she too died and became a nat. Today, when children smile in their sleep, it’s because Shin Nemi is playing with them in their dreams.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ This is my own retelling of the legend.

INTRODUCTION

Belief in the existence of nats and other supernaturals likely arose as a response to the desire to control the environment and the future, and was initially limited to ancestor and nature spirits associated with prominent features of the landscape, such as the mountain associated with Min Mahagiri and his sister.¹³⁷ Myanmar's history throughout the first millennium is complex and not yet fully understood; although the country's interaction with the rest of Asia is well researched, with early evidence of spiritual and cultural influences moving back and forth across the continent. Although the exact origin of Myanmar's nats is lost to recorded history, belief in sentient spirits resident in physical features of the landscape is part of a widespread animist tradition throughout Southeast Asia, where they co-exist in the socio-religious framework alongside Buddhism, Islam and Christianity.¹³⁸

Until recently, the dominant paradigm held that the prototypes for Myanmar's religious art derived from India, arriving in conjunction with Buddhism. While this is undoubtedly true for early examples, local sensibilities and concepts of the supernatural changed those early prototypes quickly. Influences selectively absorbed from the Siamese kingdoms, China and Tibet

¹³⁷ For a discussion of the 'contracts' made by people settling land with its spirit lords, see Lehman, "Founders' Cult," 15-39.

¹³⁸ In 1975 Paul Mus wrote of a network of cults operating throughout what he termed "monsoon Asia", in which the cult of an earth god, a tutelary spirit of a community, was prominent. He attributed the spread of Buddhism and the cultural parcel that went with it to the familiarity of a shared substratum of belief in spirits that could be managed by ritual practice. He proposed a style of collective belief where the true god of the soil was a place, connecting it with the way in which land was organised, positing this functioned something like territorial law. Mus's argument is strongly reflected in the way in which nature spirits and *āsaún* nats are conceptualised as spirits of place, particularly the *natsein*, who remain attached to the location of their death, in Myanmar and all across Southeast and East Asia. Paul Mus, *India Seen from the East: Indian and Indigenous Cults in Champa*, trans. I. W. Mabbett. eds. I. W. Mabbett and D. P. Chandler (Melbourne: Monash University Press, 2011), 4 and 24-6. Mus's 'monsoon Asia', an area devoid of modern socio-political borders, is the place to look for possible cultural and artistic antecedents and parallels for nat imagery. This is an enormous subject that warrants in-depth scholarly research beyond the scope of my thesis.

are also now acknowledged.¹³⁹ Early images of the nats could therefore be expected to include elements retained from local culture as well as influences introduced via the movement of people and goods through trade with the wider Asian area over several millennia.¹⁴⁰

EARLY NAT IMAGERY

While there are very few early images extant, it is likely a belief in spirits playing a protective or guardianship role was present during the earliest recorded periods of Myanmar's history. There is evidence of ritual activities involving imagery during the Samon era in the form of small bronze figures, dated from ca. 700 BCE to 400 CE, used as funerary decoration for high status individuals.¹⁴¹ Although the Samon culture was similar to that of Yunnan in China, figures like these have not yet been discovered there, indicating these small bronzes are likely to be a local expression of a guardian spirit.

¹³⁹ In the wider cultural and artistic field in Myanmar, Claudine Bautze-Picron discusses the influences of Indian and Chinese artistic models on the murals of Bagan, observing that certain motifs used in depictions of clothing may have been derived from imported cottons from South Bangladesh and porcelain from China. Claudine Bautze-Picron, "Between India and China, the Murals of Bagan," paper presented at Early Myanmar and its Global Connections: An International Conference, Bagan, October 2012. <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-01079874>. See also Claudine Bautze-Picron, "Bagan Murals and the Sino-Tibetan World," paper presented at Network and Identity, Exchange Relations between China and the World, Ghent, December 2013. <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01099967>. Alexandra Green discusses the influence of Thailand, the Shan States and southwest China on Nyaungyan and Konbaung era wall paintings in Alexandra Green, "From Gold Leaf to Buddhist Hagiographies: Contact with Regions to the East Seen in Late Burmese Murals," *Journal of Burma Studies* 15, no. 2 (2011): 305-58. On the transmission of *acheik lüntāya* textile patterns see Frances Franklin and Deborah Swallow, "Identifying with the Gods," *The 1994 Hali Annual* (1994): 48-61. The work of all these scholars confirms the movement of artistic ideas and motifs all across Mus's 'monsoon Asia'.

¹⁴⁰ Elizabeth Moore has pointed out that the transition from Bronze-Iron Age to Buddhist polities in Myanmar was catalysed by trade with South Asia, Yunnan, and Central Asia. She argues that the significance of overland exchange between Central Myanmar and Yunnan is borne out in the presence of imported mortuary goods and the similarity of the two areas' burial customs. Recently, she wrote "In the roughly contemporary shift from [700 BCE to 400 CE] Samon chiefdoms to Buddhist kingdoms, the archaeology ... does not suggest abandonment of local ancestral and animistic beliefs, but a complex mix of appropriation, absorption and transformation of indigenous elements that then find expression in the early Buddhist archaeology." Elizabeth Moore, "Myanmar Bronzes and the Dian Cultures of Yunnan," *Bulletin of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association* (2010): 122-31. Elizabeth Moore, "Cultural Exchange between Myanmar and Yunnan ca. 600 BCE-400 CE," in *Southern Silk Route: Historical Links and Contemporary Convergences*, eds. Lip Ghosh and Tansen Sen (New Delhi: Manohar, 2014), 62-3.

¹⁴¹ Moore, *Early Landscapes*, 10 and 109. These are stylised representations of a female figure, made from thin beaten sheets of bronze, with prominent cone shapes depicting breasts and womb, iconography commonly associated worldwide with fertility. Moore first explored the links between the equestrian culture of Yunnan, the Samon Bronze-Iron culture, the Pyu and Dian in Elizabeth Moore, "Men on Horses and Tea-Eating," *Enchanting Myanmar* (2008), 8.

To date, two pairs of iron statuettes found buried near one of Thaye Khittea's city gates, estimated to date to between the 2nd and 7th century, are the earliest extant examples of guardian figures in a more recognisably human form (Figs. 32 and 33).¹⁴² Their guardianship role was conceptualised by marrying what appears to be a protective gesture to the indigenous belief in the protective powers of iron and duality, and crucially, the deliberate placement in an environment where their power was needed — at the entrance to the city. Considered in the context of guardian figures, these images are protective in several ways. Firstly, they were cast in iron, a metal well documented in Myanmar for its protective qualities, and found elsewhere in the Pyu era (200 BCE to 900 CE) in the form of iron nails rammed into the earth. Secondly, by holding their hands up, palms facing outward, they may be displaying an early reference to the Buddhist gesture known as *abhaya mudrā*, signifying the dispelling of fear. Thirdly, they were buried in pairs, with the pair at Fig. 33 appearing to be male and female. Duality is often required for balance, harmony, perfection or completion in Asian ancestral spiritual practice, and in Myanmar this is commonly seen in the pairing of nats as *maun hnama* (brother and sister) couples (Fig. 1).

Whether these two pairs of figures were understood as 'nats' is impossible to say, although it seems likely. Although we have no way of determining when the leap was made from understanding that the local nat inhabited the tree or the mountain, to its representation by a physical image, this could well have occurred in Myanmar prior to, or in tandem with, the introduction of Buddha images early in the first millennium. While veneration of the Buddha and propitiation of the 'lower' nats are two different concepts, the usefulness of a visual focal point for devotion and offerings applies equally to both. The presence of images of the 'lower' nats in the first millennium is, of course, implicit in the legend of Min Mahagiri and his sister,

¹⁴² The estimated date range is based on the overall chronology for wall building at Thaye Khittea. Bob Hudson, personal communication, August 4, 2016. On the use of iron for protection in archaeological and ethnographic contexts, Hudson cites Sein Maung U, "Ancient Sriksetra", *Special Bulletin of Culture* (Yangon: Ministry of Culture, 2005), 115 (in Burmese). Maung Htin Aung wrote that alchemists considered there were 167 different varieties of iron. Maung Htin Aung, *Folk Elements*, 47.

and in the mythological tale of Anawrahta placing images of the nats on the platform of Bagan's Shwezigon *pāyā* in homage to the Buddha.¹⁴³

Buddhism's pre-eminence in discussions of Myanmar's material culture has seen historians and archaeologists overwhelmingly look westward to India for prototypes and models for its early visual culture. Certainly the material culture of the major walled sites of the Pyu — Thaye Khittea, Halin and Beikthano — are associated with Bengal, coastal India and Sri Lanka. Yet as Stargardt notes, "Burma produced an indigenous cult of gateway guardians which neither iconographically or ritually correspond to the classical Indian *dvarapalas* ... the Pyu, like Sri Lanka and East Java at later dates, developed their own *dvarapala* traditions."¹⁴⁴ Two stelae in the Sri Ksetra Archaeological Museum, Figs. 34 and 35, are examples of how Myanmar's artists conceptualised guardian figures during this period.

The figures carved upon these two stelae were conceptualised as squat, heavy-set figures brandishing clubs or short swords up to their shoulders, a motif found in the *yakkha* images discussed later in the text. Fig. 35, a stele found Thaye Khittea's palace gate in the 1960s, appears similar in conception to the large figure brandishing the club in the 'Warrior/Throne' stela pictured at Fig. 36.¹⁴⁵ This stela has a similar frame, with its slightly pointed arch, as one featuring an image now identified by the local people as a Bodaw nat, implying — assuming its 16th century dating is correct — that this design persisted for around 500 years. This 'Bodaw stela', Figs. 37 to 39, is now housed in a shrine on the outskirts of one of the villages in the Thaye Khittea area, and as these photographs were taken over a period of 114 years, they allow a

¹⁴³ Khin Maung Than states that sculpted nat images have not been used for a long time, although drawings of Hnamedaw Taung Gyi Shin's face were made in gold on the *sagā* trees around Mt Popa, acknowledging her presence on the mountain and her creation legend. He describes the usual item used in lieu of an image was a *theqdaw aùnbù*, meaning "where the spirit of the royal human being is kept", a reference to the nat's *leiqpya*. These 'spirit bottles' were blocked with cotton wool, to prevent the *leiqpya* from escaping. Khin Maung Than, *Yòya Naq Youncihmu*, 3. According to a biography of poets cited by Geok Yian Goh, the mother of Shin Thilawuntha (1453-1518), was the chief *natkadaw* of Lulin village. This would date nat propitiation to the mid to late 1400s, although whether nat images were in use then is unrecorded. Shin Thilawuntha was a famous monk who wrote the *Yazawingyaw Chronicle*. Geok Yian Goh, *The Wheel-Turner and His House: Kingship in a Buddhist Ecumene* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2015), 88-9 and footnote 218.

¹⁴⁴ Janice Stargardt, *The Ancient Pyu of Burma* (Cambridge, PACSEA in association with the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1990), 172.

¹⁴⁵ Pamela Gutman and Bob Hudson convincingly argue that the size and iconography of this 'Warrior/Throne' stela demonstrated "that Indian beliefs were imposed on ... an earlier animist tradition." Pamela Gutman and Bob Hudson, "A First-Century Stele from Sriksetra," *Bulletin de L'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient* 99 (2014): 20.

consideration of how its image has been conceptualised during this timeframe — as well as highlighting the problems encountered when attempting to record the history of Myanmar’s material culture. In 1906, the *Archaeology Survey of Burma* dated the stela to the 16th century, and reported that its figure was known as the guardian of Thaye Khittea’s Kanbawk Gate — his name was Maung Waing, he held two daggers, and had two sisters.¹⁴⁶ The stela may have been moved to its current location due to the archaeological work carried out at Thaye Khittea, but in any event, at the time of my visit there was also a shrine to the sisters nearby. Only one image, a large painted stone, is still extant.

Fig. 37, the earliest photograph, shows the stela and its figure at the time it was known as Maung Waing, the guardian of the Kanbawk Gate. Unlike the figures on the museum stelae, who are portrayed standing, Maung Waing sits cross-legged on the base of the stela’s frame. This photograph shows traces of two extra arms: one on the figure’s left side, palm held towards the chest; and another on the right, extending down to the bottom of the frame. He appears to hold a *thanlyeq* (a short, four-sided, leaf-shaped sword) upright in his left hand, and the right hand once held something that in outline resembles the shape of a lotus bud. His upward and outwardly flexed arms are also a feature seen on the 11th to 13th century statue now known as Thakya Min at the Shwezigon at Bagan, discussed in Chapter 6 (Fig. 411).

While the stela may have originally depicted a Brahmanic or Buddhist deity, at some point — possibly when it was rediscovered — its figure acquired a new and more meaningful identity to the local population as a named local guardian nat. In 1997, the stela was set into a cement base within a wooden shelter at the entrance to the village, and by the time it was photographed in 2005, the figure’s extra left arm had been painted in as a scarf, the extra right arm is ignored, and what might have been a lotus bud has become a mirrored *thanlyeq* (Fig. 38). By 2014, his lower half was completely obscured by layers of pink paint, and his identity had changed (at least to my informant, who also told me the image dated to the Bagan era), to conceptualise him as a Bodaw, a more generic guardian figure than the named Maung Waing nat of the previous century (Fig. 39). Both later photos demonstrate the re-conceptualisation by local villagers of an unidentified deity over a relatively brief period of time, indicating how easily meanings can

¹⁴⁶ L. De Beylie, *Prome Et Samara: Voyage Archaeologie En Birmanie Et En Mesopotamie* (Paris: Leroux, 1907), 106.

change, and of course this may have happened in the past as well. By the time of the 2005 and 2014 photographs, the Bodaw had been re-conceptualised in modern terms, assisted by the application of paint, which gives him a demeanour of disinterested agelessness. This redecoration brings him into the stylistic company of the more modern nat images discussed in Chapter 5.

Similar stele featuring guardian figures had become a prominent part of the visual landscape by the early Bagan era, such as those that once adorned the upper terraces of the 11th century Shwesandaw *zedi* (Fig. 40).¹⁴⁷ Others were sculpted as freestanding figures, or integrated into the architecture and decoration of stupas and temples, like the images of the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords analysed in Chapter 6. Many have since acquired legends that have reconceptualised them, like the Bodaw, as guardians of particular people or other locations, and have clearly been moved from their original site. From those that do remain in situ, their placement, and their iconography, identifies them as important deities drawn from Buddhist cosmology, itself a conceptual space in which the different types of nats flourish. An appreciation of the different heavenly and earthly realms is fundamental to understanding the different nat typologies, and, by extension, their portrayal in art and their placement in the natural and built environments.

¹⁴⁷ The Shwesandaw is believed to enshrine one the Buddha's sacred hairs, presented to Anawrahta by a conquered ruler of Lower Myanmar. Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 234-5. Stadtner writes of small, unglazed *Jātaka* plaques that were originally placed within the niches on the *zedi*'s terraces. None have been yet been identified, and although I have not seen them, it is possible that these, too, represent guardian figures from Buddhist cosmology, rather than vignettes from *Jātaka* tales.

BUDDHIST ASTROLOGY AND COSMOLOGY

The nats are an integral part of the astrological and cosmological beliefs associated with the cardinal and intercardinal directions.¹⁴⁸ These directions play an important part in Myanmar's material culture, where physical space is interpreted astrologically. When it comes to Myanmar art and architecture in relation to the 'lower' nats, southeast looms large as the most important. This direction reflects the location of mountains in relation to ancient royal capitals — Mt Popa, home of Min Mahagiri and his sister, is located to the southeast of Bagan; and the “magic mountain” of the Mon, Mt Zingyaik, is located southeast of the historic Lower Myanmar capitals of Thaton and Bago.¹⁴⁹ *Natkùn* located in *pāyà* compounds — such as the Shwezigon's nat pavilion — are overwhelmingly located to the south or southeast of the main *zedi* or temple, mirroring this arrangement.¹⁵⁰ Additionally, the southeast pillar of traditionally built homes not only provides protection against natural disasters, but is the home of Min Mahagiri in his role as the household guardian, where he is known as the *eindwin* (within the house) or *einsaún* (house guardian) nat.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Moore suggests that the popularity of astrology in Myanmar reflects “the importance of planets and 'place' in the country's pre-Buddhistic ancestral and animistic ritual heritage.” Elizabeth Moore, “Astrology in Burmese Buddhist Culture,” 80. In Myanmar, astrology is mainly concerned with the day of the week on which one was born. Each day is associated with a cardinal or intercardinal direction, an animal, a planet, and letters of the Burmese alphabet, and children are traditionally named with reference to their birth day. Planetary posts representing each day are set out at the proper intervals around many *zedis* in Myanmar, to allow people to make offerings for assistance, and are typically indicated by an image of the relevant animal. For example, if you were born on a Tuesday, your life is ruled by the planet Mars, your associated animal is the *chinteq* (lion), your direction is southeast, and your name should begin with the letters စ၊ ဆ၊ ဇ၊ ဝှ၊ ည (s, s', z, z or ny). Wednesday is divided into two (forenoon and afternoon) to account for the even number of cardinal and intercardinal directions. An excellent overview of the practice of making offerings at one's planetary post is given in Fraser-Lu, *Burmese Crafts*, 235-6.

¹⁴⁹ Brac de la Perrière, *Les Rituels*, 21. H. L. Shorto argued that southeast was the most important direction due to its association with live birth and auspicious rebirth in H. L. Shorto, “The Planets, the Days of the Week and the Points of the Compass: Orientation Symbolism in 'Burma',” in *Natural Symbols in South East Asia*, ed. G. B. Milner (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1978), 144-54.

¹⁵⁰ During my research I carried a small compass with me to record the location of nat shrines in *pāyà* compounds.

¹⁵¹ As recorded by Fraser-Lu, “... in addition to providing the necessary structural support, [the house pillars] were also imbued with much protective symbolism to ensure the continued wellbeing of the inhabitants. Prior to entering a new house or palace, various prescribed offerings might also be made at each pillar and special *gahtas* recited to ensure the health, wealth and general safety of the new occupants. The SE pillar (*u-yu*) offered protection against natural calamities, and is the home of the *ein-dwin* Nat. It is also associated with the king and the head of the household.” Sylvia Fraser-Lu, *Splendour in Wood: The Buddhist Monasteries of Burma* (Bangkok: Weatherhill, Inc., 2001), 57. Scott O'Connor, a late 19th century visitor to the royal capital of Mandalay, recorded that Min Mahagiri had his own shrine within Thibaw's main palace building, situated in a corner of the room behind the Lion Throne. O'Connor, *Mandalay*, 90.

The importance of the correct alignment with the right cardinal or intercardinal directions cannot be overstated. This is particularly important in the construction of temples and stupas, which are conflated with Mt Myinmo. As argued by Buddhist scholar Adrian Snodgrass:

Every stupa embodies a mandala. In some its presence is outwardly expressed by those elements, such as gates or stairways, which indicate a cross-form arrangement of the axes; in others it is made apparent by images of Buddhas or other divinities located in the four directions ... The mandala form is also overtly expressed in the stupa by the presence of images of the four Regents of the Quarters (*Lokapāla*). The regent-gods of the four directions, called the “Four Kings” ... are guardian deities, whose function it is to protect the Dharma and, more specifically, to protect the borders of the mandala, preventing the entry of disruptive or demonic forces into its sacred area.¹⁵²

Because Mt Myinmo is located at the centre of the Buddhist universe, it features in colourful visual representations of the different realms of existence seen at several major Buddhist pilgrimage sites in Myanmar, serving as a reminder to visitors of their spiritual journey.¹⁵³ As shown in Fig. 41, an illustration made in the late 19th century, the material world where humans reside is at the base of the cosmic mountain, pictured here with its southern face shown in red facing the viewer.¹⁵⁴ Beneath this *lāwkiyè* (earthly) world at the mountain's base are four separate hells, and above are the six *lāwkuttaya* (heavenly) realms collectively known as *nat ywa* (in Pāli, *dewaloka*). *Nat ywa* contains the 26 realms of the ‘higher’ *dewa* nats, conceived as good nats who protect people from harm and assist them when appealed to. *Zatumaharit*, the lowest level of *nat ywa* immediately below the summit of the mountain, is the residence of the Four Great Kings, the guardians of the cardinal directions.

¹⁵² Adrian Snodgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stupa* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1992), 131-5. Snodgrass argues the “mountain stupas” of Myanmar are explicitly identified with the mandala. As he explains, the Sanskrit word ‘mandala’ means ‘circle’, and by extension indicates a centred space used for ritual action. Stupas are also conflated with the Buddha.

¹⁵³ Seen, for example, in the museum near the southern entrance at the base of the Shwedagon *pāyā* in Yangon, and within the Shwe Oo Min cave complex at Pindaya in Upper Myanmar. Stadtner notes Mt Myinmo's popularity as a subject for Bagan's mural painters in Stadtner, *Sacred Sites*, 258.

¹⁵⁴ For an account of the way Myanmar's artists have depicted Buddhist cosmology, see Patricia Herbert, “Burmese Cosmological Manuscripts,” in *Burma: Art and Archaeology*, eds. Alexandra Green and T. Richard Blurton (London: The British Museum Press, 2002), 77-97. Mt Myinmo is associated with precious substances and their colours. The *Myanma Min Okc'ouqpoun Sadan* (*The Royal Administration of Burma*, hereafter *MMOS*) records these as white to the east, green to the south, *acheiq* (a wavy pattern) to the west, and yellow to the north. The flags mounted at the four entrances to Mandalay Palace reflected these colours. U Tin, *The Royal Administration of Burma*, trans. Euan Bagshawe (Bangkok: Ava Publishing House, 2001), 425.

Buddhists aspire to be reborn as a *dewa* nat in *Tawadeintha* Heaven, the level above the Four Great Kings at the summit of the mountain. It is generally held that living within *Tawadeintha* Heaven are 33 *dewa* nats, headed by Thakya Min, the guardian of Buddhism, whose imagery now features prominently in Myanmar's art. Buddhism holds that one may be reborn into any of the five *lāwkiyè* realms or into *nat ywa*, depending on one's personal account of merit.¹⁵⁵ Accordingly, many inscriptions and Royal Chronicles relate that Myanmar's kings automatically departed to *nat ywa* when they died, by virtue of the great merit they had accrued by founding Buddhist monuments.

The guardians of Mt Myinmo

As stupas and temples are conceptualised as physical manifestations of Mt Myinmo, many include imagery of the cosmic mountain's guardians — the followers of the Four Great Kings introduced in Chapter 1. The Mya Thein Tan *pāyà* at Mingun, Fig. 42, is good example. Its designers positioned the central *zedi* in the middle of wavy terraces symbolising the seven cosmic oceans surrounding Mt Myinmo, while the *zedi* itself is surrounded by five levels of small, niche style shrines. These contain images of Mt Myinmo's guardians: *nagà* on the lowest level, above them the *gāloun*, (also known as *garuda*), then the *gounban*, the *yakkha* and finally, the *gandabba* (Fig. 43). Although Mya Thein Tan was built by Bagyidaw and not completed until 1807-08, from the Bagan era onward, images of the Four Great Kings and their followers were placed in positions where they could confer protection.¹⁵⁶

Although imagery of *nagà* and *gāloun* are easily identified, images of *yakkha*, *gounban* and *gandabba* are rarely differentiated as such, with the blanket terms '*yakkha*', '*bilū*', '*dvarapala*' or 'ogre' more commonly used. One example of the conflation of these terms is in a 1996 guidebook to the Shwedagon, which refers to the figure at the northern stairway, Fig. 44, as an

¹⁵⁵ For an account of the different levels, see Walshe, *Dīgha Nikāya*, 38-46. Temple also gives a succinct summary of the different levels and the beings that inhabit them, in Temple, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, opp. 27. For simplicity's sake, the upper levels of *nat ywa* have not been labelled in Fig. 41. From *Tawdeintha* upwards, they are: *Yamabon*, land of Yama; *Tuthita*, where the Buddha visited to preach to his mother; *Nemmanayati*, ruled over by Man Nat (Mara); and *Wuthawati*. The next 16 abodes are where the *Byamma* nats dwell; and above this, but not illustrated, are the four abodes of formless sentient beings. *Neibban* is conceptually beyond the very last abode.

¹⁵⁶ Stadtner suggests the *yakkha* and *gandābba* were placed in the same (third) row, with the Four Great Kings at the top. Stadtner, *Sacred Sites*, 257-9. I believe it is more likely images of the Four Great Kings were originally placed above the entrances to the monument in line with the cardinal directions they protect.

ogre, but specifies it in the text as a *yakkha*, which it defines as “half-divine beings of great power.”¹⁵⁷ Another example is the statue, probably of a *gounban*, in Fig. 45. At the time he was carved he was conceived as a massive, quasi-human being, with coarse but otherwise human facial features, seated in the *bilūt’ain* guardian posture. The local people identified him as an attendant on a nearby image of a female nat guardian of a local weir, but the statue’s photographer recorded him as a *dvarapala*.¹⁵⁸

Most images identified using the generalised terms conform to the description of the *gounban* given in the *Sumaṅgala Vilāsinī*. According to this text, the *gounban* had huge stomachs and their genital organs were “as big as pots”, hence the Pāli name *kumbhaṇḍa*, from *khumba* meaning pot.¹⁵⁹ However, a set of images with discrete iconography and accordingly identified as each type is pictured at Figs. 46 to 50. This group of five terracotta votive tablets was found buried underneath a burial urn fashioned in the shape of Mt Myinmo at the Shwegugyi at Bago, in Lower Myanmar, built under the patronage of Dhammazedī (r. 1462–92). Each portrays one of Mt Myinmo’s guardians: a *nagā* from the base of the mountain; a *gāloun* from the level immediately above; then the *gounban*, the *yakkha*, and finally the *gandabba*.¹⁶⁰ While the *nagā* is portrayed in the customary form of a serpent, the three other protective beings shown on the same page are all posed in a version of the classic *bilūt’ain* style, indicating that artists of the late 15th century were continuing iconography used at Bagan, as discussed below. Their relative position in the different levels of the Buddhist cosmology are signalled by iconographical differences — as a higher class being than the other two, the *gandabba* is identified by his more regal attire including a multi-tiered crown, and he wields a curving sword and shield. The *yakkha* wears a crown with a crenellated brim, has a triangular collar, large plug earrings, and wields a heavy club. The *gounban* is more simply attired, holds a slimmer club, and features the

¹⁵⁷ Tun Aung Chain and Thein Hlaing, *Shwedagon* (Yangon: The Universities Press, 1996). The authors note that the Myanmar word for ‘ogre’ is *bilū*, and give a possible etymological base as the Sanskrit *bhairaya*, meaning frightful, terrible, formidable. The term ‘*nat dewata*’ is also occasionally used by Myanmar authors, for example, in Nan Kyaw Shin, *Kōkwehmu S’ainyapainya Naq Pyiqthwàthaw Thuyèhkaùnmyà* (Myanmar: Myiqk’weh Kòsin Sape, 2011), 14.

¹⁵⁸ The photographer, R. Grant Brown, noted the statue was “much weathered, about three feet high, with a primitive club ... [it] resembles the *dvarapala* or door-keeper, found at the gates of temples or pagodas elsewhere.” Brown, “The Lady of the Weir,” 492.

¹⁵⁹ The *Sumaṅgala Vilāsinī* is Buddhaghosa’s commentary on the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the Long Discourses of the Buddha. Cited in Malalasekera, George Peiris, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names, Vol I: A-Dh* (London: John Murray, 1937), 638.

¹⁶⁰ U Ba Tint, (retired master woodcarver), now a monk known as U Pandita (Bhamo), in discussion with the author, March 5, 2015. I interviewed U Pandita at length in March 2015, and thank him for his generosity and patience in answering my many questions. I also thank my translator, Wai Phyo Maung, from Yangon’s Inya Institute.

protruding belly mentioned in the definition above. This indicates the artist was familiar with the *Sumaṅgala Vilāsinī*, the text from which this definition derives.¹⁶¹

One of the protective *suttas* from the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the *Āṭānāṭiya sutta*, is the textual source for the first, and probably the oldest, of the three pantheons of ‘Thirty-Seven Nats’ — the Thirty-Seven Buddhist Lords.¹⁶² Images of these important nats are found at the Ananda temple at Bagan, and my analysis of these proposes a textual link for their interpretation as part of the symbolism woven into the architectural fabric of this famous temple.

THE THIRTY-SEVEN BUDDHIST LORDS

Inda, Soma, Varuṇa,
 Bhāradvāja, Pajāpati,
 Candana, Kāmasaṭṭha,
 Kinnuḅhaṇḍu and Nighaṇḍu,
 Panāda, Opamañña,
 Devasūta, Mātali,
 Cittasena the *gandabba*,
 Naḷa, Rājā, Janesabha,
 Sātāgira, Hemavata,
 Puṇṇaka, Karatiya, Gula,
 Sīvaka, Mucalinda too,
 Vessāmitta, Yugandhara,
 Gopāla, Suppagedha too,
 Hirī, Netti, and Mandiya,
 Pañcālacaṇḍa, Āḷavaka,
 Pajunna, Sumana, Sumukha,
 Dadimukha, Maṇi too,
 Then Mānicara, Dīgha,
 And, finally, Serissaka.

These are the *yakkhas*, great *yakkhas*, their commanders and commanders-in-chief who should be called upon in case of such an attack. And these, sir, are the *Āṭānāṭā* protective verses by means of which monks and nuns, male and female lay-followers may dwell guarded, protected, unharmed and at ease.

The Āṭānāṭiya sutta ¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Malalasekera, *Pali Proper Names* Vol. I, 638 and xv.

¹⁶² Walshe, *Dīgha Nikāya*, 471-8.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 477-8. I have followed the layout of the original, which gives the reading a lilting quality.

The mighty *yakkha* named in the protective *Āṭānāṭiya sutta* may be appealed to by Buddhists in time of need. Appropriately then, the ‘higher’ nats that comprise the pantheon known as the Thirty-Seven Buddhist Lords are *yakkha* drawn from this *sutta* (see Appendix B). The first nine are known in Myanmar as *Nat Mingyi* (Great Nat Lords), and the remaining 28 are *Nat Sitthugyi* (Nat Generals).¹⁶⁴ At least two Myanmar kings have appropriated their power, and that of the Four Great Kings, to protect their temples and palaces: Kyanzitttha, when he built the Ananda temple at Bagan around the turn of the 11th century; and Mindon Min, who placed statues of *yakkha* on the four sides of Mandalay’s *Shwe Myodawgyi*, his ‘golden royal city’, in August 1859.¹⁶⁵

Images of the 28 *Nat Sitthugyi* are included in the long frieze of ceramic plaques placed around the plinth on the eastern side of the Ananda temple (Figs. 51 and 52). There are two series of plaques, one converging on the eastern door from the north, and another from the south. Each series, or procession, is headed by *dewa* nats carrying various auspicious objects in honour of the Buddha’s defeat over Man Nat’s armies, who are featured on plaques adorning the plinth on the western side of the temple. The *dewa* are then followed by Mt Myinmo’s guardians: the *nagā*, *gāloun*, *gounban*, *yakkha* and *gandabba*; followed by the *kindok*, the Mon ancestral spirit; one or more of the Four Great Kings; then the frieze of *Nat Sitthugyi*. Fourteen plaques featuring these *yakkha* bring up the rear of the northern to eastern gate series, and fourteen march from the end of the southern gate to eastern gate.¹⁶⁶

As noted by Po Kya, these *yakkha* are seated in *bilūt’ain*, which he called “guardian spirit style.”¹⁶⁷ Their relaxed and rather elegant pose distinguishes them from their neighbours in the series, the *kindok*, ancestral spirits conceived more in human terms (shown in the two plaques at

¹⁶⁴ Po Kya, *Thoùns’eh-k’niq Min*, 9-11.

¹⁶⁵ Tainturier, “Foundation of Mandalay,” 335. I note the attribution of the Kyanzitttha is traditional as the temple’s inscription stone has never been found. Over twenty stelae featuring the same *yakkha*, dated to between the fifth and seventh centuries, can still be seen at the Mahamuni temple in Rakhine State, although their provenance is questionable. Bob Hudson, personal communication, June 22, 2016. For a discussion of these images see Fraser-Lu and Stadtner, *Buddhist Art*, 51-52.

¹⁶⁶ Emmanuel Guillon’s monograph on the plaques on the western side, featuring Man Nat’s armies, includes an appendix noting the distribution of the plaques on the eastern side, and which were missing. At the time, 1985, fifteen plaques — those featuring the *yakkha* — were missing from both series discussed here, but have since been reinstated. Emmanuel Guillon, *L’armee De Mara* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1985), 71-74.

¹⁶⁷ Po Kya, *Thoùns’eh-k’niq Min*, 11.

the left of Fig. 52).¹⁶⁸ The plaques' artists also differentiated the other types of nats in the series — the deities identified by Luce as *gounban* were portrayed standing in a dynamic, upright pose holding their weapons and wearing crowns; while the figures of the *dewa* are graceful, slim, and regally attired (Figs. 53 and 54).

The imagery on these plaques has always been collectively interpreted as the *dewa* celebrating the triumph of the Buddha over Man Nat's armies, although to my knowledge there has been little analysis of the imagery itself. Luce recorded the plaques in *OBEP*, observing that they featured “heavenly and other mighty beings” celebrating the Buddha's triumph, including Kuwera near the northern entrance, “together with his 28 Generals (*yakka senapati*) as listed in the *Mahāsamaya* and *Āṭānāṭiya sutta s* (Nos. 20, 32) of the *Dīgha Nikāya*.”¹⁶⁹ Shorto analysed the objects held by the *dewa* in 1966, and found that 18 correspond to the auspicious symbols shown in contemporary portrayals of *Buddhapada*, the Buddha's footprints.¹⁷⁰ Although Luce gave a textual source for the plaques — the *Samantabhadrika*, a Pāli commentary — Guillon's analysis of the plaques portraying Man Nat's armies suggests an alternative source — the *Lalitavistara*.¹⁷¹ Chapter 21 of this text, “Conquering Mara”, gives a vivid description of the appearance of the armies as portrayed on the plaques on the western side of the temple, while Chapter 23, “Exaltation”, describes the different *dewa* who came to pay homage to the Buddha upon his enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. The *dewa* are recorded bringing offerings that are portrayed in the plaques on the eastern side: flowers, perfumes, garlands, unguents, umbrellas, standards and flags. The *Lalitavistara*'s description includes the *dewa*, the Four Great Kings, “hundreds of thousands of celestial maidens” (Fig. 55), and the “terrestrial gods” who anointed the entire surface of the earth, sprinkled it with perfumed water, strewed it with flowers, covered it with canopies of various dyed fabrics, and then offered it to the [Buddha].¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ H. L. Shorto Romanised the gloss at the foot of the plaque as “kindok ma rap snek”, which he translated as “daemons holding swords”, then identified them as “yakkhas, the guardians of the north.” H. L. Shorto, “The Devata Plaques of the Ananda Basement,” *Artibus Asiae* 23 Supplementum (1966): 156-65. As Shorto noted this was the only “class of genii for which a vernacular term is used, the Mon word for spirits in general and the lineage spirit in particular”, I have favoured the Mon word rather than his interpretation. The *yakkha* are clearly distinguished by their iconography.

¹⁶⁹ Luce, *OBEP*, Vol. I, p. 360.

¹⁷⁰ Shorto, “Devata Plaques”, 164.

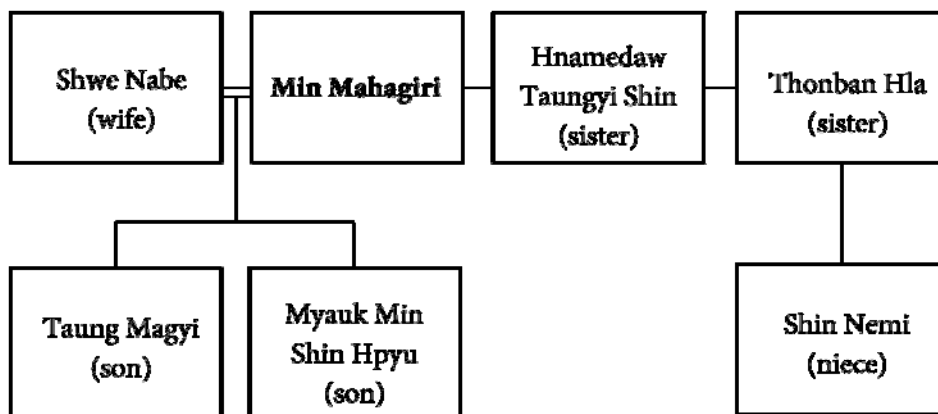
¹⁷¹ Luce, *OBEP*, Vol. I, 361. Guillon, *L'Armee De Mara*, 74.

¹⁷² *The Play in Full: Lalitavistara*, trans. Dharmachakra Translation Committee, <http://read.84000.co/#!ReadingRoom/UT22084-046-001/0,271-9>.

An analysis of the plaques with reference to the *Lalitavistara* allows an understanding of these two series of plaques, taken together, as a physical representation referencing the Buddha's awakening to enlightenment. Their location encircling the very base of the temple provides a ring of protection for visitors, who then enter the temple itself "guarded, protected, unharmed and at ease."¹⁷³

WHY THIRTY - SEVEN ?

The myths and legends surrounding the 'lower' nats, centuries of oral transmission, and the conflation of one nat's legend with another, have served to obscure the individual origins of many. Nevertheless, Maung Tinde, the blacksmith who became Min Mahagiri, the Lord of the Great Mountain, is generally understood as the head of a family of seven powerful 'lower' nats that is believed to have emerged in Upper Myanmar during the first millennium. The other family members are: the sister who perished alongside him in the fire, Hnamedaw Taungyi Shin; his *nagàma* wife Shwe Nabe; their two sons, Taung Magyi and Myauk Min Shin Hpyu; his youngest sister Thonban Hla; and her daughter, Shin Nemi, as shown in this simple family tree:¹⁷⁴



¹⁷³ Walshe, *Dīgha Nikāya*, 478.

¹⁷⁴ Sithu Myain, *Thòuns'eh-k'niq Mìn Hnín Tainyinthā Yòyanaqmyà* (Yangon: *S'upyisoúnt'un Sape*, 2010), 35. See also Min Sithu, *Naqkòkwehmu Thamain*, 300-1. This family group could be considered the first iteration of the pantheon, but as they are not recorded as such by Myanmar authors I have followed suit. Six are included in the group recognised by the Shwezigon's Trustees, as opinion as to the number of sisters varies.

Although opinion as to the number of sisters varies among sources, four members of this family of nats have endured through the centuries as the nucleus of the different iterations of the pantheon of Outside Thirty-Seven Lords. These iterations are shown in chronological order in Appendix D.1, and Appendix D.3 provides a summary of the different sources regarding Min Mahagiri's sister/s.¹⁷⁵

In 1806, Bodawpaya (r. 1782-1819) issued a Royal Order for a pavilion to be built for the "Thirty-Seven Lords".¹⁷⁶ This is the earliest mention in a primary source I have found of the pantheon of nat Lords. Some 50 years later, the KDKT's *parabaiq* records the guardian nats of "ancient kings", as well as those at Inwa and Amarapura during Bodawpaya's reign. It records that during Pindale Min's reign from 1648 to 1661, 11 nats, including Thakya Min, were "appointed to the Thirty-Seven Lords", alongside four members of Maung Tinde's family.¹⁷⁷ The resulting 15 nats form the first iteration of the Outside Thirty-Seven Lords recognised by Myanmar scholars, as shown in the table on page 11. Exactly when this group of 'lower' nats grew to contain 37 members and became known as the 'Thirty-Seven Lords' is unknown, but presumably this occurred in or between the reigns of Pindale Min and Bodawpaya, ie, between 1648 and the 1806 Royal Order.

As discussed in Chapter 2, most Myanmar historians and authors writing in the early 20th century and later are explicit in delineating the differences between the Inside and Outside Thirty-Seven, although opinion as to the individual origins of the nat Lords included in the Outside Thirty-Seven occasionally differ and their work sometimes contains unverifiable

¹⁷⁵ Of the Myanmar scholars consulted, only Maung Htin Aung regarded the nats listed by the Shwezigon's Trustees as an early iteration of the pantheon, writing in 1962 that the hereditary attendants there did not recognise any of the nats propitiated by kings after the Bagan period. Nevertheless, I have included the Shwezigon's list in Appendix C.2 for completeness. Maung Htin Aung, *Folk Elements*, 108.

¹⁷⁶ Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma, AD 1598-1885 Part V, AD 1788-1806* (Kyoto: The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1986), 314-5.

¹⁷⁷ SMMK, *Foundation Report*, 242-63. There is a certain amount of ambiguity in the text, as the KDKT was writing from a position of assumed knowledge, however, Myanmar scholars agree Pindale Min's iteration was the first. Whether it was originally called 'the 37 Lords' or something else at that time is unclear.

information.¹⁷⁸ Nevertheless, Po Kya had clearly differentiated all three pantheons by 1937, and argued that the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords emerged during the reigns of Anawrahta and Kyanzittha, in imitation of the Thirty-Seven Buddhist Lords, the pantheon discussed earlier in this chapter.¹⁷⁹ It is entirely plausible that the number of nat Lords was increased to match the two earlier pantheons — a symmetry proposed by Spiro’s informants in 1961.¹⁸⁰

However, the theory most often advanced by Western authors regarded the pantheon as an earthly counterpart to *Tawadeintha* heaven’s 33 *dewa*, an alignment first proposed by Temple, which led to some creative accounting in regard to the remaining four.¹⁸¹ The most commonly held view added the Four Great Kings to bring the total up to 37, an interpretation taken up by most scholars.¹⁸² Thus the ‘Thirty-Seven Nats’ were viewed at the time as a Burmese national pantheon, centred on Mt Popa, which was deemed analogous to the cosmic mountain, Mt

¹⁷⁸ Khin Maung Than, a retired psychology professor who researched the nats and published an excellent explanatory and illustrated text in 2001, wrote “Depending upon where the nats were placed by King Anawrahta, it was believed they were named the Outside or the Inside Thirty-Seven Nats. Those nats enshrined inside the wall of the Shwezigon Pagoda were called the Inside Thirty-Seven Nats and those outside the wall were the Outside Thirty-Seven Nats ... the Outside Thirty-Seven Nats obtained the present name not because they were outside the wall, but because they were outside the framework of Buddhism. They were not mentioned in the Buddhist scriptures and they were not *thamma* devas but are *meihsa* or evil nats.” Khin Maung Than, “Outside Thirty-Seven Nats,” 47. Another recent English language article by a local author includes nats from Upper and Lower Myanmar that were not included in any of the iterations of the Outside Thirty-Seven Lords, as well as making a distinction between the two: “There are 37 Inner Nats and 37 Outer Nats. The Inner Nats are a mixture of Buddhist nats and Hindu gods and goddesses. The Outer nats are the nats that ordinary people of Myanmar will point to if they are asked what nats are. There are also several others who are not included in this list but worshipped equally. These are nats like Bago Medaw worshipped near and around Bago, Ko Myo Shin worshipped near and around central Myanmar, and U Shin Gyi worshipped in the delta area.” Ohmar Myo, “U Shin Gyi,” in *Traditions 2005* (Yangon: SEOMEO Regional Centre for History and Tradition, 2005), 40.

¹⁷⁹ Po Kya. *Thoùns’eh-k’niq Min*, 5-12.

¹⁸⁰ Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism*, 52.

¹⁸¹ Temple, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, 35. Temple found three women on the list “with no particular story and more or less obviously thrown into the set”, the fourth being a nat without any obvious royal connection. His alternate accounting was that the last four on the list were “all women, whose stories may have been invented to complete the orthodox number” of 37. Temple’s colleague, Taw Sein Ko, believed the number was fixed at 37 because that was how many odes, played and sung at the nats’ festivals, had been written for them — a reference to Temple’s primary source, the *Mahagita Medanigyan*.

¹⁸² See, for example: H. L. Shorto, “The 32 “Myos” in the Medieval Mon Kingdom,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 26, no. 3 (1963), 590; Brac de la Perrière, “Taungbyon Festival,” 88 footnote 4; Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière, “The Cult of the ‘Thirty-Seven Lords,’” *IIAS Newsletter Online* 25, <http://www.ias.nl/iasn/25/theme/25T5.html> (accessed October 10, 2010).

Myinmo.¹⁸³ This was given a political dimension via the understanding that that royal cities are a microcosm of *Tawadeintha* heaven, with the king an earthly representation of Thakya Min.¹⁸⁴ Another explanation drew on an Indian legend, which recorded that 33 followers of Sakka (Thakya Min) travelled around making bridges and cleaning villages. This legend is said to have travelled to Myanmar where a village headman, known as U Ma Ga, undertook the same practice with 32 junior followers. Again, the Four Great Kings were drafted into the story to make the number up to 37.¹⁸⁵ Both explanations are problematic, given that the primary sources discussed in Chapter 7 make clear distinctions between *dewa*, nat Lords, local guardian nats and *bilù*, and their respective roles.

Notwithstanding the differing theories, the number 37 has a high level of cultural importance in Myanmar, and is used to enumerate many different types of objects. For example, various musical instruments, types of sword play and lances, as well as the Buddhist, Inside and Outside Lords are recorded in a book on the nats written by Myanmar scholar Min Sithu.¹⁸⁶ The logical conclusion, however, as to why the Inside and Outside Thirty-Seven became known by that number is that they were modelled, as proposed by Po Kya, on the Thirty-Seven Buddhist Lords — a symmetry that makes perfect sense in the context of their role as guardians of royal foundations.

¹⁸³ F. K. Lehman, “The Relevance of the Founders’ Cult for Understanding the Political Systems of the Peoples of Northern Southeast Asia and Its Chinese Borderlands,” in *Founders’ Cults in Southeast Asia: Ancestors, Polity, and Identity*, eds. Nicola Tannenbaum and C.A. Kammerer (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 2003), 26-7. Lehman states the ‘Thirty-Seven’ were formed into a national pantheon to effectively replace the traditional major spirit lords ultimately ruling over the various parts of the kingdom. My (differing) view is presented in Chapter 7.

¹⁸⁴ Michael Aung-Thwin, “Heaven, Earth, and the Supernatural World: Dimensions of the Exemplary Center in Burmese History,” in *The City as Sacred Center*, eds. Bardwell Smith and Holly Baker Reynolds (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), 94-100. Although many texts refer to people being reborn in *Tawadeintha* heaven, it appears to be populated by an unspecified number of deities. Walshe noted that no list of the 33 exists, although they appear as ‘the Thirty-three Gods’ in various *suttas*. In the *Janavasabha sutta*, for example, the 33 appear at an assembly at which Byamma declares that the ranks of the gods are increasing due to the Buddha’s mission on earth. Walshe, *Dīgha Nikāya*, 41 and 59. See also R. C. Childers, *A Dictionary of the Pali Language* (London: Trubner & Co., 1875), 500.

¹⁸⁵ U Win Maung (Tampawaddy), in discussion with the author, January 27, 2014. Sarah Bekker also recorded this legend, see Bekker, “Transformations,” 45. A variation is included in a 2015 publication where the “voluntary social workers” died and were reborn in *Tawadeintha* heaven as *dewa*. Yenanthar Win Maung and Hteik Tin Thet, *Bagan: 37 Pagodas & 37 Nats*, trans. Hteik Tin Thet (Mandalay: Cho Cho Myint Publishing House, 2015), 74.

¹⁸⁶ Min Sithu, *Naqkòkwehmu Thamain*, 232-245. One highly placed informant in the Myanmar government told me “The number of 37 is very sacred to our people. Even now, we have 36 [government] ministers, we don’t [have] 37.” Private conversation, the International Burma Studies Conference, Singapore, August 3, 2014.

S U M M A R Y

Images of Myanmar's 'lower' nats have clear antecedents in the placement of well crafted and locally significant imagery in culturally important environments. The bronze figures placed in graves and the pairs of iron figures found near Thaye Khittea's gates, at a time when Buddhism was gaining an increasing hold in the country, attest to a mix of spiritual belief that has endured to the present day. The selective adoption of Brahmanic and Buddhist beliefs and artforms combined with local traditions, such as the placement of iron in the landscape, produced locally meaningful art that was adapted over the centuries as community needs demanded. In Myanmar, the primacy of local belief in spirits of place has endured. In fact, it has triumphed, as seen in the reconceptualisation of the Bodaw stela which privileged the local beliefs, rather than the imported, once the context of its original use had passed out of living memory.

These early guardian figures can be considered as the forerunners of nat images placed in prominent positions in a Buddhist context during the Bagan era, which may have been a way of integrating earlier animist beliefs. Imagery of the 'higher' nats comes into sharper focus at this time, largely due to its integration into temple architecture and decoration. These images confirm the important role Buddhist cosmology played at Bagan, and its part in the wider visual repertoire supporting Buddhist belief.

While studies of Myanmar archaeology, Buddhist art and architecture and focused studies of specialist art practices are now widely available, and there are excellent studies on nats from the anthropological viewpoint, there is almost no writing that focuses on the nat images themselves. The lack of any art historical analysis of the nats as a substantial part of Myanmar's visual culture has, in turn, led to a significant lack of understanding of their imagery. As recorded in the legend of Min Mahagiri and his sister, Hnamedaw Taungyi Shin, their earliest artistic representations were informed by their fundamental role as guardians. In order to understand the place of the different types of nats in the overall cultural schema — and how and why they are represented in art in particular ways — we need to turn to Myanmar artists.

CHAPTER 4

Imaging Spirits

In 1170, King Naratheinkha of Bagan fell in love with the wife of his younger brother, the Crown Prince Narapatisithu. In order to get rid of the Crown Prince and take his wife as his Queen, King Naratheinkha sent the Crown Prince off to war. But the Crown Prince was suspicious of the King's intent, and left his white horse, Thudawti, and his trusted equerry, Nga Pyi, behind to keep watch.

After a few days, King Naratheinkha seized his younger brother's wife and made her his fourth Queen. Nga Pyi rode post-haste in the wake of the army, but when he reached a river he mistook a sandbank glittering in the moonlight for water. Thinking the river was too wide to cross safely at night, he made camp by the side of the river to wait for the dawn.

But the Crown Prince was only a short distance away across the river, and easily recognised the neighing of the white horse. When Nga Pyi arrived the next morning with his news, the Crown Prince became angry at the unnecessary delay and executed his equerry for neglect of duty. Thus Nga Pyi became the nat known as Myin Hpyu Shin, the Lord of the White Horse.

In the dark days of 1824 when the Burmese army was in retreat from the British, Myin Hpyu Shin, the nat Lord of the White Horse, was seen fighting alongside the Burmese against the enemy.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ After Maung Htin Aung, *Folk Elements*, 96 and 98.

INTRODUCTION

The colourful creation legends of the 'lower' nats and their intersection with Buddhist, Brahmanic and magical practices have afforded artists the opportunity to portray them in a wide variety of artistic contexts and media. As with images of the Buddha, the earliest extant images of nats are made of stone and have survived due both to the durability of this medium and the esteem in which they were, and are, held.¹⁸⁸ Only a few wooden statues of the Buddha attributed by the Bagan Archaeological Museum to the Bagan era have survived. While their dating may be doubtful, there are certainly stylistic affinities with Bagan era art to indicate they were copied in that style if not original. Given Myanmar's long tradition of woodworking it is highly likely there were many thousands of Bagan era wooden images that have simply not endured the country's harsh monsoon climate. Similarly, as there is metal imagery of guardian figures from the first millennium, it is probable many others were also created in wood during that time that have not survived in the material record.

The famous legend of Min Mahagiri and his sister encompasses cultural themes important for an understanding of the nats and their imagery: the significance of place and family, the power of nature, the fear of its capricious spirits and the acknowledgement of this power by Myanmar's people. These themes are all expressed in physical representations of the nats, their function, and placement in the community. All have evolved over the centuries in line with various agents for change that can be identified and pinpointed to a particular event or period of time, as discussed in this chapter and later in the text.

This chapter, which is presented in two sections, draws together information from a wide range of sources to provide an analysis of nat images within an art historical framework. The first

¹⁸⁸ For an excellent summary of Myanmar's Buddha imagery created in stone, see Sylvia Fraser-Lu, "Buddha Images from Burma Part 1: Sculpted in Stone," *Arts of Asia* January/February (1981). Bagan era sculpture is summarised in Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 74-8 and 88-93.

section examines the methods of creating and decorating nat imagery, and traces the developments that have occurred over time in response to different agents for change. The second section introduces the more common elements that distinguish the ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ nats, as a prelude to the more focused discussions of particular groups of images presented in the following chapters. In particular, this section looks more closely at the iconographical components of nat imagery: posture and gesture; attributes and affiliated animals; and how the nats are dressed as a component of the artwork itself and as its decoration.

SECTION I: ARTISTIC PRACTICES

WOODCARVING

37 Nat, the design of the *tazaung* and the way the forms of the nat sculptures are made is in wood. Mahagiri Maungdaw Hnamedaw is drawn on *sagà* wood. The nat images are made from *yamane*, *pădauq*, *sagà* wood, according to the ancient records only three kinds are used.

Myawaddy Mingyi U Sa, 1820¹⁸⁹

One of the features of Myanmar’s traditional artisan society was the existence of extended family workshops, where artistic skills were passed down from generation to generation. This practice is still in evidence today, particularly in Tampawaddy, the original artisan quarter of Mandalay. Tampawaddy is particularly known for its skilled woodcarvers, who are known as *pyinnyathe*, translated as people with “special knowledge”.¹⁹⁰ This concentration of artists in one area of Mandalay, close to the famous Mahamuni temple, is part of a long tradition reaching back to the Bagan era, when specialised groups of people would be ‘donated’ to care for major religious sites. Artists creating imagery connected with Buddhism are commonly found close to famous pagodas, and there are also clusters of workshops around the base of the Shwedagon pagoda in Yangon.

¹⁸⁹ BUR MS 200, 40. “Mahagiri Maungdaw Hnamedaw” is a collective term for both Min Mahagiri and his sister.

¹⁹⁰ U Pandita, discussion. U Pandita told me that as the term *pyinnyathe* is equated with witches and wizards, many local people were afraid of the Tampawaddy woodcarvers.

Today, Tampawaddy's workshops create both Buddha and nat imagery in wood, marble and bronze, alongside others creating decorative elements for temples, stupas and secular commissions. Images of the Buddha are destined for local or international religious sites, or will be bought by pilgrims for home shrines. *Dewa* nats and images of mythical creatures are also created for religious sites, and are now commonly used to decorate commercial premises such as hotels and restaurants. The majority of carvers interviewed only carve images of the nat Lords or other local guardian nats to order. However, some workshops in Mandalay and Yangon mass produce images in conventionalised poses that are sold in shops lining the entrance corridors to major pagodas (Fig. 56).

All the woodcarving workshops observed during my fieldwork in Mandalay, Yangon and Bagan make Buddha and nat statues, and the methods of carving and decorating both types of image are essentially the same. Both makers and sellers of nat statues differentiate 'ancient' or 'old' and 'modern' styles of statues, and there has been a definite shift in the form and final appearance of statues of the nat Lords in particular. These differences are covered in detail in the section on iconography later in this chapter.

The master woodcarvers interviewed are all familiar with the iconography of the most important and popular nats. Their knowledge and carving skills were acquired via family workshops or in a master/apprentice milieu. The monk U Pandita, a master carver formerly known as U Ba Tint and the oldest master woodcarver interviewed, learned his craft from his father and maternal grandfather. When he was young, *natkadaw* would come to his father's workshop and ask for a particular posture, which he would draw on paper. If they agreed on the design he would then make the carving.¹⁹¹

Similarly, the woodcarvers at Aung Nan, a large workshop in Mandalay, trained for six to seven years under the supervision of older relatives before working on their own. In order to achieve high quality work, they each specialise in one of the well recognised woodcarving styles for

¹⁹¹ U Pandita, discussion. U Pandita is now in his 80s.

Buddha images, known as Inwa, Yadanapon, or Shan style.¹⁹² The Aung Nan workshop also specialises in particular nat statues as well — Myin Hpyu Shin, the Lord of the White Horse, is popular with tourists.¹⁹³

While apprentice woodcarvers may not necessarily know the legends of the nats they are carving, the master carvers of the workshop will certainly be familiar with them. One master carver told me that the design of a nat is “only in the mind of the master ... of the workshop.”¹⁹⁴ Another master carver said he would do the initial carving then pass the image on to others to finish the detail; while another said that all his apprentices know what he wants, and were able to carve images accordingly.¹⁹⁵ All the master woodcarvers interviewed are familiar with the traditional iconography of the nats most commonly ordered by their clients, which include the *dewa* nats and the more popular nat Lords or other local guardian nats. As U Pandita said

All the styles of the nats and the way they are dressed have long traditions. Different styles for different nats, that is, Ko Gyi Kyaw, [the] sculpture must [have] the brown horse, sword in his hand, *yinzi* [cloth tied around the chest] and *loungyi* tied to form short pants.¹⁹⁶

This design is portrayed in Fig. 57. U Pandita summed this up in a kind of artistic shorthand as

ကိုကြီးကျော်၊ ရင်စည်း၊ ကတောင်းကျိုက်၊ မြင်းညှိစီး
Ko Gyi Kyaw, *yinzi*, *loungyi* tucked up, rides a brown horse.¹⁹⁷

A major artistic element such as an identifying attribute is inevitably included in all nat images. Ko Gyi Kyaw, for instance, is usually shown riding his brown horse, or, as in the case of Fig. 58, with a fighting cock or toddy-pot, as according to his legend he was a famous drunkard and cock-fighter. However, a master carver living and working in Yangon told me the styles of nat carvings have changed over the past 20 to 50 years. He says this is because carvers rarely have

¹⁹² Traditionally, figures of the Buddha, the nats and humans belonged to a motif group known as *nari pàn*, while *kapi pàn* carvers specialised in animals, birds and supernatural beings, including nats, in animated poses and settings. The *MMOS* lists 11 *pàn*, defined as “fine arts and crafts”: goldsmithing, blacksmithing, turnery, painting, masonry, lacquerwork, stucco work, coppersmithing, carving, stonecutting and stone polishers. The latter were sometimes “carelessly omitted from the list.” *MMOS*, 508-9. The number and precise definition of each *pàn* varies between sources. See, for example, Fraser-Lu, *Burmese Crafts*, 21; and Moilanen and Ozhegov, *Mirrored in Wood*, 4.

¹⁹³ Ko Min (Manager, Aung Nan, Mandalay), in discussion with the author, January 20, 2014.

¹⁹⁴ U Win Maung (Tampawaddy), in discussion with the author, January 2014. U Win Maung is a well-known master carver, archaeologist and heritage advisor in Myanmar, and I thank him for taking the time to meet with me..

¹⁹⁵ U Pandita, discussion; interview with master carver (Tampawaddy), March 5, 2015.

¹⁹⁶ U Pandita, discussion.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

the opportunity to see older imagery, so have no statues to reference. All the carvers he knows only make nat statues in ‘modern’ styles, suggesting knowledge of the older forms is either fading, or the preference is for the newer, more conventionalised forms shown in Fig. 56.¹⁹⁸

Statues in the round are carved by reference to a drawn design, a photograph or from memory. The iconography of each nat is largely learned from photos, artworks made by older carvers, or from books. Imagery is thus standardised to a large extent. Customers sometimes bring in a picture of what they want, and one informant said that if he was asked to carve a more “obscure” nat he would go to the local *natkadaw* to find out how it should look.¹⁹⁹ However, as demonstrated by the statue of Ko Gyi Kyaw in Fig. 58, images are also made that fall outside the traditional models.

Myanmar’s famous low and high relief woodcarvings have been the traditional decoration for Buddhist temples and monasteries from at least the Bagan era. *Dewa* nats, scenes from the *Jātaka* tales, and vignettes from the legends of popular nat Lords and other ‘lower’ nats are frequent subjects for decorative carvings. Large format relief carvings are also commissioned as decorative pieces for private homes, and more public spaces like high-end hotels and restaurants. The process for crafting these has not altered since 1906, when it was recorded by Harry L. Tilly — the design is first drawn onto paper which is transferred to prepared wood blocks of the required length and height before carving commences (Fig. 59).²⁰⁰ The best quality relief carvings are those made from one piece of wood, while a “second quality” has smaller panels carved separately then affixed to a backing panel.²⁰¹

Wood used in nat imagery

When it came to the choice of wood, only two of the three varieties specified for nat images in the Myawaddy Mingyi’s 1820 *Inventory* were still being used by the woodcarvers observed during fieldwork — *yamane* (*Gmelina arborea*) and *pādaug* (*Pterocarpus macrocarpus*), the

¹⁹⁸ Interview with master carver (Yangon), March 6, 2014.

¹⁹⁹ Ko Min, discussion; interview with woodcarver, March 7, 2015.

²⁰⁰ Harry L. Tilly, *Wood-Carving of Burma* (Rangoon: Harry Tilly, 1903), 3-5. Relief carving practices were recorded more recently by Fraser-Lu in the 1990s. Fraser-Lu, *Burmese Crafts*, 89-94.

²⁰¹ Ko Min, discussion.

pinkish-red coloured wood seen in Fig. 60. Whether *sagà* wood is still used is not known; however, it was not listed among the 28 different types of wood recorded by Moilanen as used in woodcarving in the early 1990s.²⁰² Two master carvers told me that *yamane* is still the traditional wood used for creating nat carvings. It is not a particularly hard wood, but is considered the best to use as its fibres are well-connected and it lasts a long time. After it has been carved and sanded, the resulting figure “is smooth, as if it is made of ivory.”²⁰³

Yamane is preferred to teak (*Tectona grandis*, in Burmese *gyùn*), as teak fibres run straight, and may easily be broken. However, approximately 30 years ago *yamane* became harder to obtain, and nat statues are generally now made from teak, the best quality being aged between 25 to 100 years.²⁰⁴ Ko Min, the owner/manager of the Aung Nan workshop in Mandalay, said they usually used teak for their carvings because, being a hard wood, it lasts longer, but that the choice of wood for a commissioned statue ultimately depended on the choice of the customer. In this respect nat statues differ from those of the Buddha, as the choice of wood for a commissioned Buddha statue will traditionally be decided by an astrologer, or it will be made from the wood associated with one’s day of birth.²⁰⁵ However, Ko Min told me that teak would be used if his workshop’s customers did not request a particular type of wood for their statue.

Woodcarving techniques

When carving figures in the round, all the carvers observed work in the traditional manner, seated on the ground and steadying the log of wood with their bare feet, as seen in Figs. 60 and 61. A rough design is drawn in chalk on a log of the appropriate length and diameter, and the outline is cut. Four kinds of chisel are used for this rough cutting: plain (straight profile), semi-circular, one with a shallower semi-circular profile and a V-shaped chisel. The sizes of the

²⁰² Irene Moilanen, “Last of the Great Masters?,” 84-5.

²⁰³ U Pandita, discussion, U Win Maung (Tampawaddy), discussion.

²⁰⁴ U Pandita, discussion; U Win Maung (Tampawaddy), discussion. In her analysis of the thrones of the Konbaung dynasty, Daw Yi Yi notes that “all the carvings made [on the thrones] were made of *yamane*. The popularity of this wood was probably because of its low shrinkage once it was dry, its durability and adaptability to carving.” Yi Yi, “The Thrones of the Burmese Kings,” *Journal of the Burma Research Society* XLIII (1960): 123. According to an article on the royal thrones of the Myanmar court, *yamane* was used for the Lion Throne as it symbolises royalty, bravery, integrity and faithfulness. Khin Maung Nyunt, “Thrones of Myanmar Kings,” *New Light of Myanmar*, February 23, 2014.

²⁰⁵ Moilanen, “Last of the Great Masters?,” 84. Moilanen’s thesis provides a list of the suitable woods for each day of the week.

chisels range from 1/4” to 1” (approximately 6mm to 25mm).²⁰⁶ Once blocked out in this manner, more detailed features are outlined in chalk or pen to guide the carver’s execution of the design (Fig. 62). A line drawn down the centre of the image (Fig. 63), helps keep the design balanced and symmetrical. Modern power tools, such as angle grinders, are used along with different grades of sandpaper to smooth contours.

Relief carvings, if reasonably large, may be leaned against a support, but carvers were also seen working on these laid flat on the ground. In the past, the gaps in a relief carving or a statue would first be bored out with an auger, but nowadays an electric drill is commonly used (Fig. 64). Semi-circular and V-shaped chisels in different diameters are used for incising lines and carving out crevices (Fig. 65). Saws and sandpaper are used alongside more traditional implements such as the twig brush seen at the bottom of Fig. 65. The hammers the carvers are using in Fig. 66 are another traditional tool, made from the inner trunk of the tamarind tree (*Tamarindus indica*) where the grain is most dense.²⁰⁷ The photographs shown at Figs. 64 to 68 demonstrate different stages in the carving of decorative panels.

The use of modern power tools has had a significant impact on both the techniques of woodcarving, and on the finished product. A Yangon-based master carver told me that the use of modern tools made carvings smoother, more elegant, with more detail. He told me he is able to look at a carving and know immediately what sort of tools have been used. He also identified a skill known as “wood eyes”, the ability to look at the surface of a piece of cut wood and know which end is up — in other words, which end of the log, before it was cut from the tree, was originally closest to the sky, and which was closest to the ground. This is an important skill, as Buddha and nat statues must be carved the right way up, the head from the top of the log and the base from the bottom, in accordance with the belief that the head is the most sacred part of the body.²⁰⁸

Both large and small statues may be made from one piece of wood, or in sections that are later fitted together (Fig. 69). The head and hands of wooden figures may be created and decorated

²⁰⁶ U Win Maung (Tampawaddy), discussion.

²⁰⁷ U Pandita, discussion.

²⁰⁸ Interview with master carver, Yangon, March 6, 2014.

separately, then assembled into the final product, as seen in the heads of the *dewa* figures in Fig. 70. The attributes that so often serve to identify a nat, such as a sword, are usually made and decorated separately, then placed in position when the statue is finished (Fig. 71). This allows workshops to create a ‘stock style’ of statue that in some cases can be modified with the addition of different attributes or a specific paint colour to represent a particular nat.

Nat imagery is made today in a variety of sizes, qualities and commensurate price ranges, to suit different buyers. These may be a *natt'ain* or *natkadaw* wanting a new statue, or a devotee buying a statue for a home shrine, or to donate to a favourite *natnàn* in thanks for a nat's assistance. There are still older statues found in antique shops that are sought out by private collectors, while tourists or local buyers wanting a less expensive piece can easily find the modern style of brightly painted carvings in tourist markets and pagoda shops.

DECORATION

A client who commissions an image can choose from different levels of decoration.²⁰⁹ Statues may be completely painted using modern paints, partly or completely coated with traditional *thiqsè* (lacquer), or a mixture of both. Statues are then often decorated with supplementary *thayò* (lacquer moulding), and embellished with gold leaf and glass or mirror mosaic. This is the classic Mandalay style, as shown in Fig. 72, that developed in the early 19th century and is still popular today. Nowadays, cheap gold foil may be used instead of genuine gold leaf, to save time and keep prices down.

Lacquer

Thiqsè, the resin of the *Melanorrhoea usitata* tree, is used to decorate a wide range of functional and decorative objects in Myanmar, including Buddha and nat images. Fragments of *thiqsè* provisionally dated to the 13th century have been found at Bagan, attesting to its early use, but it is not known exactly when lacquer became the conventional decoration for wooden nat

²⁰⁹ U Pandita, discussion.

imagery.²¹⁰ However, there are nat images covered in lacquer and gold leaf provisionally dated to the 17th century still extant, so the practice was likely standardised by that time. The technique called *shwezawa yèthàkyin*, the application of gold on lacquer, is referred to as an historic method of creating imagery of the nat Hnamedaw Taungyi Shin, Min Mahagiri's sister. Her image is recorded as being drawn in lacquer on the *sagà* trees around Mt Popa, acknowledging her presence on the mountain and her creation legend.²¹¹

As lacquer provides both protection from the elements and a suitable surface for gold leaf to adhere to, it was probably employed on nat statues, as it was on Buddha images, precisely for those reasons. The oldest nat statues seen during fieldwork were small carvings, ranging from approximately 15 to 40cm high, and completely covered with gold leaf, such as those shown at Figs. 73 and 74. These simply carved, lacquered and gilded statues are typical of those made during the Inwa to Nyaungyan eras (16th to mid 18th century).²¹²

Prior to the availability of tubes of oil paint which were introduced during the British occupation, probably in the very late 1800s, a dull red coloured lacquer known as *hinthapada* was used to decorate nat statues. This is still occasionally employed, although if gold leaf is applied over it, the *hinthapada* tends to make the gold turn a paler colour. As the preference is for brighter, shinier gold, more gold leaf then needs to be applied, but this is not always seen as economically desirable.²¹³ Many nat statues do, however, have gold leaf applied to them as a means of paying homage, as is done for Buddha images.

U Pandita told me that about a century ago, nat statues were only decorated with black lacquer and gold leaf, as in Fig. 72, the image of a female nat riding an elephant. This statue was carved

²¹⁰ Isaacs and Blurton, *Visions from the Golden Land*, 22-3. The authors describe the practice being introduced gradually as a consequence of war with Thailand.

²¹¹ Khin Maung Than, *Yôya Naq Youncihmu*, 3. Unfortunately no date for the use of the *shwezawayèthàkyin* technique is given by the author; it is simply noted as being "a long time ago". I was told that *sagà* trees are commonplace in the region around Mt Popa. Ma Aye Aye Khine (archaeologist, Department of Archaeology, Mandalay), in discussion with the author, October 5, 2015.

²¹² U Win Maung (Tampawaddy), discussion.

²¹³ U Pandita, discussion. *Hinthapada*, a sulphide of mercury, is also known as cinnabar, or vermilion. The bases of nat statues are still conventionally painted a dull red colour to mimic *hinthapada*, as demonstrated by the many images included in my thesis.

and decorated in what is now considered an ‘old’ style. When U Pandita was young, painting nat images became more common:

They started using the oil paint ... from the time of the British; before that the Burmese had their own formula for making paint. [I] never used the Burmese way of painting because [I] was born during the British era, and oil paints and wall paints were already available.²¹⁴

However, people who were well off would pay more to have lacquer and/or gold leaf applied to their statues. U Pandita said:

If the customer asks to paint it, I just paint it. If the customer asks for gold leaf, it takes time, is more expensive. Just to paint it, you don’t need lacquer first. But if you want gold leaf, you have to have lacquer for it to stick, so you have to go through a long process ... for the figures, to put the gold leaf, you’ve got to put the lacquer at least five times. So it gets applied, goes in the ground to harden, then apply the [lacquer] again, then [it] gets polished, another coat ... so it takes a long time.²¹⁵

This was confirmed by another master carver, U Win Maung (Tampawaddy), who told me the older, traditional method of decoration for wooden statues was “black lacquer, then some decoration is specially gilded, including the skin”, as in Fig. 72.²¹⁶

Paint

The modern style of nat statues seen in Fig. 56 began to be made around 50 years ago, alongside the introduction of acrylic paint to Myanmar. This led to the more recent convention of painting the ‘skin’ of nat images with naturally coloured skin tones rather than gold leaf, although black lacquer and gilding may still be used to decorate the nat’s skin and clothing. Ko Min from Mandalay’s Aung Nan workshop noted that 70 to 80 years ago, paint was used to hide any flaws in the carving, but now nat images are painted purely for aesthetic reasons. U Pandita told me that the same type of oil paint used in fine art painting may be used, or “like for houses,

²¹⁴ U Pandita, discussion. U Pandita was not able to tell me about the formula for making paint, but referred to the wall painting at Bagan as proof of how long lasting it was. Different kinds of substances used in Bagan wall painting are listed in a 13th century inscription recording a donation at Bagan: orpiment, vermilion, minim, chalk, gum-lac and plumbago. G. H. Luce, “Economic Life of the Early Burman,” *Journal of the Burma Research Society* LVIII, no. 1 (1975): 328.

²¹⁵ U Pandita, discussion.

²¹⁶ U Win Maung (Tampawaddy), discussion.

wall paint” to make images that are cheaper than those that are lacquered then gilded with genuine gold leaf.²¹⁷

During fieldwork, I observed statues being painted with high gloss enamel paint, thinned with turpentine, and white acrylic paint used as a base coat, with different colours for topcoats (Fig. 75). Bright colours appear to be preferred, giving the nat statues a rather naive appearance not unlike Western wooden children’s toys. U Win Maung (Tampawaddy) told me the colour green was never used on nat statues, as the word ‘green’ in Burmese is ‘*sein*’, giving rise to an associated meaning with the *natsein*, people who suffered a ‘green’ (a raw, or untimely) death.²¹⁸ However, the carved clothing on a few nat statues in the Mahamuni pagoda shops, as in Fig. 56, were painted green, indicating the associated meaning with the term *natsein* may be waning.

Thayò decoration

When *thiqsè* (Fig. 76), is mixed with the ash of animal bone or dried and powdered cow dung, a malleable and pliable putty-like substance called *thayò* is produced, which can then be used for relief-moulded decoration on both painted and lacquered statues.²¹⁹ Figs. 77 to 79 show the process of preparing decorative *thayò* string, known as *thiqsègyò*. In Fig. 77, the young boy is beating *thayò* paste into a long sausage shape, which is rolled by hand with the aid of a small wooden block to form long pieces of string (Figs. 78 and 79). *Thiqsègyò* of various thicknesses is then produced using a wooden mold and roller (Figs. 80 and 81). Fig. 82 shows both plain and patterned *thiqsèkyò* being applied with the aid of a small wooden stylus to a section of statue pre-painted with lacquer. As the lacquer is sticky, it binds the *thiqsègyò* to the surface of the carving, and after two or three days it hardens “like cement.”²²⁰ Statues decorated with *thayò* are kept for about 15 days in a cool place to completely cure between coats. The best quality statues

²¹⁷ U Pandita, discussion. This was confirmed in discussions with two other interview participants, U Win Maung (Tampawaddy) and Ko Min.

²¹⁸ U Win Maung (Tampawaddy), discussion.

²¹⁹ Ko Min, discussion. Another source lists paddy husk and teakwood sawdust mixed with animal bone. “The Lacquer Tradition in Myanmar,” *SEAMEO Newsletter* Vol. 3, last modified February 20, 2001, http://www.seameo.org/lacquer_tradition.htm#lacquer_tradition.

²²⁰ Ko Min, discussion.

have up to seven layers of lacquer and four layers of paint applied.²²¹ Other workshops apply at least one coat of lacquer as a base for decoration. I also observed unpainted wooden statues being coated with adhesive latex, with *thiqsègyò* applied directly to the sticky surface, in a quicker and cheaper method of production.

Fig. 83 shows a finished carving prior to decoration, and Fig. 84 shows the same carving, with its pair, photographed eight days later, when both had since been decorated with supplementary *thiqsègyò* and painted pink. Lacquered statues have a longer life than those that are only painted, and one workshop manager told me that a painted statue would be used inside, while a lacquer statue “can go outside”, so would therefore be more suited to a roadside shrine.²²²

Gold and silver leaf

Gold leaf, made from pure gold, is produced by hand in the traditional manner at several workshops in Mandalay, and is sold in packets of small squares or rectangles, each leaf being protected by pieces of backing paper. A sheet of gold leaf is taken, pressed gold side down onto the statue and the backing paper removed. As the gold is extremely friable, a small, soft paintbrush is used to work the gold leaf into the crevices of the carving, and the tip of the brush is used to lift a thicker application of gold from its backing paper when the artist wishes to apply it more thickly. Fig. 85 shows a statue having gold leaf applied to it over an undercoat of traditional *hinhapada*, which provides a suitable surface for the gold to adhere to. A finished statue can be seen in the top left hand corner of the photograph.

The best quality, and consequently, higher priced statues, are decorated with genuine gold leaf, but for less expensive statues gold-coloured emulsion paint may be used. Gold leaf is also applied to nat images as an offering. However, one shrine attendant interviewed said they no longer did this as they did not want the features of their nat images to be obscured. While the use of silver leaf can be found on older statues and was historically employed for images of Myin Hpyu Shin, this does not seem to be as common. I did observe one statue decorated with silver

²²¹ Ibid. Newly lacquered objects were historically kept underground to cure, and some lacquer workshops still have underground cellars for this purpose. Myanmar’s lacquerware traditions and industry are well covered in the art historical literature. See, for example, Than Tun, *Lacquerware Journeys*; Isaacs and Blurton, *Visions from a Golden Land*; Fraser-Lu, *Burmese Crafts*, 221-45.

²²² Ko Min, discussion.

leaf, although as noted, no contemporary imagery used this method of decoration.²²³ Modern images of Myin Hpyu Shin are now conventionally painted white, although a few were observed in shrines that had been painted with silver-coloured paint.

Disco *shwe*

‘Disco *shwe*’, or ‘Japanese gold’ are the common terms for gold coloured foil, which has been in use in Mandalay for approximately 30 years. According to U Pandita, disco *shwe* is occasionally preferred by customers as it has a much brighter appearance than genuine gold leaf. It also makes the final product much cheaper, an important consideration for some customers.²²⁴ The foil is imported from Japan in rolls of approximately 120 metres in length, and at the time of research these were being bought for around 10,000 *kyaq* (approximately AUD\$10).²²⁵ Strips of foil are cut from the roll and tacked onto a wooden frame foil side down, and the underside painted with adhesive (Fig. 86). Pieces of foil are then cut to the appropriate size and applied by hand, pressed into the moulding of the object either using the fingers, or an old toothbrush covered with a plastic bag, to work it into the carving’s crevices (Fig. 87). The ‘right’ or upper side of the foil strip has a thin film of cellophane which is peeled off and discarded. Some statues are decorated with genuine gold leaf on the face only, with disco *shwe* applied to other areas. Moilanen recorded that disco *shwe* was applied over lacquer, but this technique seems to have been discarded in favour of adhesive, which is quicker and easier to obtain and apply.²²⁶ Disco *shwe* could also be cut to the same size as squares of genuine gold leaf, to be applied to Buddha or nat imagery as an act of homage, but this was not observed.²²⁷

²²³ Ko Min, discussion; interview with *natt’ ein*, January 23, 2014.

²²⁴ U Pandita, discussion.

²²⁵ Interview with workshop owner at Mandalay, January 20, 2014. This informant told me Japan invented this foil because it has no gold from which to make genuine gold leaf.

²²⁶ Moilanen, “Last of the Great Masters?,” 86.

²²⁷ Charlotte Galloway, email message to author, May 28, 2016. Only genuine gold leaf from recognised workshops is allowed to be used at the Shwedagon in Yangon, and at the Shwezigon at Bagan. U Win Maung Myint, discussion.

Glass and mirror mosaic

Hmanshi shwekyá, glass mosaic embedded in gilded *thayò*, is another traditional decoration for nat imagery and many other objects.²²⁸ Lines of glass mosaic decoration are applied to statues and other objects between *thiqsègyò* while the lacquer solution beneath is still tacky, but workshops were observed using a thin line of fabric adhesive instead, which is white when applied but dries clear. Pre-cut and faceted glass mosaic pieces, made with an opaque white backing to reflect more light, are now bulk bought ready-made in canisters of various sizes from Mandalay's Zegyo market. These have replaced the older method of using bits of glass from broken light bulbs.²²⁹ A wooden stylus is used to pick up each piece of mosaic and put it in place — Fig. 88 shows glass mosaic being glued onto the bottom of an offering receptacle over a disco *shwe* base. Disco *shwe* is also sometimes applied over existing mirror and glass decoration, then a wooden stylus is used to scratch away the foil covering the upper surface. Again, this is a quicker and cheaper method of producing decoration that resembles traditional *hmansi shwekyá*.

The photograph at Fig. 89 shows that once the carving process is completed, different elements of decoration may be done almost concurrently by different specialists. This statue of a monk has areas that have been painted with a thin lacquer solution prior to decorative strings of *thayò* being applied. The pictured artist is in the process of applying glass mosaic between the *thiqsègyò*, as seen on the robe draping the statue's right arm. Paint and/or gold leaf or foil will then be applied over this decoration, and the remainder of the statue lacquered and/or painted.

Metal

The highly decorative fascia and barge boards seen on many temples and monastery buildings in Myanmar are usually made from tin, then painted in bright colours. This means of decoration is also used for decorative elements on Buddha and nat images, such as the pair of small, praying *dewa* statuettes shown in Fig. 90. The decorative pieces are cut from a flat sheet of tin using a

²²⁸ Moilanen wrote that the *hmansi shwekyá* technique was relatively new, probably brought to Myanmar with the influx of Thai artists following the conquest of Ayutthaya in 1767. At the time of her research, Buddha images decorated with *hmansi shwekyá* were not available in pagoda shops, but now they are commonly seen. Moilanen, "Last of the Great Masters?," 88.

²²⁹ Interview with workshop owner at Mandalay, March 5, 2015.

paper template, as seen in the bottom left-hand corner of Fig. 91. Flat-headed pins are then used to hold pieces together, as seen on the flanges attached to the rear of the left-hand figure in Fig. 90.

THE INFLUENCE OF PUPPET IMAGERY

Puppetry, first documented in 1444, is one of the oldest Myanmar art forms still practised today.²³⁰ In 1822, a Royal Order was issued to codify all the aspects of a performance, including a law that the person paying for the show was responsible for offering the guardian nats one coconut, a bunch of bananas and a *tical* (approximately 16 grams) of pure silver. These were to be placed in a tray, along with a copy of the story to be performed.²³¹ Historically, puppet shows commenced with an ode to the nat spirits of fire, air and rain, then the *natkadaw* puppet made her entrance. Her song was addressed firstly to the spirit of the stage, then to the local nat of the area, and finally to the audience. Only the man who sang the part of the hero and heroine of the play being performed was permitted to sing the *natkadaw's* verses, and this was followed by some of the current *natkyin*. According to the Royal Order, *yamane* or *thiqmuzu* wood was to be used to make the *dewa*, human and horse puppets, while all the others were made of *leqpàn* (*Salmalia malabarica*) or *thanthaq* (*Albizia lucida*).²³²

Puppetry heavily influenced the production of nat imagery, with decorative elements such as sequins and cut glass being shared across puppets, Buddha and nat images. Sequins, imported from India from about the 17th century, but also struck by the royal treasury, were made from gold and silver foil in both flat and cupped shapes, and were used to decorate costumes and

²³⁰ Axel R. H. Bruns, *Burmese Puppetry* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2006), 2.

²³¹ Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma, AD 1598-1885 Part VIII, AD 1819-1847* (Kyoto: The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1988), 53-61. Than Tun noted that although this Royal Order is dated March 1, 1822, it may in fact have been written at a much later time.

²³² Than Tun, *Royal Orders Part VIII*, 53-61. Singer recorded that puppet shows traditionally began with the *natkadaw* performing extracts from *natthan*. Noel Singer, *Burmese Puppets* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1992), 10. According to Myanmar writer Ma Thanegi, the song accompanying the *natkadaw* is sung first to Thakya Min, then to the 'Thirty-Seven Nats'. Ma Thanegi, *The Illusion of Life: Burmese Marionettes* (Bangkok: White Orchid Press, 1994), 56-7.

textiles offerings. By the 1890s, flat pieces of porcelain, originally made for the eyes of Buddha images, also became popular for puppets and these were probably employed in nat images too.²³³

A puppet's costume alone made a nat instantly recognisable to the audience, as performances had a standard repertoire. Nat puppets are traditionally shown wearing a red headband, except for Thittha Shin Ma Nat (The Lady of Wood), who wears a black headband with a silver crescent, and holds peacock feathers, an attribute now shared by the *bilumá* nat Popa Medaw.²³⁴ As Thakya Min and the other *dewa* nats' costumes were updated during the later part of the Konbaung dynasty (1752-1885) to match that era's more elaborate and heavily jewelled costume, Thakya Min puppets made from the 19th century onward appear in the full royal ceremonial dress of the Konbaung court, as worn in the mid 1800s (Fig. 92).²³⁵ Prior to the demise of the monarchy and sumptuary laws, only puppet representations were permitted this honour, whereas human actors portraying royalty in live theatre were limited to the use of a symbolic attribute of kingship, such as holding an umbrella.²³⁶ Thakya Min puppets for the tourist market are still made wearing this elaborate costume, a persistent reminder of the splendour of the royal court.

MASS - P R O D U C T I O N

There are now workshops mass-producing wooden images of the more popular nats. In Mandalay these are wholesaled, undecorated, to shops in the Mahamuni temple complex where local workers apply a final layer of acrylic paint and disco *shwe* to create images for the cheaper end of the market, as seen in Fig. 56.²³⁷ This practice indicates how quickly the market for nat imagery is evolving in line with the rapid modernisation of Myanmar in the recent decade. This

²³³ Singer, *Burmese Puppets*, 8 and 27-33. Singer also wrote that some of the principal puppet characters had agate pupils, but that that was rare. He recorded how the movements and postures made by puppets became part of the repertoire of human dancers by the second half of the 19th century, and also influenced woodcarvers and sculptors. In recognition of this history, a puppet and a female dancer perform together in the regular shows given by the Mandalay Marionettes, as seen by the author in February 2012 and March 2014.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

²³⁵ U Win Maung (Tampawaddy), discussion.

²³⁶ Ma Thanegi, *Illusion of Life*, 4 and 36.

²³⁷ Interview with pagoda shop employee, March 5, 2015. I was also told about, but have not yet seen, small nat images being mass-produced in plastic. Daw Nanda Hmun (Director-General, Department of Historical Research), in discussion with the author, January 7, 2014.

growing market and the mass production of imagery has, of course, led to a highly standardised artistic style for contemporary nat statues. When the statues are seen in large groups, as displayed in a shop for example, it is apparent the imagery lacks any sense of individuality or presence. As observed by Moilanen in the early 1990s:

Most carvings are technically good or medium class handicraft, but the treatment of the motif is formal, lacking any personal touch from the carver's side. Whatever artistic ideas lay behind the original prototypes for these sculptures, they have been completely lost in hundreds and hundreds of copies carved quickly in large amounts for [the] export and tourist market. Unfortunately now, lower quality carving is also being accepted to be shown and sold. Economic realities together with loose quality requirements, even a lack of understanding and knowledge from the customer's side, provide temptation to choose quantity over quality.²³⁸

Moilanen's observations are particularly evident in the two statues shown at Figs. 93 and 94. They are almost identical apart from subtle differences in their lacquer decoration and attributes. Both are made to a generic template, modelled in a squatting position with one hand upraised and one outstretched, and decorated in an almost identical manner. The only features that differentiate them are their conventionalised attributes — Ame Gyan holds her identifying cheroot between two fingers modelled in a V-shape, and Ame Yeyin holds her upraised *dà*. Although Ame Gyan in particular can be identified by her fingers and cheroot, it is not surprising to find each nat's name painted on the statue's base. This method of identifying a nat appears to have commenced in the late 19th or early 20th century, as all the older images seen lacked this detail. The addition of a name in either *thiqsègyò* string, or paint, on a base is now quite commonly seen.

The demise of the nuances seen in older carvings appears to be continuing. One master carver interviewed lamented that concentrating on image quantity rather than quality, and the need to finish a commission quickly, has led to a loss of skills within his workshop.²³⁹ Another case in point is the production of the stone or glass eyes made for Buddha images, puppets and nat

²³⁸ Moilanen, "Last of the Great Masters?," 93. Moilanen noted that even the restricted tourism of the 1980s and early 1990s had added a group of 'souvenir' motifs to carvers' repertoires, such as busts of Red Indian chiefs and mermaids, taken from advertisements in foreign magazines. These types of carvings can still be found in Myanmar's tourist shops.

²³⁹ Interview with master carver, Tampawaddy, March 5, 2015. When interviewed in the early 1990s, U Win Maung (Tampawaddy), observed that the "British conquest and rule in the 1800's made our artists craftsmen." Moilanen, "Last of the Great Masters?," 72. Moilanen and Ozhegov also recorded that "hopes for economic profit have also encouraged shortcuts in arts and crafts in Burma." Moilanen and Ozhegov, *Mirrored in Wood*, 5.

images. Around a century ago, these were carefully crafted in two differently coloured pieces of stone or opaque glass, then fused together with no visible join. Fig. 95, an older style statue of the important local guardian nat Pale Yin, shows how cleverly this was achieved (her statue has since been updated with the addition of painted lips, eyelashes and eyebrows). There is still at least one workshop in Mandalay making high quality glass eyes for Buddha images, which may also be used for nat statues (Fig. 96). However, the eyes of the puppet shown at Fig. 97, acquired from a souvenir stall at Mingun in 2015, shows how the maker has followed the traditional idiom but with none of the skill.²⁴⁰

OTHER MEDIA

Nat images are also made from bronze, cast using the traditional 'lost wax' method, although this method of production appears to be mainly reserved for images of *dewa* nats. Fig. 98 shows the beautifully detailed figure of a dancing *dewa* nat that has been modelled in thin wax over a clay base in the first part of the lost wax process. The statue will then be covered in more clay so the wax layer sits between the two clay layers. The statue is then carefully heated to melt the wax, which runs out through small holes made in the bottom of the figure. Hot molten bronze is then poured in through small holes in the clay, to take the place of the wax, thereby creating an image. Fig. 99 shows a pair of newly cast statues, marked up with blue pen where additional decorative elements will be applied, or incised decoration will be carved into the cast surface. Fig. 100 shows a partially cast statue of Myin Hpyu Shin being polished using a motorised polishing wheel. Files, machine grinders and marble discs are used as well.²⁴¹

Images may be finished by hand in the traditional manner. Ko Par Lwin, the workshop manager of Bandoola Bronze Sculpture in Tampawaddy, told me that although power tools are popular, handmade tools create a final image of higher quality. The face and posture were identified as

²⁴⁰ The puppet was purchased for US\$25 and the seller told the buyer (a friend of the author) that it was 'old'. A lovely Mandalay style Buddha with stone eyes is featured in Otto Karow, *Burmese Buddhist Sculpture; the Johan Moger Collection* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1991), 87. The use of opaque white and black glass or stone eyes were a feature of Buddha and nat images made prior to the early 1900s, and these are still occasionally seen today. U Hla Baw, (Bonton, Bogyoke Aung San Market, Yangon), in discussion with the author, January 15, 2014. Larger nat statues featuring opaque glass eyes were retailing for approximately USD450-500 in early 2014.

²⁴¹ Ko Par Lwin, (U Par & Sons, Tampawaddy, Mandalay), in discussion with the author, 31 January, 2014. The statue of Myin Hpyu Shin was the only 'lower' nat image seen made in bronze.

the most important parts of a cast statue, as they provide the image's identity. As the majority of images made are modelled on older, highly regarded pieces, these must conform to the period of the original image for the sake of authenticity. Only then, said Ko Par Lwin, will customers be satisfied and want to buy.²⁴²

Depictions of nats can also be found in traditional Myanmar textiles, although this does not appear to be as common as their presence in other media. A rare example on a *kálága*, a traditional wall hanging, shows the climactic scene in the popular story of the virtuous wife, Ma Me U, being carried off by the younger Taungbyon Brother's tiger after she spurned his advances, was killed by the tiger and became a nat (Fig. 101). Nat imagery is also made from cast iron and plaster, and statues in these media are discussed later in the context of my stylistic chronology.

QUESTIONS OF BEAUTY

As noted by Moilanen in the early 1990s, the word 'art' is understood in a broad manner in Myanmar in that it encompasses fine and decorative arts, but rarely as 'art for art's sake'.²⁴³ The beauty of a donated piece of sculpture or carving to a religious foundation is therefore closely connected to the value of the donation rather than any aesthetic quality. In many cases, nat images are created by highly skilled artists, yet they are not usually considered as art objects, but rather as locations of meaning. Whereas a nat image may be considered beautiful by its owner, when I asked *natt'eìn* and *natkadaw* about this it struck many of them as an unusual question. However, Daw Nu Nu Yin, a *natkadaw* living near Yangon, told me it was important to have good quality statues, and when she ordered a statue she would make an offering to the nat involved: "I pray to him, I want a good statue, is part of you, and then please, [in] kindness to me, give me a good statue for me, especially for me." If an offering was made, a nat spirit could then influence a woodcarver to make it "like a live statue". Daw Nu Nu Yin said that because

²⁴² Ko Par Lwin, discussion.

²⁴³ Moilanen, "Last of the Great Masters?," 15. Myanmar's paintings on canvas are an obvious exception.

carvers make so many statues, sometimes the nat will come and influence the carver's hand and it will "become a live statue and [be] different to the others."²⁴⁴

For this informant, whether a statue was made in an old or modern style was irrelevant, it was the influence of the nat that determined the quality, beauty and or power of the image. When I asked Daw Nu Nu Yin whether it was important to have a beautiful statue, she replied "The most beautiful [statue] can [be] more interesting for the people ... But the more powerful statue is better. But some statue is also powerful, also beautiful."²⁴⁵

When asked if he preferred the older style of statues to the newer, one woodcarver in Bagan told me he thought the older style of image was "boring", using as an example Myin Hpyu Shin, who used to be depicted as a man, with a moustache, riding a horse that is "celestial, all painted white".²⁴⁶ He prefers the more recent style where the horse is more energetic, and more colours are used. Another master carver told me that it was easy to spot the newer statues because the use of modern tools meant they are "smooth", have more details and "the colours are nice."²⁴⁷ I considered many of the nat statues I saw to be beautiful works of art, and when I voiced this opinion the custodians or creators of the statue were pleased. For the custodians, however, the notion of beauty largely appeared to be allied to the belief that the nat is powerful, or is looking after its custodian and supplicants. Conversely, the creators of nat images appreciated skilfully created imagery, with notions of 'quality' appearing to be equated with 'beauty'.

S U M M A R Y

The historic methods of making nat imagery endure in the form of traditionally run workshops where traditional tools are still used. Notwithstanding the passing down of traditional art practices and styles, and the skills of Myanmar's artists, simple changes to technology, such as the introduction of modern paints and power tools, have had the most noticeable impact on the

²⁴⁴ Interview with *natkadaw* Daw Nu Nu Yin, near Yangon, March 25, 2014.

²⁴⁵ Daw Nu Nu Yin, discussion. Moilanen and Ozhegov recorded that the notion of beauty was connected with the value of the donation (in the case of a Buddha statue) rather than its artistic value, and that a Buddha image that follows the iconographic rules is considered 'beautiful'. Moilanen and Ozhegov, *Mirrored in Wood*, 4.

²⁴⁶ Interview with woodcarver, Bagan, March 7, 2015.

²⁴⁷ Interview with woodcarver, Bagan, March 7, 2015.

appearance of three dimensional nat imagery. It is apparent, however, that woodcarving masters of the 19th century were able to create incredibly detailed and finely wrought carvings without the aid of modern technology. Wood is still the most prevalent medium, being both traditional and one that is relatively inexpensive and easily obtained, although the use of *yamane* has largely been replaced by teak and other woods. The use of *sagà* for statues of Min Mahagiri and his sister, once a required reference to the place they inhabit, is no longer current.

For centuries, the traditional colours for decorating statues of popular nat Lords or other local guardian nats were black, gold, silver and the dull red of traditional *hinhapada* lacquer. As the older style of black lacquer and gilded nat images were only considered as collectible works of art by a few interested visitors to the country, there are fewer left to study in situ — and the images being created today are arguably less collectible. Since the introduction of modern paints and the availability of a larger colour palette, portrayals of the clothing nat statues ‘wear’ are now found in a wide range of colours, with paint in a more natural skin tone largely replacing the use of gold leaf or gold-coloured paint on a nat’s ‘skin’ from the mid-20th century onward.²⁴⁸ The use of disco *shwe* from around the 1980s is now a cheaper method of providing traditional decoration, and its use, and that of the natural skin tone coloured paint, can therefore help date nat images. This should be used with caution however, as nat statues may in some cases be redecorated.

Whether a nat image is ‘beautiful’ or not appears to be very much in the eye of the beholder. For users of the images, notions of power expressed in the nat’s features, their gestures and attributes, seem to outweigh a purely aesthetic appreciation. For one of my informants at least, it appears that if master craftsmen are spiritually in tune with the influence of the nat whose image they are creating, this may inform and be perceived to improve their work, but this area requires more focused anthropological research.

Although artists followed time-honoured traditional motifs and forms, there was, and still is, room for individual artistic expression that might enhance the reputation of a carver or his

²⁴⁸ Assuming wooden images of nats were made during that time, it is possible they were also painted in similar colours prior to the adoption of the convention of lacquer and gold leaf seen in images stylistically dated to the 17th century.

workshop. While many artists show a real sensitivity to the subject matter in the execution of the work, other nat imagery is mass produced for inexpensive sales. Regardless of the quality of an image, it will still display defining iconography, the subject of the next section.

SECTION II: ICONOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION

The different types of nats are depicted in ways that reveal the most important aspects of their narrative: their genesis or creation legend; the location they are tied to; the role they played if originally human; the role they play as a nat or the role they are expected to perform; and often a mixture of these. Posture, gesture, grouping with their familial nats, attributes, props and clothing all help identify a nat to the viewer, as well as expressing their role, their character, or an element of their legend. Artistic choices, many now conventionalised, were made over many centuries in order to highlight some of these aspects.

I begin this section by focusing on what I argue are the three major aspects taken into account in the making of nat imagery of all types: their fundamental role as guardians of heavenly or earthly locations; the presentation of their biography; and a visual expression of their power. This is followed by an analysis of how these aspects play out in the artistic representations of the 'higher' and 'lower' nats, along with parallels in Buddhist and Brahmanic/Hindu imagery. This will demonstrate that certain conventionalised iconographical features — a posture, a gesture, an attribute or even how they are dressed — are visual markers that inform the viewer of the nat's place in the Buddhist cosmology, and its role in the lives of the people. In many cases, these visual markers also serve to instantly identify a particular nat to the viewer, and will inform the stylistic chronology proposed in Chapter 5.

GUARDIANS OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

Let the nats who guard the royal city, the palace, the umbrella, the nats who all around guard the empire, the provinces, the villages, the nats who guard the monuments of the Divine Hair around the hill Tambagutta, together with the nats governing the earth and space, and all rational beings throughout the universe utter praises ...

Inscription on Singu Min's bell (r. 1776-82)²⁴⁹

The many nats invoked in the inscription of Singu Min's bell are all guardian spirits responsible for the protection of specific places. How they are depicted in art varies according to the place they preside over, and their position in the cosmological hierarchy. As the guardians of Buddhism, Thakya Min and other *dewa* nats preside over a conceptual space as much as a physical one, and accordingly their imagery is found at many temples and monasteries. Placed either side of an entrance or as a decorative feature above, these images guard Buddhism, and also mark the transition from the secular space outside to the sacred space within. Seven-storied *pyathaq* towers, a familiar part of the Myanmar architectural landscape, include a *Thakya-bauq*, an opening in the north-west corner of the third storey, to allow Thakya Min to enter (Fig. 102).²⁵⁰ Images of Bo Bo Gyi, the generic elderly father-figure nats who guard cities, provinces and villages, are often found on pagoda platforms, or housed in shrines within the communities they protect. *Bilù* and associated beings are set in positions guarding more tangible physical spaces such as walls, entrances or stairways; the nat Lords and other local guardian nats have shrines within their domains; and nature spirits are acknowledged wherever they reside.

As both social and ritual aspects inform the appearance of the nats, this led to conventionalised iconography for many individual nats. As all nat imagery is conceptualised in terms of what, or

²⁴⁹ The translation of the bell's inscription is given in Win Pe, *Shwe Dagon* (Rangoon: Printing and Publishing Corporation, 1972), 92. This bell, donated by Singu Min (r. 1776-82), is now on the platform of the Shwedagon pagoda in Yangon. In 1824, during the first Anglo-Burmese war, the bell was dropped into the depths of the Yangon River by the British, who were trying to ship it to India as war booty. Unable to retrieve it, they promised to return it to the platform of the Shwedagon if the local people could raise it — which, according to legend, they promptly did by floating it to the top of the river using the air trapped in hundreds of bamboo poles. No doubt the “nats who guard the monuments of the Divine Hair around the hill Tambagutta”, where the Shwedagon is located, along with those of the Yangon River, were petitioned for help in restoring Singu Min's royal work of merit to its proper home.

²⁵⁰ The *pyathaq* built above the Lion Throne in Mindon Min's royal palace at Mandalay had a *Thakya-bauq*. Tainturier, “Foundation of Mandalay,” 142.

more to the point, where they guard, and the role each type of nat plays within the community, an understanding of this is fundamentally important to an art historical analysis of nat images.

The classic posture of guardianship, *bilùt'ain* (or *mosòt'ain*, hunter-sit), refers to the conventional use of images of *bilù* set in guardianship positions of the entrances and stairways of pagodas.²⁵¹ This is a posture that dates back to the first millennium CE and is still part of the conventional portrayal of many nats today. The figure is seated with one leg bent and laying along the ground with the foot tucked into the groin, with the other leg upright, bent at the knee, with the foot flat on the ground. One arm is bent at the elbow, with the elbow resting on top of the upright knee, with the hand holding a *dà* up to the shoulder, as seen in Fig. 103. In the *Inventory* and other records of the nats iconography, this posture is expressed in the customary artistic shorthand:

လက်ယာဒူးတောင် လက်ဝဲဒူးလှည့် လက်ယာလက်ထားတမ်း လက်ဝဲပေါင်တောက်
 Right knee upright, left knee laying down, right hand holds a *dà* to the shoulder, left
 covers knee.²⁵²

The *bilùt'ain* pose is most commonly seen in imagery of *bilù*, but it became an identifying feature of several prominent nat Lords too. This signifies their guardianship role, as discussed further later in this chapter.

THE PRESENTATION OF BIOGRAPHY

The presentation of biography and legend via pictorial narrative is an important aspect of Myanmar's visual culture. The importance of narrative disseminated via visual and aural performance is evidenced across Myanmar's artistic history, from paintings of *Jātaka* tales in the

²⁵¹ U Pandita, discussion. In her article on the thrones of the Konbaung kings, based on the translation of a palm-leaf manuscript manual for the thrones' construction, Daw Yi Yi notes that six *dewa* nats carved on the *Thihathana*, the Lion Throne, are "in the protective attitude — sitting with one raised knee and holding a yaktail fan in one hand." They may well represent *yakkha*. Yi Yi, "Thrones of the Burmese Kings," 105.

²⁵² BUR MS 200, 48.

Bagan era; through to the composition of songs specifically for important nat Lords in the early 18th century; and beyond to the appointment of an official Minister for Puppets in 1776.²⁵³

As argued by Galloway, the incorporation of the *Jātaka* tales, with their strong moral narratives, into Bagan era art, marked the beginning of a particularly Myanmar form of Buddhist imagery.²⁵⁴ Both *Jātaka* tales and nat legends are recounted in music, dance, drama and puppet theatre, with plenty of overlap in the media employed in all these forms of art. Whether the love of fireside tales of wicked nats found a ‘higher’ expression in Buddhist narrative, or the legends of the nats as known today were modelled on the *Jātaka* tales is open to conjecture. Nevertheless, the iconography of the Buddha is distinguished by being simple and instantly recognisable, and so is the iconography of both the ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ nats.

As described by Alexandra Green, narrative or biographical tales in Myanmar’s art may be spatially presented in three different modes: monoscenic, where the depiction of a single scene is illustrated; conflated, where several moments in a tale are shown in one frame using a single character; or as an extended narrative, where the protagonist appears several times in successive stages of the tale within an overall frame.²⁵⁵ These narrative modes are also apparent in depictions of nat legends. As argued by Green, the tale of the life of the *bilūmá* nat Popa Medaw is spatially presented in 20th century shrines at Popa Taung Kalat (the volcanic plug on the plain southeast of Bagan that is now home to a plethora of nat and *weíza* shrines), in the same way as

²⁵³ Singer, *Burmese Puppets*, 7. The post of Thabin Wun (*thabin* being the collective term for the professions of singers, dancers, musicians and puppeteers, while *wun* is a ministerial title) was created in 1776. The Thabin Wun devised rules for puppet troops to follow, listed the 28 characters required to form a set of puppets, and prescribed the sequence in which these characters would appear in a performance.

²⁵⁴ Galloway, “Burmese Buddhist Imagery,” 211-12. Of the 550 *Jātaka* tales recognised in Myanmar, the last ten, known as the *Mahanipata*, are the most commonly found in art, as each tells the tale representing one of the ten *paramittas*, the virtues of Buddhism: generosity; morality; renunciation; wisdom; energy; forbearance; truthfulness; resoluteness; loving kindness and equanimity.

²⁵⁵ Alexandra Green, “Deep Change?: Burmese Wall Paintings from the Eleventh to the Nineteenth Centuries,” *Journal of Burma Studies* 10, no. 2005/2006 (2005): 4-5. Green divides the extended narrative mode into two types differentiated by their spatial dividers: a sequential mode where natural features, buildings and dividing lines mark the boundaries between scenes; and a continuous mode, where the viewer must use visual clues such as people facing different directions to mark the divisions.

the life of the Buddha is told in temples.²⁵⁶ Certainly the elements employed by artists in constructing a visual narrative around the Buddha and the nats bear striking similarities. Both the Buddha and the nat occupy the most important — usually central — space in their respective shrines, and are surrounded by visual elements that emphasise their importance. Additional accoutrements such as the canopies and umbrellas used to designate the royal status of the Buddha are also commonly seen in nat shrines (Fig. 104). The relative size of the Buddha to his surroundings or his followers, a simple visual clue to his importance, is another artistic convention commonly seen in larger *natnàn*, where the statues of the most important nats either occupy a more prominent position, or are larger than their supporting cast (Figs. 105 and 106).

Similarly, the use of decorative glass mosaic patterns on walls, floors and ceilings, and the placement of flowers, flags, flashing neon lights and textiles; are all decorative elements used today in the ornamentation of both Buddhist temples and *natnàn*. Additionally, just as the Buddha is often depicted attended by a retinue of disciples or devotees, many modern *natnàn* viewed during fieldwork also presented the locality's foremost nat at the centre of a tableaux formed by the nat's familial group.²⁵⁷ These tableaux were augmented with props, and occasionally theatrical style backdrops, to add interest and drama for viewers. The photographs at Figs. 107 to 109 demonstrate how individual these tableaux can be — Fig. 107 shows a relatively simple scene set up in an undecorated setting, while Fig. 108, a much larger tableaux, has a painted backdrop that evokes the nat's territory, Pyin Oo Lwin, which is famous for its waterfalls. Fig. 109 is an example of another modern style of *natnàn*, with life-sized statues dressed in the latest fashions, placed in a carpeted and curtained setting reminiscent of an elegant sitting room.

²⁵⁶ Alexandra Green, "The Religious Material Cultures," paper presented at the Burma Studies Group International Conference, Singapore, August 2014. Green is currently analysing the religious material culture of two pilgrimage sites in Myanmar, the Shwese ttaw and Mt Popa, for comparison with the collection of material related to Burmese pilgrimage sites held in the British Museum. Her research project aims to expand the revisions of Southeast Asian religious scholarship by exploring how the relationships between Buddhism and non-canonical activities are seen as material features. The overlap of material culture used in paying homage to both the Buddha and the nats was discussed by Green at the Burma Studies Group International Conference in 2014, which I attended, and I thank her for sharing her presentation notes with me.

²⁵⁷ As noted by Lowry, representations of the Buddha attended by his two main disciples, Sariputta and Moggallana, were conventional by the Bagan period. They were also included in paintings and in small sculptures. Lowry, *Burmese Art*, 1.

VISUAL EXPRESSIONS OF POWER

As discussed in the first section of this chapter, Myanmar's centuries of traditional workshops manned by hereditary artists and craftsmen making Buddhist and nat imagery led to the parallel development of technical and decorative features. Other more subtle similarities between images of the Buddha and the nats are also found in the art of both, and it is not surprising to find that the way in which nat images are presented to their audience can be very similar to the presentation of the Buddha. However, direct engagement with the nat is implicit in the understanding of devotees that the nat's *leiqpya* is captured within its image, and explicit in their execution, as the eyes of the nats gaze out to their viewers. In this respect they are more akin to Hindu images, where direct contact with the god is the aim of devotional practice, than to the Buddha, whose downcast eyes encourage his followers to contemplative and meditative practice.²⁵⁸

Nevertheless, it is interesting to observe that for many people, Buddha images in Myanmar are attached to the notion of auspicious power residing within an image, alongside the image acting as a focus for meditation or the precepts of Buddhism itself. Commissions for images of the Buddha are most often for those that will be powerful by being made as replicas of a famous image, and Mandalay's Mahamuni Buddha, traditionally regarded as an actual portrait of the Buddha, is a common example.²⁵⁹ Carvings of nats that are believed to have successfully granted their supplicants' wishes also acquire a reputation for being particularly powerful, and several *natt'ein* showed me nat statues that had been donated to their shrine following a successful petition by the donor to the shrine's foremost nat.²⁶⁰

The use of posture and gesture to convey meaning is another similarity between images of the Buddha and the nats. The positioning of the hand recorded in the *Inventory* as 'right hand held

²⁵⁸ The making of eye contact with the god, known as *darshan*, is particularly auspicious in Hindu devotional practice. T. Richard Blurton, *Hindu Art* (London: British Museum Press 1992), 35.

²⁵⁹ Moilanen and Ozhegov recorded that ordering specific images of Buddha are believed to have a positive effect on the donor. Moilanen and Ozhegov, *Mirrored in Wood*, 3 and 39-40. Over the modern border with Thailand, the four-faced Byamma statue in the famous Erawan shrine in Bangkok has become known as a magical Buddha, and has an international reputation for granting financial wishes. Guelden, *Spirits Among Us*, 13-4.

²⁶⁰ Images donated following the success of a petitioner's wishes were seen at shrines in Lehgyi, Monywa, Pyay, Tada-U and Nyaung U during fieldwork in 2014.

to the chest style' was noted by Bekker as being the traditional gesture for grief.²⁶¹ This hand position is conventional iconography for several female nats whose creation legends record they became nats in this manner, such as Shwe Nabe, the wife of Min Mahagiri, who died of grief on learning her husband's fate (Fig. 110).²⁶² Similarly, the *mudrās* (postures and hand positions) of the Buddha also reference part of the narrative of his life, as well as conveying a message. For example, *bhumisparsa mudrā*, the most often encountered posture of the Buddha in Myanmar, shows the Buddha calling the earth goddess to bear witness to all the good deeds he performed over his many lifetimes, thereby making him worthy of enlightenment. This posture is as familiar to Buddhists as *bilūt'ain*, the posture of guardianship, would be familiar to nat devotees and regular visitors to Myanmar's pagodas. So too are the costumes given to both the Buddha and different types of nats. The Buddha is instantly recognisable in his usual habit of a monk, or in the royal regalia of *Jambupati* style imagery, combined with his familiar *mudrās*. The different types of nats, too, are clothed in costumes that reference their position in the Buddhist cosmological hierarchy, their legend and the role they play, as discussed below.

THE 'HIGHER' NATS

Thakya Min and the *dewa* nats

Theravada Buddhists aspire to acquire sufficient merit to be reborn in *Tawadeintha* Heaven, alongside Thakya Min and his fellow *dewa* — a process generally considered to take many lifetimes. Images of *dewa* in guardianship positions, such as Thakya Min pictured above the entrance to a temple on the Shwedagon platform, Fig. 111, act as reminders to the faithful of this aspiration and ultimate reward. As Thakya Min has long been considered the celestial equivalent of the king, he and his fellow *dewa* are customarily portrayed wearing the royal costume and ornate jewellery worn by Myanmar kings, making them instantly recognisable to devotees. This iconography has been used by Myanmar artists to denote the royal status of the Buddha, as well as the celestial status of *dewa* nats, since the early 11th century.

²⁶¹ Bekker, "Transformations," 43.

²⁶² This gesture is also symbolic of compassion in Buddhism. U Win Maung Myint, discussion.

The use of royal regalia to convey heavenly status in the 19th century is demonstrated in the *parabaiq* illustration of a scene from the *Vidhurapaṇḍita Jātaka* shown at Fig. 112. This shows the legendary King Dhanajaya playing dice with the demon Punnaka, while his guardian nat — his mother in a former life — hovers protectively just above the palace walls at the top left of the painting. The setting of a *Jātaka* tale within a contemporary Myanmar court scene demonstrates how artists used the trappings of royalty at this time to clearly identify *dewa* nats in the scenes they were painting. Moreover, by depicting celestial beings and the rulers of the kingdom wearing royal garb, 19th century artists forged an explicit link between the two and emphasised their remoteness from the common people.²⁶³ The elaborate costumes worn by Mindon Min and his chief queen at their coronation ceremony in 1857, Fig. 113, are a prime example of this, as they were specifically designed to portray the King as Byamma (the Brahmanic/Hindu deity Brahma) and his consort as a Queen of *Devaloka*.²⁶⁴

Depictions of Mindon Min and his Queen wearing their royal costumes survive in one of the many *parabaiq* painted by artists for the amusement of the court. One such *parabaiq* in the collection of the V&A shows the royal couple dressed in their full regalia but barefoot, as they are on their way to visit a monastery accompanied by their ministers (Fig. 114). Another folio from the same *parabaiq* shows the royal couple relaxing in a royal carriage, dressed more informally despite their large entourage and the trappings of royalty surrounding them (Fig. 115), and yet another shows them seated on a throne in a royal pavilion receiving homage from ministers and other members of the court (Fig. 116). In the context of official court business, they are portrayed here in the costumes that stress their heavenly connections.

This elaborate Konbaung era royal costume design is known as *malika k'aboun*. It is the conventional costume given to artistic depictions of Thakya Min and other *dewa* nats — a style now frozen in artistic time. On a visit to Mandalay in March 2015 I fortuitously came across an

²⁶³ For a focused discussion of this point, see, for example, Franklin and Swallow, "Identifying with the Gods," 1994. See also Conway's *The Shan*, on tributary dress. Conway notes that Shan royalty appropriated the power of a link with *Tawadeintha* heaven by claiming descent from heavenly beings sent to earth, while their subjects, more prosaically, emerged from a giant gourd. Conway, *The Shan*, 13 and 105-6.

²⁶⁴ Although the King and Queen were undoubtedly devout Buddhists, ritual at the royal court had been heavily Brahmanic from the Bagan period onwards. However, as argued by Pamela Gutman, the symbolism of Myanmar's kings being the earthly counterpart of Thakya Min underlay all royal ritual. Pamela Gutman, "Vishnu in Burma," *The Art of Burma New Studies* 50, no. 4 (1999): 34. For a discussion of royal regalia in the Konbaung period, see Yi Yi, "Life at the Burmese Court under the Konbaung Kings," *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 44, no. 1 (1961).

artist painting new statues set in a guardianship position either side of the entrance to a modern reconstruction of Mindon Min's ordination hall, and was able to take a photograph that highlights the main elements of this costume picked out in yellow paint (Fig. 117). These are the tiered crown (*māgai*) with the ornamental flanges behind the ears (*nāgin*); the panelled shoulder armour (*balegwè*); worn over a traditional long looping scarf (*yinzi tabeqsá*); the waistband (*k'ási*); and the long apron (*k'àbounsa*) with its distinctive ornamental side flanges (*k'àboun kănouq*).²⁶⁵ Today, images of Thakya Min and other *dewa* all feature elements of the *malika k'àboun* design, and a three-panelled *k'àbounsa* as seen in this photograph, is an indispensable iconographical feature. This could well be why recent images of Thakya Min, for example Figs. 111 and 118, often depict him holding a conch. This provides a means of distinguishing him from the more anonymous *dewa* such as those I photographed in Mandalay.

Anonymous *dewa* imagery carved in a standing position for placement in conventional positions of guardianship or supplication have been made to the same overall design since the 14th century (if not earlier), yet small differences in posture, gesture, facial expression and 'clothing' display the vision and the mastery of their creators. Two *dāga nat*, both carved in high relief to adorn swinging doors at Thibaw's royal retreat, show how the artistic choices made by their carvers convey different moods (Figs. 119 and 120).²⁶⁶ The *dāga nat* on the left stands tall, feet firmly together, and all the choices made by the artist emphasise the figure's verticality: the tall crown; upturned collar; and the elongated hands clasped together, fingers pointing upwards directly above the long fall of the panelled *k'àbounsa*. The upturned *kănouq* elements wrapping around the figure's legs also emphasise this vertical line. However, its soft curves, and the way the carver has allowed the wood to 'flow' around the feet, softens an otherwise quite rigid image. In contrast, the *dewa* in Fig. 120 has been carved with feet apart and knees slightly bent forward, as if bobbing down in homage as his royal viewer passes. His garments are also less overtly royal

²⁶⁵ This costume design was explained to me by U Pandita. The translation of *kănouq* in an artistic context is the traditional art style used to depict foliage, but the term is also used as a suffix to denote an added floral element. *The Dictionary*, 3. Conway described how some of these decorative elements were made for the tribute dress worn by Shan royalty: "Each attachment consisted of scalloped tiers made from reinforced tinsel cloth with a cotton lining, the surface couched with silver and gold sequins, beetle wings, pearl beads and coloured glass, and was trimmed with green velvet." Conway, *The Shan*, 105.

²⁶⁶ These two *dāga nat* are found at the Shwenandaw Kyaung, in Mandalay. It was originally part of Mindon Min's apartments, but was moved outside the walls of Mandalay palace after his death, then reconstructed as a monastery. Its removal from the palace grounds ensured its survival during World War II, when the palace and its surrounding buildings were destroyed.

— he wears a shortened *pas'ò* in a checked pattern — an intriguing departure from similar figures seen elsewhere.

Similar standardisation, but with a personal and humanising touch, is displayed in two figures originally from Amarapura's San *Kyaùn* (a monastery). Fig. 121 was carved for placement by an entrance, and Fig. 122 for the top of the monastery's *taguntain* (flagstaff).²⁶⁷ The feet of the *dewa* guarding the entrance are carved in the usual parallel position, and his upper body stands to attention, but the carver fashioned his lower body in a graceful bend, and the lotus stem once held in his hands — as seen in Fig. 120 — would have continued the curving line of the *k'abounsa* panels. In contrast, the figure made to grace the top of the *taguntain* stands rigidly upright, chin uplifted and eyes wide open to look out over the building in his care.

The concept of guardianship and protection for royal buildings and religious foundations during the Konbaung dynasty was often expressed in a common and very stylised motif, known as *nats'aw*, that was used to decorate royal thrones and the edges of roofs.²⁶⁸ When carved identically and lined up like peas in a pod, these *dewa* nats blend anonymously into the overall decorative scheme (Fig. 123), but when given more individual poses, these charming little figures add interest and drama to a composition (Figs. 124 to 126). These anonymous *dewa* are the descendants of a motif found decorating the entrances to Bagan era temples, seen on the flame-like finials known as *Yama leqhnyò* ('Rama's fingers', Fig. 127). Small, playfully animated *dewa* figures like these are still found decorating old wooden monasteries that have survived the ravages of time, and the vibrancy of these figures is also seen in carvings of *Jātaka* tales and nat legends incorporated into decorative panels or architectural features on temples, monasteries and other buildings (Figs. 128 and 129). All these *dewa* images show how artists working within a fairly standardised schema during the 19th century were able to inject variety and personality into their art.

²⁶⁷ The original positioning of both figures is identified by the Museum's labels. A *taguntain* is a tall pillar, usually topped by a *hintha* (Brahminy duck) and with *dewa* figures around its base, found in stupa, temple and monastery compounds. It is the first element erected on the site of a religious building.

²⁶⁸ The *nats'aw* motif included images either standing or in a position of reverence. The motif was reserved for royalty, although special permission could be sought for its use in buildings erected by commoners. Bagshawe, *MMOS* Vol 5, 600.

Man Nat (Mara), the tempter of the Buddha prior to his enlightenment, is also conceptualised in Myanmar as a *dewa* nat. Man Nat is rarely depicted on his own, presumably because he is not propitiated but is a main character in the legend of the Buddha attaining enlightenment. When he does appear, he too is portrayed in a conventional way to ensure his easy identification. In Bagan temple paintings he rides his war elephant and wears the regalia of a *dewa* nat, and at Bagan's 12th century Loka-Hteikpan temple he is pictured with multiple arms.²⁶⁹ This particular artistic convention was still in force in the late 18th century, as seen in Figs. 130 and 131. These two scenes of the earth goddess, known as Wathoundaye in Myanmar, depict her wringing out her hair to wash away Man Nat and his army of demons. Temple included three 19th century illustrations of Man Nat in his book (Fig. 132), the *dewa* costume underscoring Man Nat's status as an important deity. These show his development from a foreign-looking, multi-armed figure brandishing weapons, to a more naturalistic deity in the *malika k'aboun* costume accorded to other *dewa* nats.

The Natgyi

Images of Brahmanic and Hindu deities were created during Myanmar's first millennium, but in comparison to Buddhism these belief systems left little behind in terms of artwork. Extant examples indicate that the important Brahmanic deities Byamma (Brahma) and Thakya Min played the most prominent roles, usually in a supporting role to the Buddha (Fig. 133). At an unknown point in time, Thakya Min was appointed, according to tradition, as the leader of all the nats and protector of Buddhism.²⁷⁰ As such, he has moved to a more prominent role at the very forefront of nat imagery in Buddhist spaces.

At Bagan, Byamma appears in several mural paintings, as the subject of the magnificent reliefs adorning the Nanpaya's piers; and in the recently uncovered paintings on the walls of the Ananda's entrances (Figs. 134 and 135). Ganesh (known in Myanmar as Mahapeinne) and Sarasvati (in Myanmar, Thurathati) are included in the list of the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords

²⁶⁹ A sculpture with multiple arms at the Shwezigon is identified as Mara, and is discussed in Chapter 5. References to Mara's iconography at Bagan, where he is dressed "regally", as a "well-appointed courtier", and has multiple arms, are found in Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 138, 205, 213, 240, 241 and 277.

²⁷⁰ See Chapter 6, page 202 for a discussion of the primary sources in relation to this.

tasked with the protection of the Shwezigon, although sadly Thurathati's image no longer exists and Mahapeinne's statue, discussed in Chapter 6, is a replacement.²⁷¹

Images of Vishnu dated stylistically to the sixth century have been recovered from Thaye Khitteya, southern Myanmar and Wethali in Rakhine State. A particular form of Vishnu featuring Byamma, Vishnu and Siva emerging from Vishnu's naval, was found at Thaton and the Kawgun Cave near Hpa-an, conjecturally dated to between the eighth and tenth centuries.²⁷² From Kyanzitha's palace consecration ceremony we know that Brahmanic ritual played an important role in the Bagan era, with the king identifying himself with Vishnu.²⁷³ Additionally, the 11th to 12th century temple now known as the Nat Hlaung *Kyaùn* at Bagan was originally dedicated to Hindu worship. There were once images of Siva and Vishnu inside, and statues of six of Vishnu's avatars set in niches on the temple's exterior.

Reverence of important Brahmanic and Hindu deities continued in royal ritual from the Bagan era through to the end of the Konbaung dynasty in 1885.²⁷⁴ An illustration from 1819 depicts Paramithwa (in Pāli, Siva) in Konbaung court regalia riding a tiger, probably due to the Indic artistic convention of picturing the deity sitting on a tiger skin (Fig. 136). During Bagyidaw's reign (1819-37), 15 nats with Hindu origins were venerated, with descriptions of their characteristics, including their animal vehicles, recorded in a *parabaiq* dated 1834 (the *Natgyi parabaiq*).²⁷⁵ By this time, these *Natgyi* were being illustrated in a similar style to the Buddhist *dewa* nats, as seen in Fig. 137, small illustrations made between 1827 and 1849. These are from a

²⁷¹ Po Kya lists three groups of *Natgyi* recorded in "ancient" (undated but pre-17th century), records of offerings. These are: (1) Thakya, Ne Nat, Mahapeinne, Beithano (Vishnu) and Thakanda (Skanda); (2) Paramithwa (Siva), Ne Nat, Mi Nat, Beithano and Sandi Natthami; and (3) the Four Great Kings plus Paramithwa. Po Kya. *Thòuns'eh-k'niq Min*, 17-18.

²⁷² This sculpture is discussed in Fraser-Lu and Stadtner, *Buddhist Art of Myanmar*, 59; and in Stadtner, *Sacred Sites*, 170.

²⁷³ C. O. Blagden, *Epigraphia Birmanica: Being Lithic and Other Inscriptions of Burma*, Vol. III, Part I, ed. Charles Duroiselle (Rangoon: Superintendent, Government Printing, Burma, 1923).

²⁷⁴ For example, Mahapeinne, Paramithwa and U Dein Minsaw are noted as the guardian nats of elephants in a Royal Order given on November 14, 1787. They were given offerings alongside the Wednesday Rahu planet. Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma, AD 1598-1885, Part IV, 1782-1787* (Kyoto: The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1986), 653-4. For an analysis of the role of court Brahmin *puñña* (priests), during the Konbaung era see Jacques P. Leider, "Specialists for Ritual, Magic, and Devotion: The Court Brahmins (Punna) of the Konbaung Kings," *Journal of Burma Studies* Vol. 10 (2006): 159-202.

²⁷⁵ BUR MS 2.

collection of painted folios known as the Wynford Album, now held in the British Library.²⁷⁶ Many of the illustrations from the Wynford Album were used by Temple to illustrate *The Thirty-Seven Nats*, and will be met with again throughout my thesis.

Prominent Brahmanic/Hindu deities, including Byamma, were also propitiated during the consecration ceremonies held during the foundation of Mindon Min's royal city of Mandalay. Thakya Min and Byamma were included in Mindon Min's pantheon of Thirty-Seven Nats, and five *Natgyi* were named as a separate group: Thurathati, Sandi, Paramithwa, Mahapeinne and Gawramanda (or Beithano, that is, Vishnu).²⁷⁷ These five *Natgyi* are shown in the top row of the Wynford Album illustrations shown at Fig. 137.

This incorporation of Hindu deities into Myanmar Buddhism is found in images of Sarasvati, the Indian goddess of music and learning who rides a swan or a mythical Indian goose. In Myanmar, the equivalent deity, Thurathati, has been 'Burmanised', and is now conventionally portrayed seated on a *hintha*, a bird who features in several *Jātaka* tales. Modern images of Thurathati were seen in the precincts of Buddhist monuments at several sites during fieldwork (Fig. 138). She is usually shown holding a stand surmounted by three books, understood by viewers to be the Buddhist *Tipitaka*, so in this respect she is now honoured as a nat of great Buddhist learning, rather than having the common Hindu association with music and learning in general.²⁷⁸

Bilù

A comparison of the images on the terracotta votive plaques discussed in Chapter 3, with the images adorning the base of the *taguntain* shown in Fig. 139, demonstrates that this

²⁷⁶ "The Wynford Album," British Library, BUR MS 203. The dating is by reference to the watermarks on the paper the illustrations were made on (mostly 1829), while 1849 is the year they were presented to the India Office Library. The text beneath Fig. 134 lists the nats in each row, what they ride and what attributes they hold. The three rows were venerated by different levels of Brahmanic *puñña*, the top row being the most senior.

²⁷⁷ Tainturier, "Foundation of Mandalay," 327-33. These five *Natgyi* were propitiated in several different ceremonies during the founding of Mandalay: at the clearing of the site on February 1, 1857; the planting of stakes into the ground on February 12, 1857; the ground levelling on February 25, 1857; and the demarcating of the land on March 6, 1857.

²⁷⁸ In India, Sarasvati is often portrayed playing the *vina*, a stringed instrument. Blurton traces the evolution of her character from a deified river in the *Vedas*, through an association with the spoken word, to intellectual pursuits including music, in Blurton, *Hindu Art*, 174-5.

iconography was still employed in the mid 19th century, some 400 years later, and how it had developed.²⁷⁹ The *nagà* on the bottom level are now portrayed in human form in the *bilùt'ain* posture, privileging their status as Lords of the Underworld rather than as serpents, but reference their supernaturality via a *nagà* headdress. On the next level up, the *gāloun* are still portrayed as hybrid human-birds, but the human and bird parts of the image are reversed: the human head is now that of a bird with a long curved beak, and the body has changed to a human form posed in *bilùt'ain*. The *gounban* occupying the next level up retain the classic guardianship posture, and their faces have taken on the appearance characteristic of later Myanmar guardian figures influenced by the introduction of the Ramayana to Myanmar, discussed below. The higher status of the next level on the *taguntain*, occupied by the *yakkha*, is demonstrated by their crowns, as in the terracotta votive tablet shown at Fig. 47. They have the same facial features as the *gounban*, and the *bilùt'ain* posture is retained. On the top level, however, the portrayal of the *gandabba* has developed into the conventional iconography of *dewa* nats seen in the 19th century. The rounded cheeks and body of the figure posed in *bilùt'ain* on the terracotta votive plaque has become a lithe figure standing in a balletic pose, complete with crowns and royal regalia, befitting their higher position in the Buddhist cosmology.

The influence of the Ramayana

A major impetus for a change in the facial features of *bilù* was provided by the introduction of the Ramayana to the Burmese court following the sack of Ayutthaya in 1767 by King Hsin Hpyu Shin (r. 1763-76). The performance of this great Hindu epic drama at court by Ayutthayan court dancers and musicians, and its subsequent diffusion into the general populace, provided new

²⁷⁹ Temple published a similar photograph to this, which appears to be the same set of figures. His photograph is captioned "The Nats of the Devaloka or Nat-world on Mount Meru, or Myinmo, from the platform of the Shwe Dagon Pagoda at Rangoon." Temple, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, iv. Temple discussed these carvings at a meeting of the English Anthropological Institute, noting they were made of gilded wood. Richard Carnac Temple, "Buddhistic Carved Figures," *The Popular Science Monthly* Vol. 42 (1893): 718.

styles for local artists to copy.²⁸⁰ In particular, the adoption of the Ayutthayan style of masks used in performances of the Ramayana (Fig. 140), had become conventional iconography for Myanmar's *bilù* figures by at least the mid-19th century, such as those guarding the Shwedagon's southern entrance (Fig. 141). In contrast, the face of the statue said to have been placed at the northern entrance by Queen Shin Sawbu in the 15th century appears to owe less to their influence (Fig. 142). However, the adoption of the Ramayana style facial styles for *bilù* has robbed them of the individuality seen in the votive plaques discussed in the previous chapter, and this makes it harder to identify what kind of *bilù* the statue originally was.

THE 'LOWER' NATS

As argued earlier, propitiation of the 'lower' nats is a commonplace aspect of life in Myanmar. Tangible evidence of this is found not only in the statues of local guardian nats and the placement of their shrines in villages and cities, but also in the more humble acknowledgements made to local nature spirit nats. These nats are usually unnamed, or are simply referred to in non-specific terms such as 'the Grandfather of the Mountain' or another similarly generic title referencing their abode (Fig. 143).²⁸¹ Often their names refer to their association with natural elements, such as mountains or water, or with *nagà* or other supernaturals.

²⁸⁰ Bryce Beemer, in discussion with the author, August 4, 2014. See also Bryce Beemer, "Southeast Asian Slavery and Slave-Gathering Warfare as a Vector for Cultural Transmission: The Case of Burma and Thailand," *The Historian* 71, no. 3 (2009). The earliest reference in Myanmar to the Ramayana is contained in a *Jātaka* written in 1527, but it must have been known to some extent during the Bagan era, as characters are depicted at the Abeyadana and Nat-hlaung Kyaung temples. The story of Rama is thought to have gradually enlarged from the oral tradition of the Bagan period through to the more complex story as written by U Aung Phyō in 1775, titled *Yama Thagyin* (a *thagyin* is a poetic form.) Thaw Kaung, "Ramayana in Myanmar Literature and Performing Arts," *Myanmar Historical Research Journal* 9 (2002): 138. Pe Maung Tin notes that Myanmar received the legend of Rama from Siam before their version, known as the Ramakien, was composed in 1798. He cites an order of the Crown Prince made on the 1st day after the full moon of Nattaw in 1789, in which "... translations into Burmese were made in consultation with the Siamese Interpreters and Chiangmai Interpreters of the various stories and plays brought from Siam and Chiangmai." Pe Maung Tin explains that Myanmar's knowledge of the Ramayana dates to the 16th century, when Bayinnaung brought 30 bronze images home from Ayutthaya that included Rama, Hanuman, a three-headed elephant and others. Pe Maung Tin, "Cultural Activities in Konbaung Period," 7. Michael Symes also saw these bronze images, see Michael Symes, *An Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava, Sent by the Governor-General of India, in the Year 1795* (London: W. Bulmer & Co., 1800): 391. Fraser-Lu refers to the influence of the Ramayana on Myanmar's artists in Fraser-Lu, *Burmese Crafts*, 23. For further discussion, see also Singer, "The Ramayana at the Burmese Court," 1989.

²⁸¹ At the time this photograph was taken, these lovely little statues occupied a modest niche in the southeastern wall of a pagoda platform, but had sadly disappeared by the time of my next visit two years later.

Nature spirit nats

Many nature spirit nats are not represented by a physical object, despite the creation of a shrine for offerings, with the shrine itself acting as the focal point for acknowledgement of the nat's presence. While not always present in a physical sense, as spirits of place these nats are the most numerous, and their presence can be signalled simply by the customary offering of red and white ribbons or a bunch of *thăbye* leaves placed near their home. Flowers, food, drink, and textiles are other common offerings to nature spirits and other 'lower' nats. The main traditional offering, particularly to the nat Lords, local guardian nats and Bo Bo Gyi, is a *kandáwbwè* an unripe coconut surrounded by hands of unripe bananas. Sometimes the coconut will be covered in silver or gold foil, as seen at the bottom left of Fig. 144, the shrine of the Bo Bo Gyi at Yangon's Botataung pagoda. This photograph shows how the *kandáwbwè* may also be augmented with more overtly Buddhist elements, such as paper umbrellas and small Buddhist flags. The inclusion of elements usually offered to the Buddha underscores the important role Bo Bo Gyi play in their communities — the shrine of the Botataung pagoda's Bo Bo Gyi, for example, generally has a line of supplicants waiting to pay homage and ask him for assistance.²⁸²

Bo Bo Gyi

Mandy Sadan's research on Bo Bo Gyi concluded they are considered the oldest nat of a locality, credited with great wisdom due to their age.²⁸³ This is borne out by an early photograph of the Thaton Bo Bo Gyi, showing how they were conceptualised around the mid to late 18th century (Fig. 145 and detail). This large statue, probably made of stone or brick then covered in stucco, sits cross-legged with his hands on his knees in a simple brick shrine, the customary ribbons wrapped around his topknot and his supplicants seated in front of him.²⁸⁴ His emaciated appearance and flaccid breasts are reminiscent of portrayals of the fasting Buddha, but he is

²⁸² The Botataung Bo Bo Gyi's reputation has extended to Thailand and he now receives visitors from there regularly.

²⁸³ Mandy Sadan, "Respected Grandfather, Bless This Nissan: Benevolent and Politically Neutral Bo Bo Gyi," in *Burma at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Monique Skidmore (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 98. One of Sadan's informants, a pagoda trustee, linked Bo Bo Gyi to the nature spirits of hills or mountains, which he considered older than rivers or forests. Many pagoda compounds visited during the course of research included a shrine for the local Bo Bo Gyi.

²⁸⁴ Max and Bertha Ferrars published a photograph of this same Bo Bo Gyi, titled "Propitiating the Nat Bodaw." Max and Bertha Ferrars, *Burma* (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company Limited, 1900), 189. In their photograph, a man wearing a *k'abounsa* stands next to the Bo Bo Gyi statue. It is interesting to note that sumptuary laws had ended perhaps 15 years prior to the photograph being taken. Had the man been caught wearing this without permission during the Konbaung reign he presumably would have been punished.

distinguished as a ‘lower’ nat by the addition of a moustache and triangular beard. His posture conveys solidity and permanence rather than the more militant style of guardianship of the *bilùt’ain* pose discussed above. The palpable sense of aged other-worldliness certainly suggests this Bo Bo Gyi was conceived as an idealised ancestor figure.²⁸⁵

This aesthetic is also seen in the statue of the Bo Bo Gyi at Yangon’s Sule pagoda, who has been in residence since perhaps the mid-19th century. The statue and the accompanying wall painting, Figs. 146 and 147, reference his legend — he is said to have been a *bilù* who pointed out Singattura Hill, on which Yangon’s famous Shwedagon pagoda is built, as the location of ancient Buddhist relics and the correct site for newly acquired hair relics of the Buddha to be interred. The Sule pagoda Bo Bo Gyi’s strong connection with the Buddha has made him the role model for later Bo Bo Gyi images, such as the one at the Botataung, who is also depicted in a standing position, and points towards the Singattura Hill and the Shwedagon.²⁸⁶

This powerful association with one of Myanmar’s most revered sites is being perpetrated in an iconographic sense in other Bo Bo Gyi images (Figs. 148 to 151), all of whom face and point to the monument they are associated with. The name Kyaik Pun Taun Bain Bo Bo Gyi, Fig. 148, translates as something like “the *zedi* guardian Bo Bo Gyi”; and the name inscribed on Fig. 149 translates as the “Bo Bo Gyi guardian of the religion”; both names making an explicit reference to the monument itself. These Bo Bo Gyi are the cultural and artistic descendants of the Sule pagoda’s statue, and mark a notable shift from the legendary *bilù* pointing the way to the location of ancient relics on Singattura Hill, to localised figures pointing to the *zedi* they guard — the focus of local Buddhist pilgrimage.

²⁸⁵ Bo Bo Gyi have obvious antecedents in ancestor cults and may have once acted as guarantors of land tenure. The notion of familial protection is found in names like the ancient Baw Baw Gyi stupa at Thaye Khittaya.

²⁸⁶ The earliest known photograph of the Sule pagoda’s Bo Bo Gyi was taken in 1906. The history and legend of the Sule and Botataung pagodas and their Bo Bo Gyi are given in Stadtner, *Sacred Sites*, 84 and 106-19. The Mandalay Bodaw, pictured earlier at Fig. 14, also has a strong connection with the Buddha. His fief is Mandalay Hill, the site of the Buddha’s prophecy involving the foundation of Mandalay by Mindon Min.

In contrast, the heavily gilded Ahlone Bo Bo Gyi occupies centre stage in his elaborate ‘Outside’ palace (Fig. 152).²⁸⁷ To his left stands his own personal guardian nat, draped in a red scarf, and a statue of the Ahlone Bo Bo Gyi’s grand-daughter, the nat Ma Ngwe Taung, is placed on his right. This configuration of the main nat in the centre of the shrine, with related nats either side, was seen in many *natnàn* visited during fieldwork and recalls images of the Buddha attended by his two main disciples. The Ahlone Bo Bo Gyi’s importance within his community is demonstrated by the richness of his shrine and the many traditional *kandáwbwè* offerings he receives from his supplicants. In this respect both he and his shrine have more in common with the way in which popular nats are housed within their domains.

However, not all images of Bo Bo Gyi are created with such imposing stature, or have such weighty responsibilities. In 2009, a Bo Bo Gyi visited the headman of a village near Inwa in a dream, asking that a shrine be built for him within the grounds of a local *pǎyà* and monastery. Naturally the headman complied, and the Thaik Kyouk Bo Bo Gyi — complete with a bristly beard and moustache made from metal wire — now occupies his own pavilion on the southern side of the *zedi*’s platform (Figs. 153 and detail).²⁸⁸

Bo Bo Gyi are honoured within the communities they protect, and having been absorbed into the mythology surrounding Buddhist foundations they now occupy a place midway on a continuum between veneration of the Buddha and the ‘lower’ nats.²⁸⁹ The styling of the Thaik Kyouk Bo Bo Gyi as a lay hermit and the decoration of his shrine underscores this status. Like many Bo Bo Gyi images, he is represented as a larger-than-life size elderly man to convey a sense of great age and wisdom, but although he is portrayed in the customary dress of a lay hermit, holds the Buddhist flag, and is posed as though on a pilgrimage, the backdrop behind him is of

²⁸⁷ The Ahlone Bo Bo Gyi occupies this ‘Outside’ palace year round, apart from his ten-day festival in March, when he is conveyed to his ‘Inside’ palace. This is much larger, with a large throne on a dais swathed in offered textiles, and the palace itself has more room for visiting pilgrims.

²⁸⁸ Interview with local informant, January 28, 2014.

²⁸⁹ Stadtner, *Sacred Sites*, 107-8.

Popa Taung Kalat — popularly recognised as the home of the original nat Lords, Min Mahagiri and his sister, Hnamedaw Taungyi Shin.²⁹⁰

The nat Lords

As with nature spirit nats and Bo Bo Gyi, the nat Lords like Min Mahagiri and his sister are powerful spirits of place, tied to the location they inhabit and protect both conceptually and by ritual. This location is often referred to as their fief, a term reflecting an understanding of their role as the supernatural version of the *myósa*, ('town eater'), the historic governors of towns who 'ate' the town's revenues as part of their appanage.

The nat Lords typically have colourful creation legends that often closely align them to the natural elements, revealing an original genesis as nature spirits. For more recently created nat Lords, this alignment connects them to the ancient beliefs and with legends of earlier and more famous nats, such as Min Mahagiri and his sister, who are tied conceptually and by legend to the *sāgā* tree, with fire and mountains in general and with Mt Popa, a short distance southeast from Bagan, in particular. At Mt Popa, the spirit of the mountain was personified as Maung Tint De, the blacksmith who had the fearsome ability to smith iron, whose mighty pounding shook the city, and who could 'speak' in the language of earthquakes. Through the ritual element of the intended funeral pyre, he and his sister found refuge in a tree. The creation of the nats' images and their placement in a shrine can be seen as placation of the spirits of the natural elements — the mountains, fire and trees — while the nats and their shrines became the visual focus for ongoing propitiation in an attempt to control these powerful forces.

In art, these natural elements may be represented by simple iconography, as seen in Fig. 154, where the fire that consumed the brother and sister, leaving only their heads, is conveyed by the red paint used for their scarves and to delineate their features.²⁹¹

²⁹⁰ Popa Taung Kalat is the volcanic plug that landed on the plain when nearby Mt Popa erupted many millennia ago. Mt Popa proper is the home of Min Mahagiri and Hnamedaw Taungyi Shin, and there are shrines to both near the summit of the mountain. Popa Taung Kalat is usually conflated with Mt Popa and cited as the home of the nats, but the only shrines present on Mt Popa today are for Min Mahagiri and his sister. It is also the home of Popa Medaw, the flower-eating *bilumá* who fell in love with Byatta, one of Anawrahta's officers, subsequently giving birth to Shwe Pyin Gyi and Shwe Pyin Ngeh. More recently, Popa Taung Kalat it has become a major pilgrimage site for devotees of the *weiza* Bo Bo Aung and Bo Min Gaung. The legend of Popa Medaw and her sons is found in most texts on the nats, for a full account in English see Maung Htin Aung, *Folk Elements*, 67-73.

Min Mahagiri and his Sister are the original nat Lords associated with royalty, having lost their lives and become nats on the order of a king. Large statues of them occupy shrines set either side of the Tharaba Gate, at the eastern entrance to the old royal city of Bagan (Figs. 155 to 157). Few tourists stop to see them, being intent on reaching the more famous temples within the walls of the ancient city, but these images still play a significant role in the lives of many of the area's young boys, who are traditionally presented to these famous guardians of Bagan, or to other locally important nats, prior to entering the local monastery for the first time.²⁹²

Although both images in the Tharaba Gate shrines are locally believed to date to the Bagan era, they have clearly been subject to redecoration from time to time, and now have an overlay of modern paint highlighting their features (Figs. 156 and 157).²⁹³ Underneath this, the Brother is posed in the *bilùt'ain* posture and has elements of Bagan era regalia — the heavy shoulder armour, thick wrist and ankle bangles, plug earrings and a Bagan-style crown. The sister's statue is also dressed in a traditional *balegwè* and *yinzi tabeqsá*. Although she sits in the customary position for female nats, known as *kyouq gyouq t'ain* (to sit decorously with both feet tucked underneath), her attire marks her as a guardian nat — as does the positioning of both images either side of the eastern entrance to the ancient city.

HEADRESSES

With so many images of nat Lords and local guardian nats appearing very similar, we must look to individual attributes to help identify nat images. Not all the nat Lords have purely human pedigrees — many have creation legends that reference their origins as nature spirits or hybrid human-supernaturals, and their iconography reflects these origins. Headdresses are used to

²⁹¹ Maung Tinde's legend resonates strongly in two recent publications. Elizabeth Moore's essay on cultural exchange between Myanmar and Yunnan between 600 BCE and 400 CE discusses the early metal-using cultures of the Samon river valley, noting the area is situated between the Shan Plateau, which is rich in copper ore, gold and other metals, and Mt Popa, "a rich source of iron and precious stones." Moore, "Cultural Exchange," 45. A 2002 survey of the eastern hinterland of Bagan mapped 12 sites containing hundreds of iron furnaces, and one of these, at Zio, showed it was functioning after 1510. Bob Hudson and U Nyein Lwin, "Old Iron-Producing Furnaces in the Eastern Hinterland of Bagan, Myanmar: Field Survey and Initial Excavation," (Myanmar Department of Archaeology, 2002): 1-6.

²⁹² I have observed families presenting their sons to the nats in the Shwezigon stupa's nat pavilion, and to the Mandalay Bodaw, on several occasions.

²⁹³ At what time the shrines themselves were added is unknown at present, as they are not structurally integrated into the wall. Enriquez noted their presence in the 1920s. Enriquez, *A Burmese Wonderland*, 125.

portray what is referred to as their ‘true nature’ as a *bilùamá*, *nagàma*, or hybrid human-animal. Several major nats are identifiable simply by their headdress, including Shwe Nabe, the *nagàma* wife of Min Mahagiri; Nankarine Medaw, who wears a buffalo headdress; and Popa Medaw, the flower-eating *bilùamá* who lives on Popa Taung Kalat. This use of a headdress to indicate the ‘true nature’ of a nat has parallels in traditional puppetry, and in theatre, where one character becomes another by a simple change of headdress.²⁹⁴

The use of a serpent headdress to signify a supernatural identity and lineage has a long history in Myanmar art, reaching back to at least the 11th century, as evidenced by *andagu* plaques and the small figures occasionally found interred within relic chambers from the Bagan era onward (Figs. 158 and 159).²⁹⁵ In the 12th century, an image of an embracing couple with *nagà* headdresses was included in a wall painting at Bagan’s Gubyaukgyi temple at Myinkaba, with the female’s lower half rendered as a *nagà*.²⁹⁶ Another wall painting at Bagan’s 13th century Penanthu Gu features a couple with *nagà* headdresses kneeling in homage to a stupa (Figs. 160 and 161). The postures and context of all these images, created over perhaps a 300 year period, explicitly shows them in homage to the Buddha. This may suggest the retention of local animist beliefs within an overarching Buddhist episteme, or they may represent the *nagà* guardians of Mt Myinmo. In any event, these depictions are the artistic forebears of later nat imagery depicted with *nagà* and other animal headdresses discussed below.

This artistic tradition continued into the Nyaungyan era (17th to mid-18th centuries) when the guardian of the seas, the Meikhala Nat, depicted here wearing a *nagà* headdress, was pictured with the Buddha in a wall painting at Aneint (Fig. 162). Another wall painting from the same temple complex features several deities with *nagà* headdresses ranged either side of a pavilion featuring a bird (Fig. 163), in what is probably a depiction of a *Jātaka* tale.

²⁹⁴ Bruns, *Burmese Puppetry*, 2; Singer, *Burmese Puppets*, 71. As recorded by Singer, headdresses were placed on top of the head and never covered the actor’s or puppet’s face. It is also common practice for *natkadaw* to wear the headdress of the nat they are channelling during a *natpwèh*.

²⁹⁵ A discussion of these little figures is given in Luce, *OBEP*, Vol. 1, 197. More recently, Pamela Gutman, Bob Hudson and Win Maung (Tampawaddy) examined a collection of Konbaung period bronzes from northwestern Myanmar. Pamela Gutman, Bob Hudson and Win Maung (Tampawaddy), “Buddha’s Life in Konbaung Period Bronzes from Yazagyo,” (2013, unpublished).

²⁹⁶ A photograph of this couple appears in Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 169.

Min Mahagiri's wife, Shwe Nabe, was a daughter of the sea-serpent king, Yenagà, and became a nat when she died of grief after hearing of the death of her husband in the king's fire. Like all *nagàma*, she is believed to be able to appear in human form. An early photograph of an image of her, Fig. 164, shows that this artist, in the mid to late 1800s, was expressing her 'true nature' — that of a *nagà* — by including a *nagà* rising out of the top of her head. The artist has given her face a distinctly serpentine cast, and she holds another *nagà* in both hands, emphasising her place in both worlds. Small pottery bowls featuring a *nagàma* with upraised hands are both a traditional offering to Shwe Na-be and other *nagàma* as well as a representation of her (Fig. 165). These small bowls are filled with water by devotees and were seen in many shrines throughout central Myanmar and Yangon.²⁹⁷

Shwe Nabe's role as a nat Lord with nature spirit origins continues to be expressed in her imagery, but this has developed to portray her *nagà* nature in more modern forms. The carving of her created in the 1970s shown in Fig. 166 depicts her with *nagà* arising from her head in the form of an elaborate headdress, and she still holds her identifying *nagà*, but her iconography has been updated to portray her as a fair-skinned, beautiful woman, attired in shimmering green modern textiles that emulate a serpent's scales.

Although the iconography of the hybrid supernatural-human nats surveyed has evolved and contemporary portrayals display more recognisably human features, artists continue to employ headdresses to signify their 'true nature', as well as to help distinguish them from other nats. The 'buffalo nature' of Nankarine Medaw continues to be signified by her buffalo headdress, a convenient way of identifying her (Figs. 167 and 168). This refers to her creation legend where, as a buffalo, she adopted and raised a young prince who was lost in the forest, then became a nat when killed by the soldiers who came to rescue the prince. The black and gold striped *t'amein* on the statue of Nankarine Medaw at Fig. 167 is also distinctive, and was observed as a conventionalised way of 'dressing' this particular nat. This style of *t'amein* was modelled on the

²⁹⁷ Bekker noted a symbolic union of fire and water represented by these little bowls, in that Shwe Na-be inhabits the water and her husband, Maung Tint De, perished in the fire. Bekker, "Transformation of the Nats," 42. *Nagàma* appear to perform a similar role to Bo Bo Gyi. Their statues, usually modern in style, were commonly found in the precincts of pagodas visited during fieldwork.

fashions worn at the Mandalay court in the 19th century, when the court ladies wore black velvets decorated with gold embroidery.²⁹⁸

As noted earlier, a major change in headdress styles came about following the relocation of Ayutthayan artists to the Mandalay court. While the Bagan and Nyaungyan era wall paintings demonstrate the use of headdresses in portrayals of the nats was already well-established, the more elaborate Ayutthayan style masks soon became part of the artistic repertoire for *bilù*. This headdress style is now conventionally used by artists making images of Popa Medaw, as seen in Figs. 169 and 170. Her standardised imagery shows that the main elements of Ramayana mask iconography adopted by Myanmar artists were the upwardly-curved fangs, bulging eyeballs, the addition of more circular incised lines around the eyes and the wrinkled and snubbed nose.²⁹⁹ However, as a significant point of difference, Myanmar artists largely chose to retain the concept of the headdress to signify the nature of the nat, rather than moving to the use of the full face mask used in Ayutthayan dance-drama.

The two images of Popa Medaw shown in Fig. 171 illustrates the changes in her form and style from the 17th century. The image at the left is the earliest extant image seen — reputedly 14th century but more probably attributable on stylistic grounds to the 17th century (as discussed in the next chapter).³⁰⁰ This statue was created in a simply carved form in a roughly naturalistic style with an outwardly bent elbow (Fig. 172), a posture recorded as being a desirable feminine accomplishment in the late 1800s.³⁰¹ The statue is fitted with the opaque glass eyes known to have been in use in the 17th century, lacquered, then covered with gold leaf (her painted lips and toy tiara are obvious recent additions).³⁰² The other statue shown at the right of Fig. 171 is a

²⁹⁸ Georg Noack, (Linden-Museum, Stuttgart), e-mail message to the author, August 18, 2014. The Victoria and Albert Museum's collection of Burmese textiles from the Konbaung period is discussed in Franklin and Swallow, "Identifying with the Gods," 48-61.

²⁹⁹ The image of Popa Medaw in the main nat shrine at Taungbyon was made in this style by U Win Maung (Tampawaddy) in the 1970s. He asked the guardian of the shrine whether he wanted the "modern or the old style" and was told they preferred the old. U Win Maung (Tampawaddy), discussion. There are over 100 different demon masks employed in Thailand's *Ramakien* (Ramayana) and to avoid confusion these are divided into groups. These are further distinguished by the style of crown, eyes and mouth, and different colours, weapons and mounts. For further discussion see Dhanit Yupho, *Khon Masks* (Bangkok: The Fine Arts Department, 1972), 10-16.

³⁰⁰ U Win Maung (Tampawaddy), discussion.

³⁰¹ Temple, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, 52. Patricia Herbert records that this posture first appears in an artistic context in late 17th century wall paintings at Sagaing. Herbert, "Burmese Cosmological Manuscripts," 95 footnote 33.

³⁰² U Win Maung (Tampawaddy), discussion. Glass eyes like these were being used in Champa statues in the ninth to tenth century. See Denise Patry Leidy, *The Art of Buddhism* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2008), 170 fig. 8.6.

more recent donation to the *natnàn*. Here she is carved and decorated in the late 19th century Mandalay style, with a more naturalistic human body and face, decorated with *thayò* moulding and glass mosaic, and surmounted with the conventional *bilùmá* headdress. A subsequent visit to this shrine two years after this photograph was taken revealed this headdress has since been topped with another, made of stiffened paper decorated with synthetic materials, sequins and glitter (Fig. 173).³⁰³

At some point during the 200-odd years between the creation of these two images, the use of the *bilùmá* headdress became defining iconography for Popa Medaw, referencing her legendary existence as the flower-eating *bilùmá* living on Mt Popa. Some images created at the turn of the 19th century alluded to this by depicting her sitting ‘European fashion’ on top of a roughly carved approximation of a mountain (Fig. 174). By the time of the creation of Figs. 173 to 177, her imagery had evolved to a naturalistic depiction of a contemporary Myanmar woman, albeit including her *bilùmá* ‘nature’. Additionally, the position of her hands and arms became conventionalised: both are bent at the elbow with the hands held out in front, thumb and curved fingers forming a space for the insertion of another identifying feature — peacock feathers. These may be a relatively new addition, as it is likely that earlier representations of Popa Medaw were originally carved in this manner so devotees could place flowers in her hands, as in Figs. 170 and 171. This is an attribute that would reference her legend as well as being a more affordable and easily obtainable offering.

Imagery of Popa Medaw is invariably accompanied in her *natnàn* today by her two sons, Shwe Pyin and Shwe Pyin Ngeh. They, in turn, are usually attended by the tigers they control, which they ride when they wish to leave the environs of their *natnàn*, as seen in Figs. 178 and 179. These reverse glass paintings depict the family group with their now standardised iconography: Popa Medaw’s two sons with their tigers either side of their mother; her *bilùmá* headdress and peacock feathers; with Fig. 178 including an illustration of Popa Medaw’s home, Mt Popa, and Popa Taung Kalat in the background.

³⁰³ Masks like these are created from mass produced elements then stitched or glued together to form the whole, and appear to be popular offerings to Popa Medaw. Several *natnàn* visited during fieldwork had images topped with similar masks. Large bundles of identical composite pieces such as this were seen at workshops in Mandalay, where they are used in the decoration of *kálága* (wall hangings).

In contrast to the early photograph of Shwe Nabe with serpentine features (Fig. 164), naturally human features were retained in mid to late 19th century depictions of nats with purely human rather than supernatural backgrounds. However, headdresses and appropriate clothing were still given to images to convey their identity and reference their legend. The sculptor of Hti Hpyu Saung, for example, used the usual *bhumisparsa mudrā* posture of Myanmar's Buddha images, where the figure is seated cross-legged in the lotus position with the right hand touching the earth (Fig. 180). This posture references his biography, as prior to becoming a nat, Hti Hpyu Saung was Kunsaw Kyaung Hpyu, Anawrahta's father. Forced to give up his throne, he retired to a monastery, and is therefore depicted wearing a monk's robe and a hermit's hat. The carver of this image has tipped the figure's head backwards so he looks upwards, probably to portray veneration of the Buddha. His former status as both king and monk is also referenced in the placement of the nat on a waisted throne.

C R O W N S

The design of crowns featured in images of the nats followed the changing fashions of the royal court. The crowns given to nat statues during the Bagan era varied enormously, from a simple triangular or pointed shape, sometimes with a decorative *filet* band around the brim, to quite large and elaborate affairs with multiple tiers and various levels of decoration (Figs. 181 to 183). The crowns given to the *gounban*, *yakkha* and *gandabba* figures on the votive plaques discussed earlier followed these earlier traditions. By the Nyaungyan era, (1597-1752), the finials of crowns were elongated to encompass an elaborate hair knot tucked inside, and tipped to the rear to give a profile like a shark's fin (Fig. 184). The diameter of the crowns widened during the Konbaung era (1752-1885), again to accommodate a change in hairstyles, and featured a small downward drooping tip, as seen on the statue pictured at Fig. 185.³⁰⁴

Although Min Mahagiri was originally the blacksmith known as Maung Tinde, then elevated as a nat to the status of Lord of the Great Mountain, his image today conventionally portrays him in the role of a king's minister — the role the King of Tagaung wanted him to play in order to control his power — complete with the robes and turban-crown of a minister in the Konbaung

³⁰⁴ U Win Maung (Tampawaddy), discussion.

court, as shown in the photographs at Figs. 186 to 188. Portraying the nat wearing this crown clearly conveys the message that having become a nat, the former blacksmith is now in the king's service. More recent images continue to portray the nat in this role (Figs. 189 and 190).

Artists do occasionally go beyond these conventions, and one has placed the emphasis on Min Mahagiri's status as Lord of his domain, Mt Popa, by using a multi-tiered crown (Fig. 191). Both carvings shown here reference the role he performed in life, conflated with other iconography referencing his later existence as Min Mahagiri. Both carvings are presented in a different guise: on the left he is carved in *bilut'ain* but as a king, wearing a crown and robe with a king's *salwe* crossed over his chest, displaying his status as an active ruler of his domain.³⁰⁵ The statue on the right, however, has been carved with a traditional breastplate, but in a posture of ease. Both carvings reference his creation legend by incorporating the blacksmith's hammer in place of the more commonly seen *tarabaq* (a fan made from the fronds of a talipot palm) seen in Figs. 189 and 190, an attribute that helps Min Mahagiri fan away the flames of his funeral pyre.

These images demonstrate that both the biography and the dual nature of the nat are conveyed through art — he may simultaneously be the blacksmith, Lord of the Great Mountain, guardian of both Bagan and the home, as well as the king's minister. This portrayal of nats in different guises reflects the narrative tradition of Buddhist art in Myanmar, where characters are commonly depicted acting out well-known episodes from their biography in a conflated narrative.

T H R O N E S

The majority of three-dimensional imagery in Myanmar rests on some sort of base, and whether that is made as a plain slab or shaped like a lotus or a traditional throne is part of the story the artist is telling in his work. The bases the Buddha is depicted on has varied throughout history,

³⁰⁵ The *salwe* is a highly ornamental version of the Brahman's sacred thread and another prerogative of the king. As noted by Than Tun, they were recorded as a mark of distinction worn by the king as early as 1784. At first they consisted of a ceremonial thread worn hung from the left shoulder and wound around the torso on the right, but at some point this was refashioned as the more ornamental chains featured on this figure and seen in the many portraits of Mindon Min on display in Mandalay. By the time a treatise on the wearing of *salwe* had been copied in a Royal Order in 1867, the privilege of wearing one had been extended to other members of the royal family and the court. The number of chains permitted was determined by rank, with the king being entitled to wear a *salwe* of 24 chains. Than Tun, *Royal Orders Part IV*, 58-9.

but the lotus throne, symbolising the purity of the Buddha's teachings, is now the norm.³⁰⁶ The earliest extant nat statues sit, kneel or stand on plain slabs or on a ledge at the base of a stela, but by 1820 a conventional throne or mount for the images of each of the nat Lords was recorded in the *Inventory*:

<i>Pādounma</i> lotus blossom	Thakya Min
White elephant and <i>bilù</i>	Min Mahagiri
White elephant with five heads	Ngazishin
Throne on white elephant	Hsin Hpyu Shin
Black elephant and <i>bilù</i>	Hnamedaw Taungyi Shin
Elephant and <i>bilù</i>	Thonban Hla
Lotus stand	Shwe Nabe, Thandawgan, Taung Magyi, Myauk Min Shin Hpyu, Minye Aungdin, Medaw Shwe Zaga, Hti Hpyu Saung Medaw
Lotus stand, throne on top	Shin Goun, Shin Nemi
Lotus throne	Maung Min Hpyu, Myaukpet Shin Ma, Anauk Mibuya
<i>Zùnyò</i> with a throne on top	Taungngu Shin Mingaung, Shwe Pyin Gyi, Shwe Pyin Ngeh
<i>Zùnyò</i> throne	Mintara, Shwe Nawrahta, Shwe Sitthin
Riding a horse	Aungzwa Magyi, Min Kyawzwa
Riding a tiger	Maung Po Tu
Rectangular stand	Shindaw, Nyaungyin
Throne on rectangular stand	Tabinshweti
Throne on stand	Yun Bayin, Mandalay Bodaw, Daan Maung Shin, Hti Hpyu Saung, Pareimma Mingaung, Min Sitthu, Shin Gwa
No stand	Shwe Pyi Gyi

³⁰⁶ For a discussion of the origins of lotus thrones used for Buddha images, see Moilanen, "Last of the Great Masters?," 55-6.

What a *zùnỳò* throne is or looks like mystified all my informants, however Judson's *Dictionary* defines the word as the best of the three types of diamond.³⁰⁷ As it happens, the six nats recorded as sitting on *zùnỳò* bases in the list above all have a similar looking stand in the coloured *parabaiq* illustrations of nat statues reproduced at the front of Temple's *Thirty-Seven Nats*, and these are repeated in folios from the Wynford Album. These thrones are characterised by a long petalled flower design that is rendered quite differently to the fuller and shorter petals characteristic of lotus thrones. Given the Burmese word *zun* refers to a small, fragrant white flower, *Jasminum auriculatum*, that does indeed have long petals, it seems likely a *zùnỳò* throne — while probably retaining its meaning as the best kind of diamond — was the inspiration for the artist when drawing this type of throne.³⁰⁸ Figs. 192 and 193 clearly show the difference between the two types: Mintara sits on the *zùnỳò* throne and Thandawgan is on the lotus.

The *Inventory*'s description of the nats' bases tallies with the illustrations in the Wynford Album's folios, and, with one exception, the illustrations of the nat statues in Temple's *parabaiq*.³⁰⁹ However, by the time of the KDKT's *parabaiq*, the only nat Lord accorded a throne was Hti Hpyu Saung. All the other nat Lords were depicted on stands of various types, except for those accorded animals: Ngazishin retained his five-headed white elephant; Thado Minzaw rode a red elephant; Aungzwa Magyi and Myin Hpyu Shin still rode their horses, Maung Po Tu was still on his tiger; and Pyaung Magyi rode a gaur (a type of bison).

The vast majority of nat statues encountered over the past few years, whatever their age, were made with plain bases in the shape of a rounded rectangle or oval, as seen in Figs. 194 and 195. This may be a way of 'grounding' the nat image, an indication that the nat is part of the earthly world. Nevertheless, with the enforcement of sumptuary laws no longer a barrier to adornment, it is now not uncommon to see the statue of a *natnàn*'s foremost nat placed on a replica of the *Thihathana*, the royal 'Lion Throne' used by Mindon Min and his successor, Thibaw. This serves to emphasise the nat's power and status, arguably the most important elements in the

³⁰⁷ *The Judson Burmese-English Dictionary*, (Rangoon: American Baptist Mission Press, 1921), 431. The other two types are *nayakatwi* and *kawpyaw*. *Ibid.*, 373. It appears the word is no longer in current use, unless perhaps by specialists in the diamond trade.

³⁰⁸ *The Dictionary*, 153. *The Judson Dictionary* defines နွယ်ဖွယ် (*zunphyu*) as "a small, white flower of very delicate scent." *Judson Dictionary*, 431.

³⁰⁹ The exception is Thandawgan. According to the *Inventory* and the *Burney MS* he should be seated on a lotus stand, but Temple's carving has him on a *zùnỳò* throne instead. The *Burney MS*, 3; *BUR MS* 200, 45.

nat's presentation to its audience (Fig. 196).³¹⁰ The other prominent emblem of royalty and power — a crown — is also an attribute given to nats placed in guardianship positions.

DRESS, GESTURE AND ATTRIBUTES

Another major signifier of power and status is the way a nat image is dressed, which occurs in two different ways. Firstly, the artist chooses the costume the nat will be depicted in as part of its iconography. Secondly, the image will customarily be swathed in textile offerings, often donated by devotees as an act of homage or in thanks for the nat's assistance. The following images of the powerful nat Ame Gyan demonstrate how textiles, whether carved, painted or actual fabric, play an important role in the overall depiction of a nat.

Ame Gyan, the 'coarse' mother, is an old and argumentative nat who enjoys drinking, swearing, and smoking cheroots. In Figs. 197 to 200, however, she is depicted as the young and beautiful woman she once was, rather than the now more commonly seen version shown in Fig. 201. This particular statue shows the iconography that was conventionalised in the 1970s: her fore and middle fingers are held up in a V shape, so she can hold a cheroot — thus instantly identifying her to devotees.³¹¹ All the statues of Ame Gyan shown here are dressed in different ways. Fig. 197 was carved to show her in a simple breast wrapper and plain *t'amein*, and she is only identifiable by repute, in this case by the owner of the Mandalay handicrafts shop where the statue was purchased. In the poster shown at Fig. 198, she is also dressed in ordinary clothing, but holds her cheroot. Another recognisable attribute — the toddy pot beside her — recalls her legend, which relates that she was killed for swearing at a soldier who caused her to drop her toddy pot.³¹² In contrast, the two views of same statue at Figs. 199 and 200 show how the artist depicted her with an *acheiq lüntäya* patterned *t'amein* created in *thayò* moulding, 'worn' with a decorative blouse and scarf — clothing worn by a wealthier woman than those shown in the

³¹⁰ See also the Ahlone Bodaw, Fig. 152 on page 66 of Volume II.

³¹¹ U Pandita, discussion.

³¹² Ame Gyan is a famous nat who is not one of the Outside Thirty-Seven Lords. Her legend, along with other well-known nats unknown in the West, is easily found in Burmese language texts. See, for example, Sithu Myain, *Thouñs'eh-k'niq Min*, 135-8 and Min Sithu, *Naqkòkwehmu Thamain*, 670-6.

earlier two pictures.³¹³ Fig. 200 shows her swathed in an offered textile in the black and gold colours that continues the tradition of the Mandalay court's attire of black velvet decorated with gold. As the textile obscures her name, which is moulded in *thiqsègyò* on the statue's base, only the fact she was in the centre of the line-up of nat images in her *natnàn*, and that it was clearly signposted as hers, make her identifiable.

There is no doubt, however, that the statue shown at Fig. 201 is of Ame Gyan, as she has the modern convention of an old and cranky facial expression, the two fingers held in the V to hold her cheroot, and an upheld palm to hold a customary offering of pickled tea or alcohol. This statue is also 'dressed', in both senses, in black and gold. Fig. 202 also has the V shaped fingers and the customary dress style, but this time with her toddy pot balanced on her head.

Figs. 203 to 206 are different views of a more unusual standing image of Ame Gyan, again including the toddy pot balanced on her head. The detail picture at bottom left shows the *natt'ein* lifting the textiles the statue is wrapped in, to show that the artist has also depicted this version of Ame Gyan wearing a patterned *t'amein* created in *thayò*. The detail picture shows how she is 'holding' a corner of this in her left hand (which in this case also holds her identifying cheroot). Her carved *t'amein* opens on her left side, and I was told by the *natt'ein* that the successive layers of black and white textiles she is wrapped in must alternate their openings in turn, the closest to the statue opening to the right side, the next to the left side, and so on. As the nats are perceived as powerful, they are sometimes carved and adorned, as here, in the clothing and accoutrements of the powerful — so the topmost layer adorning this statue is an expensive and decorative sheer offering known as *sha*.³¹⁴

³¹³ The distinctive wavy pattern of *acheiq lüntäya* weaving is created using over 100 shuttles for the weft threads. It was traditionally worn by ladies of the royal court.

³¹⁴ Interview with *natt'ein*, January 28, 2014.

M O U N T S

Elephants

Depictions of animals, particularly powerful, dangerous or auspicious ones, have featured in all periods of Myanmar's material culture, from the earliest extant hunter-gatherer paintings in the Badalin caves that date to between 12,000-6,000 BCE.³¹⁵ Myanmar's astrology associates certain animals with months and days of the week, and the Buddha is associated with many different animals — particularly white elephants — via *Jātaka* tales and his life story. White elephants, so eagerly sought by Myanmar kings as a palladium of the kingdom due to their auspicious association with the Buddha, are associated with several nat Lords. The iconography for Thakya Min, Fig. 207, who rides the mythical three-headed elephant Eyawun, is described in the

Inventory as

အေကံခုံ ဆင်ရုပ် ခေါင်း၃လုံး။ ၎င်းအပေါ် ပဒုမ္မာကြာပွင့် သက္ကနံ။ ၎င်း အပေါ်သကြားရုပ်
မတ္တိတ်ရုပ်လက်။ လက်ယာ ခုရသင်း။ လက်ဝဲသာမြီးရုပ်စွဲကိုင်၍ သိကြားတံဆာအစုံ။

On top of an elephant statue with three heads. Above this is a lotus blossom. Above this the Thakya statue stands upright. Right hand holds a conch. Left hand holds a yak-tail fan. Make the statue with complete Thakya regalia.³¹⁶

By the time of KDKT's *parabaiq* however, the elephant and lotus had been abandoned, with Thakya Min's image at Bodawpaya's capital, Amarapura, recorded as a standing figure, 1 *taun* (45.7cm) high, wearing a gold painted crown. The right hand still held a conch and the left a yak-tail fan, but the fan appears to have been largely abandoned in more recent imagery, as seen in Figs. 111 and 118.³¹⁷

By the early 19th century when the *Inventory* was taken, Min Mahagiri's iconography had evolved considerably from the legendary image carved from a *sagà* log, or the classic guardian figure by the Tharaba Gate. By this point in time, he too, is portrayed on an elephant. He is supported by a *bilu* rather than a lotus, wears a prince's headdress, and holds a fan in his right hand, with only the *dà* held to his left shoulder referencing his guardianship role.

³¹⁵ The Badalin caves include paintings of bulls, pigs, a deer and a fish. For an overview of these see Moore, *Early Landscapes*, 47-53 and 100-2.

³¹⁶ BUR MS 200, 40. The *Inventory* records that a statue with this iconography was at Bagan's Shwezigon pagoda, housed in a brick *gu* (a cave-like shrine) facing west. Eyawun is from the Pāli *Erāvana*.

³¹⁷ SMMK, *Foundation Report*, 248.

Although the *Inventory* records a single *bilù*, Temple's coloured *parabaiq* illustration depicts three (Fig. 207). Min Mahagiri's sister, Hnamedaw Taungyi Shin, is recorded on a black elephant, supported by a single *bilù*, and the *parabaiq*'s artist has distinguished the two further by having the sister's elephant in a kneeling position, iconography not prescribed in the *Inventory*'s text (Fig. 208).³¹⁸ Min Mahagiri's other sister, Thonban Hla, is also described as having an elephant *bilù* stand, and the *parabaiq*'s artist has depicted her supporting figure as a *bilù* with an elephant's head (Fig. 209). The iconography of these three members of the nat Lords' 'first family' are thus portrayed in a hierarchy below Thakya Min, but still elevated above most of their fellow nats in the pantheon, courtesy of their elephants. This displays an understanding that Min Mahagiri and his family were not only the first nat Lords, they were the most important.³¹⁹

Figs. 210 and 211, from another visual source collected by Temple, show the same four nats. The artist of these illustrations was clearly familiar with the *Inventory*'s iconography, although he chose to portray Min Mahagiri with two *bilù* attendants, rather than having them as part of the nat's support. Here the hierarchy is framed in a slightly different manner, with the younger sister (named Ma Dwe Hpyu rather than Thonban Hla), portrayed in simple clothing rather than regalia, on a plain rounded stand. This use of plain versus more elaborate stands is also found in the KDKT's *parabaiq*, which records certain nats, presumably considered more important and/or powerful, being housed in multi-storey and decorated *tazaung*, while others are accorded a simple bamboo *natkùn*.³²⁰

Other nat Lords were accorded elephants due to their earthly status: Thihathu, the 14th century king of Pinya who became the nat Lord Ngazishin, had five white elephants, and accordingly the *Inventory* and the KDKT's *parabaiq* describe his elephant as having five heads.³²¹ Thado Minzaw, a military officer recorded as a nat propitiated by ancient kings by the KDKT, had a *natkùn* at Bodawpaya's Amarapura, in which the nat, dressed in military regalia, sat in the

³¹⁸ BUR MS 200, 40-1.

³¹⁹ This is also reflected in the order in which they appear in the *Inventory* — Min Mahagiri and his family are listed first, after Thakya Min. BUR MS 200, 40-4.

³²⁰ SMMK, *Foundation Report*, 246-63.

³²¹ BUR MS 200, 45-6; SMMK, *Foundation Report*, 247.

bilùt'ain posture on top of a red elephant, also holding a *dà* to his shoulder.³²² Hsin Hpyu Shin was also depicted sitting cross-legged on a throne on top of an elephant, attended by a mahout in front and a *bilù* behind.³²³

Other animals, horses and tigers in particular, are associated with nat Lords and local guardian nats to emphasise their power and status. They are portrayed in art as attending the nat, as the nat's vehicle, or may be understood as a conflation of nat and animal.

Horses

There are three nats who are now customarily portrayed riding horses: Myin Hpyu Shin; Min Kyawzwa (today more commonly known as U Min Kyaw or Ko Gyi Kyaw); and Aungzwa Magyi. All their creation legends involve horses, and Myin Hpyu Shin has long been associated with the Myanmar army.³²⁴ According to Khin Maung Than, although he has been propitiated for a long time, his shrines traditionally only held a vase for flower offerings and a carving of a white horse without a rider.³²⁵ This 'riderless' tradition continues today as he is often present in his shrines in the form of the traditional white horse puppet that is a popular children's toy and tourist souvenir (Fig. 212).³²⁶

The inclusion of a rider was conventionalised by the early 1800s, and a statue of Myin Hpyu Shin dating to the middle of that century was photographed by Brown (Fig. 213). The rider's hairstyle, his size in relation to his mount, and his odd posture, are reminiscent of another statue of this nat, and of Min Kyawzwa, housed in the Shwezigon's nat pavilion in Bagan (Figs. 214 and 215). All three riders dwarf their mounts, and the posture of the rider shown in Fig. 215 is

³²² There are at least three individuals named Thado Minzaw more or less well known to history, but it is unclear which one the report refers to. SMMK, *Foundation Report*, 252-3.

³²³ BUR MS 200, 46.

³²⁴ Myin Hpyu Shin is believed to have come to the aid of Alaungpaya's army in 1752 and again in 1824 against the British in the first Anglo-Burmese war. Harvey, *History of Burma*, 220; Maung Htin Aung, *Folk Elements*, 98.

³²⁵ Khin Maung Than, *Yòya Naq Youncihmu*, 2.

³²⁶ In relation to the puppets, Brac de la Perrière noted that "the abstraction is such that you ask sometimes if the nat is the horse or his rider." For her discussion of Myin Hpyu Shin and his legends in an anthropological context see Brac de la Perrière, *Les Rituels*, 35-40. The KDKT's *parabaiq* includes a precis of his legend, but it is unclear whether the nat is the horse, described as a မြင်းသူတော်စင် (celestial horse), or the equerry, Nga Pyi. SMMK, *Foundation Report*, 249. Singer's illustration of Aungzwa Mingyi depicts him riding astride a puppet horse in Khin Maung Than, *Yòya Naq Youncihmu*, front endpapers.

certainly not indicative of the way one would normally ride a horse. In fact, the artist of Min Kyawzwa's carving portrayed the rider squatting on the horse with his left leg bent and the foot flexed upwards — the *bilūt'ain* posture. As with many nats statues with these sorts of distinguishing features, we cannot be entirely sure why this artistic choice was made. Although the *bilūt'ain* posture suggests the focus is on the nat's guardianship role, it may also be to emphasise the nat is separate from the horse, or simply be an aesthetic choice on the part of the carver. Nevertheless, the larger size of the riders in relation to their mounts, and the unusual postures suggest the nat was understood at the time as the rider rather than the horse.

This conclusion is supported by the semi-human characteristics given to the three riders, which are typical of nat imagery made prior to the Mandalay era. These statues were probably made in the Amarapura era (1782-1853), as although they are decorated, they lack the more florid *thayò*, black lacquer and gold leaf ornamentation given to the costumes of the nats in the fully developed Mandalay style described earlier. Figs. 214 and 215 are sufficiently alike to suggest they were carved and decorated by the same person or workshop, with the main points of difference being the position of the nat's legs and the slightly different treatment given to the horses' saddle cloths — perhaps the artist's way of creating a discernible difference between two nats with very similar iconography.

Myin Hpyu Shin is not one of the nat Lords included in the *Inventory*, although his legend, as recorded by Brown, equates him with Aungzwa Magyi.³²⁷ The descriptions of Aungzwa Magyi and Min Kyawzwa do not prescribe a white horse for either. The difference between the two is that one holds a *dà* and has a tied head-covering, and the other holds a cane and has a man's topknot:

နတ်ရုပ်မြင်စီးလျှက်။ လက်ဝဲဆက်ကိုင် လက်ယာထားထမ်း ခေါင်ထုပ်ဖောင်း။

³²⁷ Brown, "The Lady of the Weir," 492-3. Myin Hpyu Shin is recorded as a guardian of Amarapura by the KDKT. SMMK, *Foundation Report*, 249. As noted earlier, many of the nat legends differ from source to source, and they are often known by different names, or are conflated with one another. R. R. Langham-Carter published several different versions of Myin Hpyu Shin's legend in 1934. R.R. Langham-Carter, "Lower Chindwin Nats: 3. Myinbyushin," *Journal of the Burma Research Society* XXIV, no. II (1934); 105. Today, Myin Hpyu Shin is acknowledged as a nat with hegemony over areas stretching from Thaye Khittea to Bagan. A recent 'popular' publication reflective of the current understanding (by one author at least), records that Aungzwa Mingyi was a military officer and Pakhan U Min Kyaw was a chief of cavalry and the Lord of Pakhan. Yenanthar Win Maung and Hteik Tin Thet, *Bagan*, 85.

Nat image rides a horse. Left hand holds the reins, right hand holds a *dà* to the shoulder, tightly tied *baùn* [head covering].³²⁸

မြင်းစီးလျက်: လက်ယာ ကြိမ်ကိုင် လက်ဝဲမြင်ဇက်ကိုင်ဟန်။ ရောင်တိုးနှင့် တုရသည်။

While riding a horse. Right hand holds a cane, left hand holds the reins style. Make the statue with a man's topknot.³²⁹

These differences are shown in their illustrations contained in the two albums of black and white pencil drawings and the coloured *parabaiq* owned by Temple, Figs. 216 to 222, although Min Kyawzwa in Fig. 221 is brandishing what appears to be a sword rather than a cane.³³⁰ Nevertheless, the illustrations show another point of difference that was understood by these three different artists at the time: Aungzwa Magyi rides his horse quite soberly, in contrast to Min Kyawzwa who is more animated. The handwritten Burmese note accompanying Fig. 222 specifies that Min Kyawzwa rides a white horse, the earliest mention of this in an extant text that I am aware of.³³¹ This particular iconography appears to have transferred across to Myin Hpyu Shin when his imagery started to be produced with the addition of a rider.

Images of nats riding horses appear to have been common during the early 1900s, and descriptions of several were published by another British civil servant scholar, R. R. Langham-Carter, in 1934. One of the statues he recorded was made of gilded wood, and was of “undoubted antiquity”. He wrote

He and four others are on horses, mule-like beasts with long pointed ears and tails, and braided manes [sic], that are clearly not thoroughbreds. They hold the reins in their left hands, and swords in their right, though their present weapons are modern ones that replaced the originals. The bridles, bits, reins, and saddles (and especially Myin Hpyu Shin's) are elaborately ornamented, the saddle-cloths running to a point. All ... are in

³²⁸ The Burney MS, 4. Aungzwa Magyi's iconography was omitted in Maung Kyaw Yan's handwritten copy of the *Inventory*. A *baùn* is defined as a kind of fillet, or turban. The word ဗောင်းတော် *baùntaw* refers to the multi-tiered crown worn by royalty or nats. *The Dictionary*, 314.

³²⁹ BUR MS 200, 49.

³³⁰ Temple's albums of black and white drawings are held in the British Library, catalogued as BUR MS 207, BUR MS 208 and BUR MS 209. The drawings in BUR MS 207 were included as the endpapers to Temple's *Thirty-Seven Nats*. The coloured *parabaiq*, included as that book's front endpapers, is also in the British Library, catalogued as BUR MS 206. The illustrations from BUR MS 208 and 209 are published here for the first time. BUR MS 208 includes an illustration of Aungzwa Mingyi, but without the horse, a notable departure from the iconographical standard.

³³¹ The coloured *parabaiq* illustration of Min Kyawzwa shown in Fig. 225 suggests the artist may have been attempting to show a white horse — the colouring is quite different to that of Aungzwa Magyi's in Fig. 222 (created by the same artist).

court dress and most have long helmets whose pointed tips curve backwards. In their ears are large nadaungs [earplugs] ...³³²

Langham-Carter's description of "reins in their left hands, and swords in their right" accords with the iconography given in the *Inventory*, indicating this convention had by then lasted for over a century. The elaborate ornamentation and particularly the court dress he describes suggests the images he saw were made in the classic Mandalay style of the mid to late 19th century.

Today, as with other modern nat statues, Myin Hpyu Shin has largely lost his gold leaf and the rider is recognisably human. White paint has replaced the traditional gold leaf, but the rider still holds a *dà* in his upraised right hand and the horse's reins in his left, as seen in the three statues in Fig. 223. Min Kyawzwa remains a very popular nat, and contemporary images conventionally depict him on a brown horse, with its right foreleg raised and supported by a plug of wood connected to the statue's base (Fig. 224). The differently coloured horse is now the only element that distinguishes his modern imagery from Myin Hpyu Shin's. The ornamented horse's tack has been retained, with the newer imagery having cheaper decorative elements added after the carvings are finished and painted, rather than the more expensive and time-consuming *thayò* and glass decoration of older statues.

Felines

Terracotta plaques from Pyu sites at Kinmungyon, Thaye Khitteya and Pinle, featuring a motif of a rider on an heraldic mythical creature wielding a leaf-shaped sword, point to an ancient heritage for the association of a supernatural figure with a feline (Fig. 225).³³³ This was still in effect in the Bagan era, with the alliance of nats with powerful animals on vivid display in many of Bagan's mural paintings. One of the fantastical scenes from Bagan's 13th century Payathonzu temple, featuring felines, has been copied by local artists creating sand paintings for the tourist market (Fig. 226). The artist of this work told me the panel on the left features the 'Thirty-Seven Nats', and identified some of the main figures: the multi-headed figure with four arms and a *bilù*

³³² Langham-Carter, "Myinbyshin," 106-7.

³³³ Swords made in this style, with bronze handles and iron blades, have been found in Samon Valley burial sites. Bob Hudson, e-mail to the author, August 4, 2016.

standing on top of the lion as Thonban Hla; and the similar figure riding the tiger as one the Taungbyon Brothers.³³⁴

The identification of the Taungbyon Brothers in particular demonstrates how entrenched their association with tigers has become, although tigers are not featured in their creation legend and are not mentioned in the *Inventory*.³³⁵ Temple recorded the Brothers were “usually represented in the villages as gaudily dressed puppets, with spire-like crowns and royal sharp-pointed swords”, evidence that not only horse puppets were employed as nat images in the 19th century.³³⁶ Additionally, the small illustrations of the Brothers from a folio of the Wynford Album renders them as simple figures sitting cross-legged, in the *bilut'ain* posture or a slight variant, with their swords over their right shoulders but with nary a tiger in sight (Fig. 227). Similarly, tigers do not feature in the coloured *parabaiq* illustrations of the Brothers featured at the front of Temple’s book, nor in the pencil illustrations in the book’s rear endpapers.

However, the Brothers’ association with large felines was certainly current by the end of the 19th century when Temple was conducting his research on the nats, as shown by Figs. 228 and 229, illustrations from two hitherto unpublished albums of drawings Temple owned. These felines, however, lack a tiger’s main distinguishing feature — its stripes. In contrast, Figs. 230 and 231, drawings of other nats from the same albums, do include lightly sketched in stripes.

Unfortunately the artist who drew Fig. 228 did not include a note with the drawing of the Brothers, but the handwritten note underneath Shwe Nabe’s illustration from the same album, Fig. 230, clearly identifies the feline as a tiger. The artist of the drawing at Fig. 232 shows Maung Po Tu on a clearly drawn tiger that is also identified in the handwritten note above the illustration, in marked contrast to the felines the Brothers are riding shown at Fig. 229, from the

³³⁴ Shein Thu (artist), in discussion with the author, September 13, 2015. The artist identified the *weiza* Bo Min Gaung as the figure on the white elephant in the centre of the left-hand panel, and Lawkanat sitting on the clawed cloud at top right. Shein Thu has been creating sand paintings for around five years, and learned from his father and his painting teacher, in Myinkaba village. The village, he told me, has only two occupations, lacquerware or painting, largely for the tourist market. I have wondered if the Payathonzu mural has become part of the sand painting repertoire following Andrew Ranard’s discussion of its murals. See Ranard, *Burmese Painting*, 12-15.

³³⁵ As far as I am aware, tigers are not associated with Thonban Hla either.

³³⁶ Temple, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, 49.

same album. Maung Po Tu's link with his tiger is via his creation legend, which relates he was a tea trader from Pinya (near Inwa) killed by a tiger while travelling.³³⁷

Two images of nats identified as the Taungbyon Brothers in the Shwezigon's nat pavilion are also featured with animals, but only the eldest Brother, Shwe Pyin Gyi, is shown sitting in the *bilut'ain* posture on top of a feline (Fig. 233). The maker of the younger Brother's statue, Fig. 234, carved the base as a *naga*, with the presence of the nat's upturned left foot indicating the *naga* is attendant on the nat, rather than being an indication of the nat's nature. These two statues predate the *Inventory*, both on stylistic grounds and on the *Inventory's* record of their iconography:

အောက်ခုံဇွန်းရိုးပလ္လင်ခုံပြန် ပေါ်တွင်။ လက်ယာဘူးတောင်လျက်။ လက်ဝဲဘူးလဲလျက်။
လက်ယာက တားတမ်း။ လက်ဝဲက ပေါင်တောက်။ မောင်းနားတောင်းလက်ကောက်အစုံ နှင့်။
နတ်၂ရုပ်ကိုပင်ပုံမချားကြီးငယ်သာတုရသည်။

Underneath stand *zùnyò* throne above. Right side knee upright. Left side knee laying down. Right side hand holds a *dà* to the shoulder. Left hand covers knee. Then complete with turban, earplugs, arm bangles. Two nat forms are not different. Make the large and small brother.³³⁸

Again, as the carvings shown here are quite similar, it seems the artist differentiated the two Brothers by giving them different animal vehicles. The *bilut'ain* posture recorded in the *Inventory* is still the conventional posture for images of both Brothers as seen in the other carvings shown at Figs. 235 and 236. Fig. 235 is the earliest photograph I am aware of showing a Brother in the posture and tiered crown that now so often identifies them.³³⁹ Both Brothers are still made to look identical, although I was told by several carvers that the image of the older brother, Shwe Pyin Gyi, is always a little larger.³⁴⁰

³³⁷ Maung Po Tu's legend may be a modification (or antecedent) of a folk tale related by Maung Htin Aung, *Burmese Folk-Tales* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 18-21 and 230-1. Maung Po Tu's inclusion in the 'Thirty-Seven Nats' has puzzled Western writers as he has no known royal connection, although as Temple pointed out, Pinya was the capital of the Shan dynasty which flourished between 1298 and 1364. This would provide a connection with a known 'victory ground'. Temple, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, 69.

³³⁸ BUR MS 200, 48.

³³⁹ Whether there was an image of a tiger nearby was not recorded by the photographer. Brown, "The Taungbyon Festival," 358.

³⁴⁰ U Win Maung (Tampwaddy), discussion; and other informants. Although there are similarities between the statues, it is impossible to say with any certainty that they were made by the same artist, made at the same time, or placed at the Shwezigon together or separately. Although their faces and headdresses are of similar style, I have tentatively assigned a later date to the younger Brother's statue on the basis of its mosaic decoration.

Today, tigers are invariably shown attending the Taungbyon Brothers, who are believed to ride them when they wish to leave their shrine (Fig. 236). In Fig. 237, tiny tiger images have been placed between the feet of the two Brothers, who are portrayed standing and holding their *dà* at waist height out in front of their bodies. The artist of these modern statues chose to depart from the *bilùt'ain* posture, although the Brothers are still carved and decorated identically. This, along with their presence either side of their mother, Popa Medaw, in her distinctive *bilùmá* headdress, would be enough to identify them to viewers, as their iconography and attributes are all part of the contemporary understanding of these nats.

The presence of much larger tiger images, such as the ones shown either side of the entrance to Popa Medaw's imposing *natnàn* at Yadanagu, a small village just south of Amarapura (Figs. 238 and 239), certainly add drama and interest, as well as announcing the presence and power of the nats within to passers by. It is probably for this reason that tigers are associated with several other powerful nats, including the Brother and Sister nats at the Golden Teak *natnàn* near Mingun (Fig. 240), and Ko Myo Shin, (Fig. 241). Ame Yeyin, a powerful nat from the Monywa region, is also conventionally attended by a tiger, as she is believed to be able to control them, as well as having power over fire, *nagà*, the night and the earth (Figs. 242 and 243).³⁴¹

S U M M A R Y

Royal costume has been used to differentiate the 'higher' nats and make them instantly recognisable from as early as Bagan's 11th century art. The costume's representation in imagery of the nats kept pace with its stylistic development at the royal courts, culminating in the conventionalised use of the highly decorative *malika k'àboun* costume by the time of Mindon Min's reign in the 19th century. Today, images of Thakya Min and anonymous *dewa* statues in the full *malika k'àboun* costume are often prominently displayed at Buddhist temples and monasteries. As at Bagan, Thakya Min can still be identified by his conch, as his iconography is otherwise identical to that of other *dewa* nats, such as those by the entrance to the reconstruction of Mindon Min's ordination hall at Mandalay.

³⁴¹ Interview with *natt'ain*, January 22, 2014. Part of the understanding of Ame Yeyin is that she can eat fire and cut herself with knives but not suffer. Women appeal to her for relief from medical problems.

As the use of *dewa* imagery with its elaborate court costume was limited by sumptuary law to royally sponsored foundations, the general populace had to create a different style of image to represent the main guardian nat of their village or town — the Bo Bo Gyi. The earliest extant representations show he was conceived as an grandfatherly figure, an aesthetic that continued in later imagery. The Sule pagoda's pointing Bo Bo Gyi is now a popular model for many other Bo Bo Gyi images assuming prominent positions on stupa platforms, but it remains to be seen whether this particular style will endure. Other highly respected local Bo Bo Gyi resemble nats made in the more traditional style of their time, such as the Ahlone Bo Bo Gyi, a wooden statue completely covered in gold leaf.

The patron role played by Myanmar's kings in the commissioning of religious art, and the role of major Brahmanic/Hindu deities in court ritual, ensured a place for the *Natgyi* in the country's art until the demise of the monarchy in 1885. The gradual rise to prominence of Theravada Buddhism throughout Myanmar probably meant these images were confined to court contexts.³⁴² However, images of Thurathati in particular are now playing a role in spiritual practice, but one that is more overtly Buddhist.

The attributes included as part of a nat's iconography always reference their human biography, their creation legend, or the role they play in the community. Images may include one or more attributes, or portray the nat in the role he or she occupied during life, or afterwards, as a nat. Images of Min Mahagiri provide a striking example of this, and of how much this nat's iconography has evolved from reputedly the oldest extant representation — that at the Tharaba Gate at Bagan, where he is rendered as a massive figure in the *bilut'ain* posture (Fig. 156), to the newer convention of the modern carving that portrays him as an idealised human dressed in the costume of a Konbaung court era Minister (Fig. 189). In most cases, detail from a nat's creation legend or human history is iconographically incorporated into its artistic representation. On a practical level this serves to identify one nat from another, but it also allows for some variety of

³⁴² The importance of Brahmanic ritual continued into the Konbaung era, but little emphasis was placed upon it in some ceremonies. For example, the naming ceremony included offerings to the Three Gems, *dewa* including Thakya Min, Byamma and the Four Great Kings, as well as the spirits of the sun, moon, earth, trees and sky. Offerings were made to the nat guardians of the city, the palace, its central spire, the child's parents, grandparents and its own personal guardian nat. For a comprehensive description see Yi Yi, "Life at the Burmese Court," 90-9.

artistic expression in a manner similar to the way in which the *Jātaka* tales provided artists with variety in Buddhist art.

The use of the *bilūt'ain* posture for guardian nats is another convention that has endured from the Bagan era through to today. It is recorded as the posture for many of the nat Lords in the *Inventory*, and is still the standard posture for modern statues of the two Taungbyon Brothers. The iconography of many of the nats may have roots as far back as the Pyu era, with the figure on the heraldic feline shown in Fig. 225 probably signifying a warrior spirit. By the Bagan era *dewa* and possibly local guardian nats are being portrayed with *nagà* headdresses and other valuable and revered animals, often in fantastical settings. The presence of a headdress on a nat's image is now understood as indicative of the 'true nature' of the nat, and functions somewhat like the crown accorded to many of the nat Lords, in that it signifies a difference from ordinary human beings. Overall, a focus on the iconography of the nats reveals that very ancient beliefs were given a human face and scale, strongly driven by tradition and a focus on the representation of narrative in art.

Different iconography accorded to different nats is not only a means of identification, it represents the narrative of the nat's past and the additional narrative that has grown around the nat over time. As images of the nat Lords and local guardian nats are not religious in nature, they have always been able to reflect a more local and personal sensibility. In some instances, their iconography is also an enabler of devotion — the placement of the hands of Popa Medaw and Ame Gyan, for example, allows physical contact with the nat as offerings can be literally placed in their hands. Thus, the nats' iconography is still developing and adapting to the needs of their devotees.

The six different images of Ame Gyan discussed in this chapter demonstrate the usefulness of recognisable iconography, and how the addition of a known attribute, such as her cheroot or toddy pot, can 'create' a nat in the artistic sense. She is also an example of how images of nats may be made to reflect a particular age during their lifetime.³⁴³ However, many statues seen during fieldwork have the nat's name applied in *thiqsègyò* or paint to the base they sit or stand

³⁴³ Temple recorded that the nats Myaukbet Shin Ma and Hti Hpyu Saung may be imaged as either young or old, but I have not come across any examples of this. Temple, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, 51 and 65.

upon, to dispel any doubt in the viewer's mind as to the nat's identity. This appears to be a convention only adopted relatively recently however, as those attributed to earlier periods lack this now standardised feature, and the identity of the older nats seen relied on local knowledge or tradition, coupled with their iconography.

Whether the nat Lords' association with animals was originally borrowed from Hinduism, the Mahayana tradition or came about through the desire to link the nats' power with a recognisably powerful animal is not clear. Imagery of deities identified as Brahmanic or Hindu are depicted with animals at Bagan, and these may well have served as artistic models for the portrayal of nats kneeling or sitting cross-legged on their animals. However, the animals attending some of the nats today — horses, elephants and tigers — were commonly found in Myanmar well into the late 19th century, as attested to by Royal Orders and colonial memoirs.³⁴⁴ I incline to the view that elephants and horses, being literal vehicles for the elite, became associated with certain nats to stress their status, while tigers were appropriated for their literally powerful and dangerous characteristics. Supernatural animals such as *naga*, of course, would have been valued precisely because of their supernaturality.

The presentation of the nats' narrative via posture and iconography is common to representations of both the 'higher' and 'lower' nats. Thakya Min and his fellow *dewa* nats appear in elements of royal regalia throughout their artistic history; the *bilut'ain* posture is shared across both classes of nat to signify guardianship; and specific iconography for the nat Lords was in place by the early 1800s. The way in which the nats are portrayed, as with the Buddha, reflect the image's purpose: sculptures are created for ritual use or to signify guardianship of particular places and spaces; painting and other media portray a story; and imagery placed in architectural contexts plays a guardianship role.

The first section of this chapter described the artistic practices used in the making of nat imagery and its decoration, and identified the major agents involved. These, in turn, have

³⁴⁴ A Royal Order dated March 13, 1879, names an Officer of Elephants, and Assistant Ministers of Elephant Men. Land was distributed among various groups of Elephant Men in proportion to the number of elephants in each area. Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma, AD 1598-1885, Part IX, AD 1853-1885* (Kyoto: The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1989), 265. Shway Yoe recorded that cart axles in Myanmar were never greased, because the "hideous shrieking noises" they made as they revolved served to keep away tigers and cheetahs. Shway Yoe, *The Burman*, 81.

impacted the major aspects of nat iconography, discussed in the second section of this chapter. I now turn to a more focused discussion of images that can be securely dated, to arrive at a chronology of style for nat images. This begins with the Bagan period (1044 to 1287), the era in which the practise of Buddhism became visually dominant.

CHAPTER 5

Stylistic Chronology

King Anawrahta ordered his servant, Byatta, to reside on Mt Popa. He was given the job of bringing fresh flowers to the King every morning, using his superhuman powers to run the sixty miles from Mt Popa to the royal city of Bagan. One morning, while picking his flowers, he met the bilù má Popa Medaw, and they fell in love. Alas, Byatta's romance made him late in delivering the King's flowers, so he was executed. Popa Medaw died of grief, becoming a nat. King Anawrahta took into his household the two young sons of Byatta and Popa Medaw, who also had magical powers. They were given gifts of gold, but of an inferior quality as they were not of noble blood — hence their names, Elder and Younger Inferior Gold. At the age of 15, the two boys entered the King's army, fought bravely, and were eventually counted among the kingdom's top four generals.

Returning home from a campaign to China, King Anawrahta and his army stopped at Taungbyon. The King undertook to build a new pagoda, and everyone in the army was ordered to donate a brick to its construction, but the two brothers were so busy playing marbles they neglected this important duty. The King ordered that they be flogged, but because of their supernatural powers, this beating had no effect. The King then ordered that their testicles be crushed instead, which killed the two brothers and they became nats. But as the King prepared to continue his journey home to Bagan aboard the royal raft, the two nats prevented it from leaving the shore. The King then appointed them as guardians of Taungbyon, and the nats permitted the royal raft to continue on its way.

Today, visitors to the pagoda can still see the gap where the two bricks were supposed to be laid by the two Brothers.³⁴⁵

³⁴⁵ After Maung Htin Aung, *Folk Elements*, 91; Yves Rodrigue, *Nat-Pwe*, 34; and Yenanthar Win Maung and Hteik Tin Thet, *37 Pagodas & 37 Nats*, 80-1.

INTRODUCTION

Considering the thousands of monuments in Bagan's archaeological zone, it is easy to regard the people who created this built landscape as nothing but devout Buddhists, yet we know this was not the case.³⁴⁶ By the 11th century, images of Brahmanic/Hindu deities, *dewa* nats and nature spirits were intertwined in seemingly overt Buddhist contexts, fully integrated into the Buddhist visual schema. Fantastical images, possibly representing the 'lower' nats are also present, particularly in wall paintings, such as those at the 13th century Payathonzu temple discussed by Andrew Ranard.³⁴⁷ However, as the vast majority of Bagan era imagery created from wood has long since perished, if there were wooden images of the 'lower' nats at Bagan it is not surprising there are no traces left in the material record.

Although there are no identified imagery of nat Lords or local guardian nats created prior to the 17th century available to study, it is presumed there was an earlier tradition of creating statues of nats in human form. As discussed in Chapter 4, the adoption of technological and decorative innovations by Myanmar's traditional workshops were used for both images of the Buddha and the nats. Not surprisingly, developments in style cross over into all areas of design, with advances in technology in particular flowing into different types of art in the relevant periods. While images of the Buddha are given distinctive *lakkhaṇa* and *mudrā* according to a textual canon, as argued in the previous chapter, the nats, too, have recognisable iconographical elements and gestures that express their human or supernatural nature — or sometimes both —

³⁴⁶ As noted by Green, the wide variety of imagery present at Bagan indicates a syncretic approach to spiritual practice during the early Bagan period. Green, "Deep Change," 21.

³⁴⁷ Ranard, *Burmese Painting*, 10-15.

along with their creation legend and personality.³⁴⁸ Therefore, many artistic traditions and identifying attributes have carried over from one historical period to another.

Myanmar's Buddhist art styles are commonly divided into periods named after the dominant kingdom of the time, with general stylistic conventions apparent in each. While it was impossible to precisely date the 'ancient' wooden nat images surveyed during fieldwork, the facial styles and decorative elements used in Buddhist art provide a reference point for the dating of nat images on stylistic grounds. In this chapter, where relevant, the general stylistic conventions found in Myanmar's Buddha images will be compared with images of the *dewa*, nat Lords and other guardian nats to help arrive at a chronology of style for the different types of nat imagery.³⁴⁹ I will address changes to their body shape and facial features, the portrayal of their costumes, the attributes they hold and the animals associated with them, and the media used in their creation and decoration — all elements that also serve to identify them to viewers.

STYLISTIC CHRONOLOGY

The stylistic chronology proposed below follows that outlined by Anne-May Chew in *The Cave-temples of Po Win Taung, Central Burma* (2005) until the Amarapura era. It is then modified to account for overlapping styles and the major stylistic changes in nat imagery that followed.³⁵⁰

Bagan era:	1044 - 1287
First Inwa era:	1364 - 1555
Second Inwa/Nyaungyan era:	1597 - 1752
Amarapura era:	1752 - 1853

³⁴⁸ The *Lakkhaṇa Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* details “the thirty-two marks [*lakkhaṇa*] peculiar to a Great Man”, which, if possessed, will make him “an Arahant, a fully-enlightened Buddha, who has drawn back the veil from the world.” Walshe, *Dīgha Nikāya*, 441-60.

³⁴⁹ For a fuller discussion of the development in style of Myanmar's Buddha images, see Anne-May Chew, *The Cave-temples of Po Win Taung* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2005), 59-71 and Charlotte Galloway, “An Introduction to the Buddha Images of Burma,” *TAASA Review* 10, no. 2 (2001). Sylvia Fraser-Lu's series of articles on Buddha images created in stone, metal and wood, published in *Arts of Asia*, are also highly informative (see Bibliography for details).

³⁵⁰ Chew ends the Mandalay/Yadanapon period at 1886, but notes that the style was perpetuated during the colonial period (1886-1947) and beyond. Chew, *Cave-temples of Po Win Taung*, 66-7.

Mandalay/Yadanapon era:	1853 - present
including the Salay style:	1880 - present
Modern era:	1930 to present
including images commissioned by the monk U Khanti:	ca. 1930 to present
including the Popa Taung Kalat style:	ca. 1970 to present
including post-censorship:	2013 to present

Although the Mandalay/Yadanapon style of Buddha and nat imagery is still created today, a distinctive style of carving emerged in the 1880s. I have termed this ‘Salay’, after the town of that name located south of Bagan, whose famous Yokson *kyaùn* bears many finely carved narrative panels created in this style. Sculptures of the nats underwent another major shift in style in the Modern era with the introduction of large cast iron statues in the 1930s. Another major shift occurred in the early 1970s, when larger-than-life images, a style I have termed ‘Popa Taung Kalat’, were introduced. A ‘heroic’ style of figure featured largely in reverse glass paintings and illustrated books also emerged during the mid 20th century, as did the more naive style of mass-produced carvings seen in Fig. 56.

B A G A N E R A S T Y L E S : 1 0 4 4 T O 1 2 8 7

Nat images adorning or accompanying monuments dated to the Bagan era were created in very different idioms: the first showing nature spirits conceived in human terms and portrayed naturalistically; and others in the style of the *gandabba*, *yakkha* and *gounban* pictured on the 15th century votive tablets introduced in Chapter 2.

Nature spirits in human form

When it came to creating imagery of the Buddha-to-be, Gotama, as a tree nat, as related in many *Jātaka* tales, Bagan’s artists chose to depict him in human form, as a crowned figure emerging

from the foliage of a tree in three-quarter view (Figs. 244 to 247).³⁵¹ This can be seen in the rendition of the *Palāsa Jātaka* (No. 307) in a ceramic plaque at the West Hpetleik, where the Buddha-to-be is a tree nat cared for by a poor Brahmin, shown in the plaque keeping the area at the base of the tree free from grass (Fig 244).³⁵² Fig. 245, an illustration of the *Rukkhadhamma Jātaka*, shows the Buddha-to-be — on the far right, identifiable by his crown — as a tree nat living in a Himalayan forest. In this tale he advised his fellow nats to take up homes in the surrounding trees. However, several chose to dwell in trees in more open spaces, closer to the town so they could receive more offerings. When a mighty tempest swept the land, only those nats living in the interlaced trees in the forest withstood the might of the storm. The conflated narrative depicted in this plaque shows the Buddha-to-be counselling the tree nats in the background, while in the foreground, one of the poor nats who took up residence in a solitary tree sits astride his former home, now uprooted and thrown to the ground.³⁵³

Identical treatments of the figure of the Buddha-to-be as a tree nat are also seen in a wall painting from the 11th-12th century Abeyadana temple, Fig. 246, and in a more crudely rendered version in an 11th century stucco plaque from the Shwegugyi at Ta Mok, (Fig. 247). Another West Hpetleik *Jātaka* plaque also named the *Palāsa-Jataka* (No. 370), features a variation in the composition (Fig. 248). Here, the Buddha-to-be is the golden goose depicted in the tree at the right, while the tree nat occupies the Judas-tree on the left. This *Jātaka* relates how the Judas-tree is destroyed by a growing banyan seedling that has lodged in a fork, the moral being that even the smallest sin should be ‘rooted out’ lest it grow and destroy its host. Turning his face away from the Buddha-to-be and raising one hand as if to indicate he is not listening,

³⁵¹ In Rhys David’s translation of Fausboll’s Pāli text of the *Jataka* tales, table VII gives a listing of the number of times in which the Buddha appeared as different characters. Topping this list is as a king (85 times), followed by as an ascetic (83 times), then as a tree spirit (43 times). T. W. Rhys Davids, trans., *Buddhist Birth-Stories (Jataka Tales): The Commentarial Introduction Entitled Nidana-Katha, the Story of the Lineage* (London: George Routledge & Sons Ltd, 1925), 246.

³⁵² Although the number on this plaque is not apparent, on the basis of the iconography I believe it to be a depiction of the *Palāsa Jātaka* (No. 307). See H. T. Francis and R. A. Neil, trans., “No. 307 Palāsa-Jātaka,” <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/j3/j3008.htm> (accessed December 7, 2015). I use the term ‘ceramic’ rather than ‘terracotta’ as it is a more accurate generic term to cover plaques made from fired clay.

³⁵³ Robert Chalmers, trans., “No. 74 Rukkhadhamma-Jātaka,” <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/j1/j1077.htm>, accessed December 7, 2015. The existence of a plaque for the *Rukhadhamma Jātaka* is not acknowledged by Luce. He omitted “foreign plaques”, and noted that the among the ground plinth plaques there were “a good many that are ... intrusive and not original.” However, he also noted “there may be more if one looks closer at the details and allows for minor displacements.” Luce, *OBEP* Vol. I, 272-3. The plaque is situated where it would be expected to be found, on the ground plinth, southern side, between the centre to the south-west corner, and although it has since had an application of gold leaf, in my photograph from 2012 the original glaze can still be seen.

the tree nat ignores the Buddha-to-be's advice, and when the banyan grows and ultimately destroys the Judas-tree the nat becomes homeless.³⁵⁴

The composition of these *Jātaka* scenes indicates that artisans were working to a standardised schema that would allow viewers to readily identify the actors portrayed and possibly the *Jātaka* tale itself. It may well be that identifying the story depicted in each plaque was a way of expressing one's education in terms of Buddhist scripture — the *Jātakas* are, after all, part of the Buddhist grand narrative.³⁵⁵ In all these compositions, the Buddha is shown discoursing, and the other main players are portrayed in animated postures, frozen in a narrative moment that captures the essence of the tale.

The three-quarter view with upraised hands is a conventional treatment of the human figure in the art of the period, and is encountered in paintings and ceramics all over Bagan.³⁵⁶

Nevertheless, these plaques illustrate that for two to three centuries there was a standardised artistic portrayal of the Buddha-to-be as a tree nat, executed in both ceramic and paint. The artist of the 13th century wall painting shown in Fig. 249 may well have looked to the earlier renditions for his vignette of the Buddha-to-be's former life. Although we might expect to see the Buddha-to-be portrayed in human form despite his supernatural existence in the *Jātakas*, the other three tree nats in the Shwezigon's plaque are also rendered naturally, indicating the artist conceived these nature spirit nats in human terms, and depicted them behaving in a human manner. This is particularly evident in Fig. 245, where the nat sits on his uprooted tree, tilting his head and leaning despondently on his left hand in an expression of his foolishness.

The plump faces, rounded brow-lines and hairstyles given to the tree nats in this plaque are rendered in a very similar manner to the figures featured on late fifth century silver gilt repousse plaques unearthed at Thaye Khittea in the 1920s (Fig. 250). The flexed legs and muscular torsos

³⁵⁴ This tale, and that of the *Rukkhadhamma Jātaka*, is interesting in relation to the position of the nats *vis-a-vis* Buddhism, as both allude to the destruction of the older belief by ignoring the advice of the newer. T. Francis and R. A. Neil, trans., "No. 370 Palasa-Jataka," <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/j3/j3071.htm> (accessed December 7, 2015).

³⁵⁵ The *Jātaka* plaques at the East and West Hpetleik do, however, include identifying script, although it is likely many people were illiterate. For an interpretation of the *Jātaka* plaques at the Ananda as icons to be 'read' in the context of the monument itself, see Robert L. Brown, "Narrative as Icon: The Jataka Stories in Ancient Indian and Southeast Asian Architecture," in *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia* (Hawaii: University of Hawai'i, 1997), 64-109.

³⁵⁶ See, for example, Luce's photographs of the West Hpetleik plaques in Luce, *OBEP*, Vol. III, pls. 97-118.

of these figures give them an alertness and vitality also expressed in the modelling of the Shwezigon's tree nats, and the similarity in style across six centuries provides another tangible link between the material culture of the Pyu and that of 11th century Bagan.³⁵⁷

Bagan's artists clearly drew on a variety of artistic models for their interpretation of Buddhist texts, with influences from India's Pala era from the eighth to twelfth century the most recognised. Although there is no recognised 'Theravada art style', as Bagan's art largely reflects Theravada philosophy it is invariably linked back to a Theravada textual source.³⁵⁸ Elements that do not sit comfortably in that framework are often credited to Tantric or Mahayanist influence rather than local tradition or sensibilities.³⁵⁹ This is surprising given that the *Jātaka* tales, the stories of the Buddha's previous lives that are so prominent in Bagan's art, are full of supernatural beings and magical events. As argued by Galloway, the *Jātaka* tales linked indigenous belief in the nats and other supernaturals to the newer Buddhist philosophy.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁷ Although the Thaye Khitteya figures are referred to as *dvarapala*, probably due to the clubs they hold by their sides, the small holes on the circular backing plate of each figure, their number (five were discovered), and their size indicates they were originally attached to a textile or wooden support which has long since perished. As each figure features a different, and quite elaborate, hairstyle and lower garment, they may represent discrete identities. The distinctive checked pattern of the close-fitting trousers worn by Fig. 260 may be an indicator of rank as it is of a more complex weave, and he is shown wearing a *salwe*, which would also indicate he is of higher rank than the others. John Guy suggests the five plaques once shared a common setting, probably the pedestal of an image; if so, the image would have been massive. As their clubs indicate their function was guardianship, I am inclined to the view they were placed over a doorway or on a wooden pillar, or possibly sewn onto a textile, perhaps a hanging or wrap. See John Guy, *Lost Kingdoms: Hindu-Buddhist Sculpture of Early Southeast Asia* (New York: Yale University Press, 2014), 83; also John Guy, "A Warrior-Ruler Stele from Sri Ksetra, Pyu, Burma," *Journal of the Siam Society* 85, Parts 1 & 2 (1997). The images are also referred to as *dvarapala* on their accompanying information panel at the Sri Ksetra Museum (viewed 20 February 20, 2014).

³⁵⁸ As argued by Galloway, Theravada traditions have dominated studies of Southeast Asian art, yet the academic division of early Buddhism into Theravada and Mahayana traditions is unsustainable. Charlotte Galloway, "Relationships between Buddhist Texts and Images of the Enlightenment During the Early Pagan Period," in *Burma: Art and Archaeology*, ed. Alexandra Green and T. Richard Blurton (London: The British Museum Press, 2002), 45. Further discussion on this in relation to Bagan by historian Lilian Handlin is found in Lilian Handlin, "The King and his Bhagava: The Meanings of Pagan's Early Theravadas," in *How Theravada is Theravada? Exploring Buddhist Identities*, ed. Peter Skilling, Jason Carbine and ors., (Chiang Mai, Silkorm Books, 2011), 165-240.

³⁵⁹ The chapter "Painting and Sculpture" in Stadtner's *Ancient Pagan* provides a succinct analysis of Bagan's art and its probable influences, and he points to local expression in his discussion of the later painting style at Bagan. Stadtner cites an example of a fantastic image at the Payathonzu, writing "[it] is just one of numerous examples highlighting a flourishing indigenous imagination." Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 74-88. In contrast, in relation to the imagery at the Abeyadana and Nagayon, Paul Strachan writes "In these temples the art historian is faced with the dilemma of identifying the alleged Northern Buddhist elements and connecting them to a definitive text ... such curious figures are simply decorative. Depicted in a florid, fanciful and highly delineated manner, these alleged Tantra figures fill awkward gaps in the wall space ..." Strachan, *Imperial Pagan*, 131.

³⁶⁰ Galloway, "Relationships between Buddhist Texts", 52.

The 'lower' nats

There is certainly no lack of fantastic and mythological imagery at Bagan. Ranard's art historical survey of painting in Myanmar, *Burmese Painting* (2009), tackles the question of whether the 'lower' nats are represented in Bagan's art. He proposes that an animist culture and belief system may have contributed to Bagan's "more riotous inspiration", arguing that the culture's multiple layers of art history give only an illusion of synchronicity.³⁶¹ Ranard focuses on a scene from the 13th century Payathonzu temple featuring a figure riding a horse, holding a dagger or short sword in one hand, and another black dagger or magic implement in the other. Surrounding this figure are others carrying daggers and spears, with one "perched, acrobat-like", on an elephant's head. From the text it appears he is discussing the scene shown at Fig. 252, however the man in this scene is clearly riding a mythical creature somewhat resembling a horse, but with feline feet and claws. Nevertheless, Ranard describes this as "classic Burmese imagery", similar to the illustrations of the 'Thirty-Seven Nats' featured in Temple's book, and suggests the figures in the Payathonzu mural are 'lower' nats.³⁶²

Temple's illustrations were, however, created some six centuries later, and followed the iconography laid down in the *Inventory*, information that was unavailable to Ranard. Given the contemporary understanding of different types of nat evidenced by the Bagan era votive tablet and *linga* discussed in Chapter 2, it is certainly possible that this sort of imagery was understood at the time as representations of the 'lower' nats. At the time of research, Bagan's old city housed nine *natkùn*, but it is, of course, impossible to determine whether these nats were present during the Bagan era.³⁶³

³⁶¹ Ranard, *Burmese Painting*, 13-15. One of Ranard's informants was a monk who identified "monstrous" images from Bagan's murals as, simply, "nats". Ranard also cites Maung Htin Aung and Spiro's texts on the nats.

³⁶² Ranard's proposal relies mainly on the implements the figures hold and the presence of animals in both the mural paintings and several of the nats illustrated in Temple's book.

³⁶³ Six nats have shrines located along the city walls: Min Mahagiri and his sister at the Tharaba Gate (east); Byatta and Byatwi in the south-west corner; Anauk Medaw near the north-eastern corner; and the Mondaing Nat at the Bupaya at the north-western corner. There are two nats within the city itself; Le Kyun Maung and Myin Hpyu Shin. The *Natgyi Sandi* has a shrine within a niche of one of Bagan's stupas, the Atwinkyekoun. U Min Swe, (Assistant Director, Archaeology, National Museum & Library Department, Bagan Branch), in discussion with the author, February 6, 2014.

The 'higher nats': *Gandabba, yakkha and gounban*

Sculptures of *bilù* attributed to the Bagan era share the defining features of the *gandabba*, *yakkha* and *gounban* analysed in Chapter 3 — they are usually posed in the hieratic *bilùt'ain* posture, hold a *da* or fly-whisk up to one shoulder, and often wear a crown. One type is rendered as a heavy set figure with thick limbs and humanised facial characteristics. Their faces are large, rather square in shape with a flattened profile; they have a heavy, triangular shaped nose; prominent eyes that gaze outward; and a gentle smile similar to that found on Buddha images from the period (Figs. 253 and 254).

A second type is also posed in *bilùt'ain*, but their faces and bodies are rendered in a more supernatural manner, with an enormous head with distinctive facial features — including huge staring eyes under arched brows — set directly on top of a massive, rotund body. These images wear Bagan era crowns and elements of royal regalia such as heavy earplugs and/or arm and foot bangles. The famous Father and Son nats at the Shwezigon in Bagan, Shwe Nyo Thin and Shwe Zaga, typify this type (Fig. 255). This artistic idiom was also used at the Shwezigon for a figure with a stela backing set outside the eastern gateway of the outer enclosure wall (Fig. 256). All three are members of the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords — the guardians of the Shwezigon.

The posture, accoutrements, and placement of these two styles of sculpture define them as guardians of a domain that may be simultaneously temporal and spiritual. They are found in places where their guardian role is explicit — on pagoda platforms, in niches surrounding temples, or in their own shrines at locations emphasising guardianship, such as the Tharaba Gate at the eastern entrance to Bagan's Old City. They may be sculpted fully in the round, as in

Fig. 255, or attached to a backing stela, as at Bagan's Shwesandaw stupa (Fig. 253).³⁶⁴ Their iconography suggest they served as stylistic models for the *yakkha* and the *gounban* depicted on the Shwegugyi votive tablets created two centuries later (Figs. 46 to 48).

Seated figures making the gesture of homage are also common in Bagan's art. Given the conflation of the *zedi* with Mt Myinmo, some of the small bronzes found interred in *zedi* probably represent the five different supernaturals that guard the cosmic mountain — the *nagà*, *gäloun*, *gounban*, *yakkha* and *gandabba*. Figs. 257 to 259 show several of these little bronzes, who were fashioned with tenons at their bases to slot into a frame surrounding an image of the Buddha. As described by Duroiselle, "Some seem to repeat themselves except for trifling differences in their ornaments." These "trifling differences" could well be the iconography the artists employed to distinguish one type of *bilù* from another.³⁶⁵

Other crowned figures portrayed in the posture of homage at Bagan are more enigmatic. There are two placed on the upper terraces of the Shwezigon, Figs. 260 and 261, and another, sculpted in the round, was discovered on the outer face of a *zedi* enclosed by a later refurbishment (Fig. 262).³⁶⁶ Although the nats shown in Figs. 260 and 261 are identified as members of the pantheon of the Shwezigon's Inside Thirty-Seven Lords by the monument's Trustees, the identity of the figure shown at Fig. 262 is unknown. If he was created to represent a *dewa* nat paying homage or an image of the *zedi*'s donor king, one would expect him to be facing the *zedi*, but as his outwardly facing position suggests a guardianship role, it is likely he represents one of the Four Great Kings. He is placed in a similar architectural context to the intriguing frieze of

³⁶⁴ In the 1930s, the stone figures placed at the corners of the Shwesandaw's terraces were recorded as Hindu, in Niharranjan Ray, *Brahmanical Gods in Burma* (Calcutta: The University of Calcutta, 1932), 67. Certainly at least one of the images extant today features Mahapeinne's trunk, but there was little iconographical evidence left when they were photographed in 1905 to support the belief they all represented Hindu deities. Luce wrote "I have looked in vain for the distinctive elephant-head of Ganesa; but several fragmentary images (P1. 84 d, e) show two figures seated back to back. I expect one of them faced inwards, worshipping the cetiya, while the other surveyed the landscape." At the time of Luce's research, the Shwesandaw was known locally as the Mahapeinne (Ganesh) temple, and Luce thought the name may have followed the presence of the statues. Luce, *OBEP* Vol. 1, 205 and Vol II, p. 70. As Mahapeinne is included in the list of Thirty-Seven Inside Lords at the Shwezigon, an alternative explanation for the images placed on the Shwesandaw's terraces is that they were another set, performing the same protective function as those at the Shwezigon discussed in the next chapter. But notably, the high relief figure carved in the *bilùt'ain* posture shown in Fig. 261 is a Myanmar *bilù*, not a Hindu deity.

³⁶⁵ Charles Duroiselle, quoted in Luce, *OBEP*, Vol. II p. 197. The arrangement of the figures in the photographs shown do not represent how they were found. Duroiselle wrote "One represents an Indian ascetic; another a raksasa or ogre; on a Naga king ... one is what I take to be a queen; one a king; one a minister; two others common people ..."

³⁶⁶ U Min Swe, discussion, February 13, 2014.

over a hundred crowned figures with their hands clasped in homage that once encircled Alaungsithu's Shwegugyi temple, completed ca. 1131 (Figs. 263 to 265). Although only a few are extant, and these are badly weathered, enough detail remains to show that they too were accorded a high status by virtue of their crowns and other elements of royal regalia. Inside the temple, Alaungsithu's Pāli inscription reads, in part, "On a platform high exalt it, and adorn with *cetiyas* [*zedis*] and images of spirits", lending weight to the identification of these figures as protective *bilū*.³⁶⁷ Although they share a cross-legged seated posture and hold their hands in the position of homage they are far from identical, with different faces and crowns. This individuality-within-a-crowd is seen in wall paintings of minor celestials portrayed as background figures. While they may be posed identically, close inspection often reveals their artists differentiated them via small details such as the pattern on their clothing.

Dewa nats

As outlined earlier, the *dewa* nats are commonly found in guardianship positions in Buddhist architectural contexts. Being the most prominent *dewa* nat, imagery of Thakya Min is now often seen but he has not always enjoyed such a high level of prominence. The stucco mouldings of deities typically placed above Bagan era temple entrances are similar to those found at the apex of contemporary inscription stones, many of which were identified by historian Than Tun as Hindu goddesses (particularly Sri) or anonymous *bodhisatta*. These deities are usually seated in the lotus position in the centre of a triangular pediment above an entrance, or in the centre finial of the stucco arch over a temple entrance, flanked by animals and/or traditional *kānouq* designs (Fig. 266).³⁶⁸ Elsewhere at Bagan, *dewa* and other heavenly beings such as celestial musicians and dancers appear in wall paintings, identifiable by their placement in the composition, their crowns and haloes.

The most prominent *dewa* nats depicted at Bagan are Thakya Min and Byamma, who usually appear together in wall paintings and sculpture. Both are portrayed in the royal regalia of the time, and usually in attendance on the Buddha, as seen in the sculpture from Bagan's Ananda

³⁶⁷ Luce, *OBEP*, Vol. I, 210.

³⁶⁸ Many sketches of the figures on inscription stones are given in Than Tun and Aye Myint, *Ancient Myanmar Designs*, 8-35. These were taken from G. H. Luce and Pe Maung Tin, *Inscriptions of Burma* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956).

temple (Fig. 267). The multiple belief systems at play in Bagan — Mahayana, Theravada, Hindu, Brahmanic, animist — are all expressed in the art of the time, but Thakya Min's popularity, and depictions of him on his own, appear to have surged only relatively recently, a phenomenon discussed below.

Summary

The sheer physical longevity of the materials used for Buddhist monuments and imagery, namely stone, brick and stucco, has allowed them to endure through the centuries since they were first created, while any artefacts made from more ephemeral material have long since perished. Imagery of *dewa* nats and *bilu* are found playing a guardianship role in Buddhist settings, while *dewa* are common supporting players in narratives where the Buddha is the focus. The presence of different styles of *bilu* at Bagan indicates that despite the collective terms 'nat' or 'bilu' used today, there was a sophisticated understanding of the role each type played during the Bagan era. This is reflected both in the style of their imagery, and in their placement in the natural and built environment. The *bilu't'ain* posture was conventionalised as the predominant indicator of guardianship by the Bagan era, much as the *bhūmisparśa mudrā* became the most popular *mudrā* for Myanmar's many millions of Buddha images.

Given the presence of fantastical imagery at Bagan, and the clear understanding and acceptance of the supernatural, it is hard to imagine there were no three-dimensional images of the nat Lords or other local guardian nats being created during this time, but with no evidence discovered to date this has to remain conjectural. Despite their absence from the material record, nature spirits and other supernaturals given a human appearance formed a large part of the Bagan era visual repertoire.

FIRST INWA TO SECOND INWA/NYAUNGYAN ERA STYLES: 1364 TO 1752

An apparent decrease in the production of art followed the decline of the Bagan kingdom. Fraser-Lu points to the turbulence of the years from 1364-1527 as the cause, with courts oscillating from Upper to Lower Myanmar, frequent earthquakes, and the tendency to refurbish existing monuments rather than create new ones.³⁶⁹ Despite Bayinnaung's conquests and his expansion into neighbouring areas to create the largest Southeast Asian empire of the mid 16th century, the bulk of art created in the Inwa/Nyaungyan era still extant, whether sacred or secular, dates to the 17th and early 18th centuries.³⁷⁰

Nevertheless, trends begin to emerge.³⁷¹ The face of the Buddha becomes squarer in shape and starts the transition to a more ethnically Burman appearance. The nose is flattened, sculptors leave more space between the nose and eyebrows, and a fine band between the forehead and hairline is added (Fig. 268).³⁷² The facial features of the nats followed suit, with artists mentally dividing the face into equal thirds to assist in the correct placement of facial features (Figs. 269 and 270). The eyes are set along the horizontal mid-line of the face, with distinctive eyebrows, set in a high sweeping arch, reaching well into the upper third of the face. The base of the nose sits on a line demarcating the bottom third, with the lips midway between the nose and the base of a narrow chin. The ears extend the height of the middle third of the face, with large ornamental plug earrings set at the top of the lower third, alongside plump cheeks.³⁷³ The crowns accorded to the nats during this era feature a distinctive 'shark-fin' profile, usually with a crenellated brim (Figs. 271 and 272). This is the era that the earliest statues of nat Lords and local guardian nats can be assigned to — and it may be no coincidence that the earliest known

³⁶⁹ Sylvia Fraser-Lu, "After Pagan: The Art of Myanmar, 1287-1900," in *Buddhist Art of Myanmar*, eds. Sylvia Fraser-Lu and Donald M. Stadtner (New York: Asia Society Museum, 2015), 65. Lack of centralised patronage would also have contributed.

³⁷⁰ Future research may well bring to light art that can be securely dated to the 15th and 16th centuries, but for now this time remains a puzzling gap in Myanmar's material culture. The extent of Bayinnaung's empire is shown in a map in Harvey, *History of Burma*, 150.

³⁷¹ Green argues that overtly Mahayana, Tantric and Brahmanic imagery was abandoned between the 14th and 17th centuries. She found a shift in narrative representation in wall paintings that reflected increasingly orthodox Theravada Buddhism across Myanmar, facilitated by improved communication and transport networks. Green, "Deep Change," 22-3.

³⁷² Chew, *Cave-temples of Po Win Taung*, 65.

³⁷³ U Win Maung (Tampawaddy), discussion. My thanks to U Win Maung, who sketched the faces and crowns in this chapter for me.

list of the nat Lords is attributed to the reign of Pindale Min, who reigned between 1648 and 1661.

The nat Lords and local guardian nats

Carvings of nats in the style of the Inwa/Nyaungyan period are characterised by small wooden images, simply modelled, coated with lacquer then gilded, with the facial features outlined above and small protruding eyes (Figs. 273 to 276). Their bodies are slim, the arms and legs are thin, and their heads are over-sized, emphasising their supernaturality. The heavy earplugs of Bagan era images are retained, but most of the nats viewed are portrayed kneeling, or stand on simple wooden bases that form part of the carving. Some are mounted on an animal that references their creation legend and/or emphasises their power. A variety of arm postures are found, and many feature an exaggerated outwardly-twisted elbow. Their backs are often quite flat, indicating they were placed in a niche or against the rear wall of a shrine. Their clothing is indicated by simple incised lines, and their decoration is limited to coatings of lacquer and gold leaf. Occasionally the gold leaf does not cover the eyes, allowing the black lacquer underneath to resemble a more life-like pupil.

The Inwa/Nyaungyan style is epitomised by the line-up of figures shown at Fig. 273. These small nat statuettes are of the family of Ko Myo Shin and Pale Yin, prominent guardian nats from the area around the confluence of the Chindwin and Ayeyarwaddy rivers midway between Mandalay and Bagan. All the statuettes are thought to date to the late 16th or early 17th century.³⁷⁴ They are quite small, the tallest, Fig. 274, being only approximately 35 cm high, and all are in fairly poor condition, with their coating of gold leaf almost literally holding them together. Each has been portrayed in slightly different postures and with different attributes. While their meanings are not known, these differences provide them with visually individual identities.

Fig. 274, Pale Yin, is portrayed standing, with her left hand to her belly and the other hanging by her side. Her long tasselled earrings are of a style identified as being worn by the Inwa middle

³⁷⁴ U Win Maung (Tampawaddy), discussion. One version of Ko Myo Shin's legend is that he was a king from Halin, one of Myanmar's ancient Pyu cities.

classes.³⁷⁵ Ko Myo Shin's brothers, shown in Fig. 275, ride animals indicating their status, while the sisters shown at Fig. 276 are kneeling, a posture commonly seen in female nat images from this period. Their faces are archetypes of the Inwa/Nyaungyan style, and the one at far left and third from left in Fig. 276 have their hair fashioned in a style seen in wall paintings dated to the same era (Fig. 277). This hairstyle is replicated on two nats from the collection at the Shwezigon (Figs. 278 and 279). The individuality accorded to the Shwezigon's statuettes can be seen in the way that Ma Dwe Phyu's carver has allowed the nat's left toes to peep out from beneath her right thigh, while Nga Ywa Shin features a flaring scarf with a scalloped edge thrown over her left shoulder that reaches to her bottom.

The simply modelled form of nat carvings in this style is also apparent in the two figures shown at Figs. 280 and 281, although their shrine attendant believes these simply carved but striking images date to the 14th century, making them, by reputation, the oldest post-Bagan era nat images I encountered.³⁷⁶ Their faces are certainly two of most stylistically individual seen, with their flat noses, tiny open eyes and gently curving mouths. The eyes of both nats are made of two pieces of glass, dyed opaque white and black, carved, then fused together, a method known to have been in use in the Nyaungyan era.³⁷⁷ As noted in Chapter 4, opaque glass eyes like these remained popular until the early 1900s, when artists largely switched to using oil paint introduced by the British.

Dewa nats

There are no securely dated images identified as Thakya Min during the 200 years or so following the Bagan era to chart his evolution in art during that time, although it is highly probable he was portrayed with elements of the court costume and regalia of those centuries given his celestial status and traditional identification with the king.³⁷⁸ He re-enters the extant artistic narrative in the 17th century, in wall paintings of the period including those depicting

³⁷⁵ For an excellent summary of the clothing, accessories, jewellery and textile designs during the Inwa and Nyaungyan eras, see Chew, *Cave-temples of Po Win Taung*, 111-22.

³⁷⁶ U Win Maung (Tampawaddy) was shown the photograph of Popa Medaw at Fig. 291, and stated he thought the image was from the 17th century.

³⁷⁷ U Win Maung (Tampawaddy), discussion.

³⁷⁸ For a discussion of the traditional identification of Myanmar's kings with both Indra and Vishnu, see Gutman, "Vishnu in Burma," 30-36.

Jātaka tales in the Tilawkguru Cave in Sagaing. These continue the Bagan era practice of showing *Jātaka* characters in contemporary settings and costumes.³⁷⁹ In a scene from the *Kumbha Jātaka*, Fig. 282, where Thakya Min is warning the king and court against the evils of alcohol, he wears the 17th century costume of the Inwa court. This includes a crown with three tiers and a finial in a saw-toothed base; heavy earplugs; and a long tunic over an ankle-length *pahso*. In the *Alumbusa Jātaka*, Fig. 283, where he sits in his celestial palace beside the nymph Alumbusa, his regalia is more overtly royal — here the long looping scarf known as a *yinzi tabeqsá* extends to waist level and his crown is more elaborate, emphasising his position as the Lord of *Tawadeintha* Heaven.

In these scenes, knowledge of the text being illustrated, or an accompanying gloss, is needed to differentiate Thakya Min from the other characters. In the mural from Salingyi, Fig. 284, he is shown playing a *saùn* (the Myanmar harp) to the future Gotama Buddha, an event known from the *Paṭhamasambodhi*.³⁸⁰ However, the anonymous *dāgà nat* on duty in his guardhouse shown in Fig. 285 wears a similar costume, and is only distinguishable from Thakya Min by the accompanying gloss underneath, which identifies him as a *dāgà nat*. In another painting from the same temple, Thakya Min and Byamma once again appear together (Fig. 286), but again there is nothing in the style, or the items they hold, to distinguish them from the other figures to their left and right. In fact, without the accompanying gloss below the register, which records that Thakya Min and Byamma are listening to the Buddha's sermon during the month of Waso, the viewer would not know they were there.³⁸¹

As Thakya Min appears frequently in the *Jātaka* tales, it is not surprising to find him in painted vignettes like these. However, he also plays a prominent role in Myanmar folklore. As recorded by Htin Aung, when he descends from *Tawadeintha* Heaven for *Thingyan*, Myanmar's lunar new year, he brings with him two volumes: one bound in gold in which he inscribes the names

³⁷⁹ The Cave's wall paintings are dated to 1672 AD. These are covered in Jane Terry Bailey, "Some Burmese Paintings of the Seventeenth Century and Later, Part I: A Seventeenth-Century Painting Style near Sagaing," *Artibus Asiae* 38, no. 4 (1976).

³⁸⁰ The *Paṭhamasambodhi* is an account of the Buddha's life in which a tale is told of Thakya Min playing a one or three-stringed lute, "Burmanised" here to the *saùn*. Alexandra Green suggests this particular episode was transmitted orally from the Tai. See Green, "From Gold Leaf to Buddhist Hagiographies," 320.

³⁸¹ Waso is the month during the monsoon season when men traditionally retreated to the monastery (sometimes described as Buddhist 'Lent'). Thakya Min and Byamma are presumably seated to the Buddha's immediate right and left.

of those who have performed acts of merit; the other bound in the skin of a dog to record the names of sinners.³⁸² This legend is shown in a mural painting at the Po Win Taung cave complex, depicting a *dewa* nat writing in a black *parabaiq* (Fig. 287). The inscription beneath clearly names him as Thakya Min: “King Sakka looks at the list, it is correct”; yet in the painting he is not merely looking at the list, but *creating* it. This demonstrates that artists were familiar with the interpretation of Thakya Min as the recorder of merit at the time the mural was painted, possibly as early as the late 17th century. Based on this, the wall painting of the *dewa* nat writing in a book shown at Fig. 288, created in the same period, may also be identified as Thakya Min.³⁸³

Thakya Min or Matali?

Po Win Taung’s wall painting and its accompanying inscription allow a reappraisal of a number of sculptures of a *dewa* nat portrayed writing on a tablet, which in turn suggest the triple-panelled *k’abounsa* formed part of royal regalia during the Nyaungyan era (1597-1752).³⁸⁴ The four sculptures shown at Figs. 289 to 292 all display the characteristic facial features of the Nyaungyan era, and all feature a triple-panelled *k’abounsa*. On the pair of sandstone statues shown at Figs. 289 and 290, the *kānouq* elements of the *k’abounsa* were sculpted to wrap around the lower half of the body, falling either side of the feet in a realistic rendition of the textile garment it was modelled upon — each *kānouq* panel is fashioned to curve upwards to meet the base of the one above, forming a series of loops that mimic the stiffened textile panels of the original. In the similarly styled sculpture at Fig. 291, the artist represented these loops in abstracted relief, which lead the viewer’s eye upwards to the central part of the sculpture. This artistic device emphasises the focal point of the sculpture: the nat’s beautifully elongated fingers writing on a tablet with a thin stylus. Sculptures featuring these distinctive iconographical elements — the triple-looped *k’abounsa* and the tablet — as well as the gracefully emphasised

³⁸² Maung Htin Aung, *Folk Elements*, 23-4 and 34.

³⁸³ Unfortunately the gloss beneath this particular fresco is too damaged to read. In 1875, R. C. Childers identified Thakya Min as “the Recording Angel of Buddhism”, writing that “four times a month ... he reads aloud from a golden book a record of good works done by men during the week.” Childers, *Pali Dictionary*, 419.

³⁸⁴ According to Chew, the *k’abounsa* emerged during the 14th to 17th centuries, and was initially “... a median panel that fell straight down and flared to the sides without folds. In the 18th century, a period when it was treated fluidly, the panel became double and ended in volutes. At the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries, the median panels were tripled and superposed. In the 20th century, the decorative motifs became intertwined and more stylised.” Chew cites Lowry’s description of Figs. 300 and 301, and Lowry gives a date of “possibly 17th century” for this pair of statues. Chew, *Cave-temples of Po Win Taung*, 88 and 281 footnote 89; Lowry, *Burmese Art*, plate 11.

treatment of the hands — are found at several other locations: the Po Win Taung cave complex; the Shwedagon's museum in Yangon; in the grounds of the Shwezigon at Bagan; and at the large religious site at Kakku (Figs. 292 to 296). The relative proliferation of these statues indicates the identity of this particular nat and the story depicted were well-known to viewers in the late 17th to early 18th centuries, although his identity appears to rely on local tradition surrounding the statue shown at Fig. 289.³⁸⁵

At the time of their acquisition in the early 1900s, the pair of statues at Figs. 289 and 290 were known to the local people as Thakya Min and Matali respectively.³⁸⁶ Matali is well-known in Myanmar in his role as Thakya Min's charioteer in a legend related in the *Nimi Jātaka*, one of the stories of the Buddha's last ten lives in which he perfects the ten virtues necessary to achieve enlightenment. However, Matali does not appear anywhere in the *Jātaka* tales as a recorder of deeds, only as Thakya Min's charioteer or an animal. Chew identified the statues with the distinctive tablet and stylus iconography at Po Win Taung as Matali, citing a tradition that it is he who ascends to *Tawadeintha* heaven to transmit to Thakya Min his report on earthly events.³⁸⁷ This proposition appears to be drawn from Duroiselle's article on the Po Win Taung Caves, in which he suggests that the statue "holding a book" outside the Mibuya Gu (Queen's temple) at the site "is probably Matali."³⁸⁸ Unfortunately Duroiselle does not give a reference or explanation for his identification, but given he was in Myanmar at the same time as Brown, who 'acquired' the statues shown at Figs. 289 and 290, he may well have been aware of the tradition associated with them. In any event, the references to Matali by both Brown and Duroiselle seem to have informed the same attribution by later scholars.

³⁸⁵ Nancy H. Dowling noted that "a book-writing image" is common in Burmese art. However, her analysis of the iconography of the "Burmese Lokapalas" she examined concluded that Datarata carries a harp; Wirupakkha a conch, Wirulaka a sword, and Kuwera was the figure with the stylus and tablet. Nancy H. Dowling, "Burmese Lokapalas: A problem of identification," *Journal of the Siam Society* 70 (1982): 86-99.

³⁸⁶ The statues were 'acquired' by R. Grant Brown, who thought the figure writing on the tablet was "more likely to be Viruhlhaka [Wirulaka] one of the four lokapalas, or recording angels, of the Four Isles ... according to the Mahagovindasutta he hands the record of the good deeds of the men inhabiting [the southernmost Isle] to Pancasika, who in turn hands it to Matali, and he to Sakra himself." Victoria and Albert Museum, "Figure", <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O472011/figure/> (accessed December 18, 2016). *The Dictionary of Pali Proper Names* also gives this explanation, and the entry for Matali does not list him as the recorder of men's deeds. See Malasekera, *Pali Proper Names*, Vol. II, 107 and 601.

³⁸⁷ Chew, *Cave-temples of Po Win Taung*, 88.

³⁸⁸ Charles Duroiselle, "The Rock-Cut Temples of Powundaung," *Archaeological Survey of India Annual Report 1914-15* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1920), 51.

Chew compared the eight carved statues on the facade of the Mibuya Gu, Fig. 297, with the Indian, Singhalese and Myanmar planetary deities and their attributes, and convincingly argues that the statues represent planets. She concludes that the figure with the tablet and stylus identified by Duroiselle as Matali, Fig. 298, actually represents Venus. In Indian astrology this iconography is associated with Indra (Thakya Min) — and since Myanmar astrology follows the Indian tradition as Chew herself points out, this is a further indication that the identity of the figures writing so elegantly on the tablet is Thakya Min, rather than Matali.³⁸⁹

This identification is supported by statues at Kakku featuring the same iconography, dating perhaps to the 18th century, and identified by local researchers as Thakya Min.³⁹⁰ At Kakku, the statues of the figure writing on the tablet are usually paired with one of Byamma holding a water pot, as in Fig. 296. In light of this, the pair of statues at Figs. 289 and 290 may actually show Byamma holding a water pot — now broken — and Thakya Min performing his *Thingyan* responsibility. A similar pair, complete with the tenons that would have anchored them in place, is currently displayed in the Shwedagon pagoda museum (Fig. 294), although whether each statue came from the same site is unclear.³⁹¹

In other temples at Po Win Taung, wall paintings show Thakya Min holding a conch alongside Byamma holding an umbrella, in attendance on the Buddha, as at Bagan.³⁹² This very conventional scene does not preclude another appearance of Thakya Min at the site as the

³⁸⁹ Chew, *Cave-temples of Po Win Taung*, 157-63. My attribution of these deities as Thakya Min is also supported by the recent re-identification of a similar statue in the British Museum, one that I first suggested was a representation of Thakya Min recording people's deeds in my Honours thesis, completed in October 2011. At that time, the statue was identified by the Museum as "Representation of a nat (?)", however the description has since been amended to "This is the god Indra (Sakka) keeping a record of a being's good and bad deeds." The British Museum, "Collection Online, Museum number 1914,0812.5," http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=225105&partId=1&searchText=1914,0812.5&images=true&page=1 (last accessed December 31, 2016).

³⁹⁰ Than Wai (Taunggyi), *Ancient Arts and Crafts of Mwaydaw Kakku Zeidi Group*, trans. Soe Thiha Naung (Taunggyi: U Than Wai, undated), 123-4. There is little published information on the Kakku site, with estimates of the age of its more than 2,500 monuments ranging from the Bagan period onwards. The only English language publication available records monuments as old as the Nyaungyan dynasty (1597 to 1752). Since that time, inscriptions on two pagoda bells, dated 1793 and 1893 respectively, record donations for the addition of newer pagodas (see pages 27-9).

³⁹¹ Lowry noted in 1974 that the object held in the hands of the statue at Fig. 300 appeared to be a conch, but it had not been positively identified. He also noted that the sandstone from which the figures in the Shwedagon's museum are made from has a limited distribution, being found mainly in the Taungngu area. Lowry, *Burmese Art*, plate 11.

³⁹² Chew, *Cave-temples of Po Win Taung*, plates 60, 92, 109, 111 and 112. Chew also records other paintings of male deities holding a conch and fly-whisk, but only names one of them as Thakya Min, probably because the context of the narrative portrayed.

recorder of deeds, but the uncertainty over the distinctive imagery of this personality highlights how fluid meanings and attributions can be. Today, Fig. 292, the statue at Po Win Taung, is believed by local people to represent the Po Win Taung Thakin Ma, the female nat guardian of the area. She has control of the monkeys that roam the site, ‘rides’ a tiger, and has her own *natnàn* at the site containing more recent images (Figs. 299 and 300).³⁹³ Just as the tall wooden Bagan era statue at Bagan is now known as Thakya Min, Po Win Taung’s ‘ancient’ images are acquiring new layers of meaning to the local people — only in this case the move has been in the opposite direction, away from a Buddhist interpretation.

Summary

While the production of art sponsored by the court may well have declined in line with Fraser-Lu’s argument, nat images made for local shrines would undoubtedly have been carved in wood — an easily obtained and inexpensive resource. If the money or skills were not available to cover these images with lacquer and gold leaf, as argued earlier they would simply not have survived the climate. This may partly explain why there are so few left today.

The earliest images of local guardian nats we have to study were typically created as small wooden carvings, whose modelling indicates they were designed to be placed in a niche or a shrine. There are still some similarities with images of the Buddha, but these are, not surprisingly, confined to facial proportions and methods of decoration. Despite their standardised artistic treatment, the statues surveyed are all individualised via small artistic details that gives each nat life and personality, as well as displaying the skills of their creators. These nats were clearly highly valued given that at some point they were conventionally accorded decorative and protective layers of lacquer and gold leaf, as were images of the Buddha.

In the Bagan era, images of Thakya Min in wall paintings were identified by his conch, his royal regalia, and his positioning — often alongside Byamma — within the narrative depicted. The *dewa* nats featured in the Nyaungyan era wall paintings continued the Bagan era convention of

³⁹³ Interview with local informant, February 3, 2014. There is a modern statue of a tiger just opposite the *natnàn*. The Thakin Ma is believed to have been the queen of the king who began the Po Win Taun complex.

portraying deities in a humanistic manner, wearing elements of contemporary royal regalia to continue their association with the monarchy. By the late 17th century to 18th century at Po Win Taung, Thakya Min is still in royal regalia and holding a conch, but it appears another portrayal of him writing on a tablet was popularised, linking him with local tradition rather than canonical text.

A M A R A P U R A E R A S T Y L E S : 1 7 8 2 T O 1 8 5 3

By the time of Bodawpaya's founding of Amarapura in 1783, the fine band between the Buddha's forehead and hairline had been widened. These bands were often decorated with geometric and *kānouq* motifs, as were the edges of the Buddha's robe.³⁹⁴ Decoration is applied to both Buddha and nat images at this time, in the form of *shwezawa* (lacquer and gold leaf) and *hmansi shwekyá* (glass mosaic embedded in gilding). A more human appearance is apparent in images of nats with a celestial or human pedigree. Images of nat Lords or local guardian nats with a supernatural background retain the overly large head of the earlier style, and are still far larger in proportion to their mounts, as seen in Fig. 301, a statue that I have provisionally dated to this era. By this time, the iconography of the 'lower' nats has expanded to include more individualised attributes.

The nat Lords and local guardian nats

The earliest extant photographs of nat statues are from the Amarapura era, a by-product of British colonial occupation. In 1916, R. Grant Brown published an article on the nat known as 'The Lady of the Weir', along with photographs of three images guarding weirs in the Kyaukse district south of Mandalay (Figs. 302, 304 and 305). According to her legend, the Lady was one of King Anawrahta's wives, and a sister of the King of Myogyi. Learning that several people were to be killed at the site of local weirs to provide protection for her husband's royal works, the

³⁹⁴ Chew, *Cave-temples of Po Win Taung*, 66.

Lady asked whether her death would not be sufficient for all, and was promptly sacrificed to become their guardian.³⁹⁵

As with all images of local guardian nats, the Lady's statues were placed in shrines located within her domain, the site of her death. In Brown's time, three of the weirs had images of the Lady that he described as being "in good condition", with one "certainly of considerable age" (Fig. 302).³⁹⁶ Their hairstyles, facial features, postures and clothing reference imagery seen in earlier wall paintings. For example, the Lady shown in Fig. 302 has the tall, looped ponytail seen in murals at the 17th century Tilawkguru Caves, Fig. 303. Given the protection of gold leaf, an enclosed shrine, and the likelihood of constant attendance, it is possible she may have been up to a century old when Brown photographed her, dating her back as far as the late 1700s. Fig. 305, however, appears to have additional *thayò* moulding around her neck and on her breast-wrapper. This may be an early example of this style of decoration on nat statues, or it may have been added at a later date.

Although all three 'Lady of the Weir' statues are portraits of a woman believed to have sacrificed her own life some 700 years earlier, they were modelled as real people posed in contemporary garments and hairstyles (Figs. 303 and 306). The outwardly turned elbow is a traditional mannerism that was still considered elegant during the colonial period, a feature seen on many older nat images, and one still used by modern artists. Although exaggerated here (as in most nat statues with this gesture) the photograph of King Thibaw and Queen Supayalat at Fig. 307 shows them relaxing in this typically Myanmar manner when sitting on a flat surface.

Figs. 308 and 309 are another pair of nats photographed during Brown's time in Myanmar. When he encountered them they were known locally as a *maun hnamá* pair, called The Brother (Fig. 308) and The Sister (Fig. 309). However, Brown recorded that the Sister's image was also known by the title Ko Thein Yin, meaning the Lord of 900,000 villages, indicating the nat's

³⁹⁵ Brown, "The Lady of the Weir," 492. The *MMOS* records that an inscription at the Meiktila Lake states it was under the guardianship of "four great spirits, the Digha nat, the Sukha nat, the Bhayapamike nat and the Dhamma nat." Bagshawe, *MMOS*, 280.

³⁹⁶ Brown, "The Lady of the Weir," 491-2.

status as the guardian of that area.³⁹⁷ While both statues have the same simple modelling of Inwa/Nyaungyan nat images, their proportions and facial features are more naturally human. This is quite a contrast to the statue of Myin Hpyu Shin shown at Fig. 301, whose supernatural background is clearly reflected in his carving.

Similarly, the statue of Yeyin Kadaw, Fig. 310, reflects her status as “[belonging] to the order of evil nats ... said to be from the wild country to the west of the ancient shrine of [Po Win Taung] in the Chindwin.”³⁹⁸ Yeyin Kadaw’s image incorporates the wide open, staring eyes and *dà* held to the shoulder of Bagan’s *gounban* and *yakkha* statues, with the rounded modelling, kneeling posture, and placement on a simple round pedestal of the Inwa/Nyaungyan style. Her glaring eyes express the power attributed to her, as images of nats were often designed to strike fear into their viewers. This was an artistic strategy that ensured a high level of respect for the local *natkadaw* who could intercede with the nat on a supplicant’s behalf.³⁹⁹ The needs of the supplicant are also addressed in the statue’s outstretched left hand, which is ready to receive an offering. This is the oldest statue I came across with this feature, and may mark a shift in the way people interacted with nat imagery during this period.

It was nat images like these that were being surveyed by the Myawaddy Mingyi and his collaborators in the early 1800s. However, we have only one photograph, again taken by Brown, that shows the correlation between the iconography recorded in the Myawaddy Mingyi’s *Inventory* (see page 218), and an actual statue in situ, dated by Brown to ca. 1850 (Fig. 311). His photograph clearly shows this statue was created in line with the recorded iconography, that describes the *bilùt’ain* position as ‘right side knee upright, left side knee laying down’, and the *baùn*, earplugs and arm bangles are all in place. Given the estimated age of this carving and its location in the main *natnàn* at Taungbyon, it appears Brown photographed the replacement for the statue recorded in the *Inventory*, as the original, and the *natnàn*, had been lost in a fire some

³⁹⁷ At the time Brown took his photographs, both statues were resident in a *natkùn* on the platform of the pagoda on top of Kyaukse Hill. Brown was told by Taw Sein Ko that the three-tiered crown indicated a supreme king. Brown, “Lady of the Weir,” 494.

³⁹⁸ Brown, “The Taungbyon Festival,” 360.

³⁹⁹ U Win Maung (Tampawaddy), discussion.

six years prior to his visit.⁴⁰⁰ Figs. 311A and B, a rather amusing *parabaiq* illustration of the Taungbyon *natpwèh*, shows what the *natnàn* and the images within it may have looked like in the early to mid 19th century — although here the artist has depicted the two Taungbyon Brothers riding tigers.

Dewa nats

By the late 18th century to early 19th century wall paintings shown at Figs. 312 and 313, the facial features of the *dägà nats* guarding this temple's entrance have evolved to be more naturally human, although very idealised, and they are portrayed wearing the triple-panelled *k'àbounsa*. This conventionalised artistic treatment of *dewa nats* is seen in two other *parabaiq* from Burney's collection containing illustrations of *Jātaka* tales. The front cover, Fig. 314, shows a *dewa nat* wearing the triple-panelled *k'àbounsa*. However, the *dewa nat* on the back cover, Fig. 315, only features two *k'àbounsa* panels with their flying *kānouq* elements. This may indicate he is considered to be at a lower level in the Buddhist cosmology than the *dewa* on the front cover.⁴⁰¹

The use of these flying *kānouq* elements as an artistic device to indicate position in the heavenly hierarchy is seen in Fig. 316, four beautifully painted folios from the *parabaiq* that illustrate the *Vessantara Jātaka*. Born as Prince Vessantara, the Buddha-to-be lives a life of perfect generosity, giving away all his possessions — even his children are given as servants to a Brahmin priest. Having been reborn in *Tuthita* Heaven, he is petitioned by all the gods to become the Buddha in his next existence. In the scenes shown on the left-hand side folio, Prince *Vessantara* is shown pouring water over the hands of the Brahmin, his children seated behind him. Meanwhile, in the lower part of the composition, his wife is shielded from the sight of the Brahmin leading away her children by a *chintheq* (mythical lion), a tiger and a leopard. In the centre folio, now reborn in *Tuthita* Heaven, he is shown flanked by *dewa* dressed in royal regalia — probably the Four Great Kings — and his costume has the flying *kānouq* elements. Meanwhile, the followers of the Four Great Kings and the guardians of Myinmo are shown in tiers underneath: the *nagà*, *gāloun*,

⁴⁰⁰ Brown, "Taungbyon Festival," 358. Brown wrote that the *natnàn* had been burned down on the order of Mindon Min, which seems unlikely given it is known he attended at least one of the nats' annual *natpwèh*.

⁴⁰¹ Patricia M. Herbert, *The Life of the Buddha* (Petaluma: Pomegranate Communications, Inc., 2005), 14-15. Herbert suggests these two *dewa* may be two of the Four Great Kings.

goúnbán, *yakkha* and *gandabba*. Although simply rendered in red ink and gold leaf, the artist has clearly differentiated the three types of *bilù*. The final two folios at the right-hand side show the Four Great Kings guarding Queen Maya, after she has conceived the Buddha-to-be. Each King holds a *thanlyeq*, an emblem of royalty, and once again are accorded elements of royal regalia, in particular the tiered crown.⁴⁰² The Queen's costume is rendered in gold and features the *kānouq* elements — again indicating her higher status as the mother of the Buddha-to-be.

The same stylistic differences are apparent in two Wynford Album folios, shown at Figs. 317 and 318. In Fig. 317, Thakya Min and three other Lords of different heavens are all portrayed in royal regalia, emphasising the link between the monarchy and the celestial realm.⁴⁰³ The artist portrayed each with a slightly different crown and arm position, and used different colours for their clothing, but otherwise their depictions are stylised in a standard manner, with all the *dewa* posed in three-quarter view. Thakya Min, at far left, is differentiated by his conch, and the artist has referenced his lower position in the heavens by depicting him without a *salwe*, an emblem of royal rank that has been accorded to the other three *dewa*, whose heavens are on a higher level than *Tawadeintha*, where Thakya Min resides. The same standardised artistic treatment was given to the depictions of four *dewa* from from the higher heavens of the *Byamma* nats, (Fig. 318). Their costumes are more overtly royal, with more flying *kānouq* elements than the four kings who occupy the lower celestial planes.⁴⁰⁴

Summary

This period marked the increasing idealisation of portrayals of the Buddha, a trend also seen in imagery of the *dewa* nats. Their representations remain conventionalised, continuing the long artistic tradition of portraying them in royal regalia. This is keeping pace with the real-life evolution of court costume to stress the connection of the *dewa* with the monarchy. The costumes worn at court had become increasingly decorative by this time, and the wearing of

⁴⁰² Ibid., 18 and 77-8.

⁴⁰³ These illustrations were included in Temple's book, titled "Kings of the Four Nat Worlds". Temple, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, 2.

⁴⁰⁴ Each figure is named, in Burmese, beneath the original illustration, which was viewed in April 2014. The paper the Wynford Album illustrations were made on is mostly watermarked 1829, although Temple thought some were made between "1826 and 1832 or later." These illustrations were also included in Temple's book, titled "Inhabitants of the Higher Heavens". Ibid., 5 and 35.

different elements was subject to sumptuary laws. Artists followed suit by using differing levels of royal regalia to distinguish between the rank each *dewa* occupies within the Buddhist heavens.

The first known written canon of artistic form and iconography for Thakya Min and the Min Nats in the pantheon of Outside Thirty-Seven Lords was produced during the middle of the Amarapura era, indicating that a development from the more simply realised imagery attributed to the Nyaungyan era had been underway for some time during the 1700s. The simple forms and postures of the Nyaungyan era were still being incorporated in statues of nats in the early 19th century, but the faces of the nats photographed by Brown show that artists conceived the faces and clothing of nats with a human background in a more natural manner.

Conversely, some carvers highlighted the supernatural background and personality of local guardian nats and Nat Lords. Statues of important nats, such as Myin Hpyu Shin, are now identifiable according to conventionalised iconography, probably as a means of stressing their individual power and making them more easily identifiable to devotees. Elements expressing the 'fearsome' natures of the nat Lords are not prescribed in the *Inventory*, and it appears these were limited to imagery of guardian nats at locations further away from the relative sophistication of the royal court, particularly to nats deemed especially powerful.

Although expressed in brief notation-style phrases, the Myawaddy Mingyi's *Inventory* provides historical textual instructions for the making of images of the nat Lords during the Amarapura period. These instructions, coupled with the pre-existing knowledge of master carvers and local *natt'ein*, comprised an artistic manual for the creation of individual images at the beginning of the 19th century.

MANDALAY/YADANAPON ERA STYLES: 1853 TO PRESENT

The Mandalay style, named after Myanmar's last royal city, describes the highly decorative imagery that began to be produced at the beginning of the 1800s, and was fully developed by the 1850s. Buddha images are characterised by a face with naturalistic human features, the eyes and eyebrows arranged horizontally. By the mid 19th century the headband had widened further into a more decorative diadem or frontal crown, often inlaid with precious stones and/or glass mosaic. The cheeks are flatter, and a finely sculpted nose dominates a sensuous mouth (Fig. 319). The Buddha's robes were carved in a heavier, undulating fashion, and their edges covered with paint or red lacquer with inlays of multi-coloured glass.⁴⁰⁵ The Mandalay style remains popular and images are still created in this fashion today.

The nats' faces became much squarer in shape, and more humanistic. The form of the body was also rendered in more naturally human, if idealised, proportions. The placement of facial features still followed a division into thirds, but the eyebrows curve normally, with their much flatter arc meeting the bottom of the upper third, and the nose and mouth imitating the more natural modelling given to depictions of the Buddha (Figs. 320 and 321). Crowns, as detailed in Chapter 4, are wider with a small downward drooping tip (Fig. 322).

The nat Lords and local guardian nats

The more naturally Myanmar facial style given to images created in this period is clearly seen in the statue shown at Fig. 321, a carving of one of the Taungbyon Brothers created in 1894. Although this statue is undecorated, during this time the use of lacquer moved from being merely an undercoat and support for gold leaf, to a decorative element in its own right.⁴⁰⁶ The images shown at Figs. 323 to 327 typify the Mandalay/Yadanapon style: a well modelled carving with realistic proportions, posed in a stiffly formal manner, decorated with a black lacquer ground supplemented with *thayò* moulding.

⁴⁰⁵ Chew, *Cave-temples of Po Win Taung*, 66.

⁴⁰⁶ The reason for this statue's lack of decoration is explained in Chapter 6.

Older nat images decorated with glass mosaic in the Mandalay style, as shown in Fig. 326, were not often encountered during my research. However, the more elaborate style of costume given to Buddha images was also accorded to local guardian nats and nat Lords. Part or all of the statues were coated in gold or silver leaf, and opaque glass eyes became popular for statues created from the late 19th to early 20th century.⁴⁰⁷ Like the Amarapura era statue of Yeyin Kadaw shown at Fig. 310, these eyes stand out in sharp contrast to their surrounding black and gold decoration, giving the images a heightened sense of great power, a feature especially evident in Fig. 324.

The *Inventory* and the Kawi Dewa Kyaw Thu's *parabaiq*

The most outstanding example of the correlation between the *Inventory* and actual imagery of the Myawaddy Mingyi's nat Lords are the lovely coloured illustrations from the *parabaiq* published as the front endpapers to Temple's *The Thirty-Seven Nats* (two are shown at Figs. 328 and 329). The *parabaiq* is dated by art historian Patricia Herbert to the last quarter of the 19th century, but sadly its provenance is unknown.⁴⁰⁸

The style of its illustrations is very similar to the *dewa* nats from the Wynford Album shown at Figs. 317 and 318. Both sets use fine red or black line to outline the nats' bodies and clothing and gold to highlight particular features. This flattened 'colouring-in' treatment has a long history reaching back to the Bagan era. However, the use of a different colour to indicate folds in the nats' clothing gives the *parabaiq* illustrations a subtle three-dimensionality. The use of similar *acheiq lüntäya* patterned *loungyi* and red as the main colour for the garments of the nats shown in Figs. 328 and 329, is an artistic choice that unites them as a group. The dominance of red is unsurprising as it is known as the traditional colour for the nats, but its use for the clothing is especially significant because at the time, red and green and *acheiq lüntäya* textiles were reserved under sumptuary laws for royalty.⁴⁰⁹ This underscores the role of this particular iteration of the Outside Thirty-Seven Lords as guardians of the royal city.

⁴⁰⁷ U Than Tun (owner, Heritage Gallery, Yangon) and U Hla Baw (owner, Bonton, Yangon), in discussion with the author, January 15, 2014. Both informants use these features to date antique nat images to the late 19th to early 20th century.

⁴⁰⁸ Herbert in *Thirty-Seven Nats*, IV.

⁴⁰⁹ Franklin and Swallow, "Identifying with the Gods," 56.

Dewa nats

The guardian statues of *dewa* nats and the Four Great Kings created for Mandalay's Royal Glass Palace were posed in a simple seated posture (Fig 330). The text underneath each image relates how each was to be created, phrased in the same manner as the descriptions in the *Inventory*.

For Byamma and Thakya Min, seen in the top register accompanied by two attendants, the text reads

Place in the Royal Glass Palace images height approximately 1 *maiq* four *leqthiq*, [28.86cm] Byamma with two attendants together. Height approximately one *taun* [45.7cm] make a mix of high quality silver and gold and place Byamma statue. In that location in the same manner make and place two attendant nat statues together. [With] Thakya Min statue.⁴¹⁰

This illustration shows Byamma, at top left, as the superior *dewa* nat. He is more richly attired than Thakya Min, and depicted in white clothing — as are his attendants — rather than the patterns worn by Thakya Min and his attendants shown on the right.⁴¹¹ Byamma is also accorded a more elaborate crown and a *salwe*. These differences show that artists continued to use sumptuary laws to underline the relative position of *dewa* nats in the higher realms of the Buddhist heavens.

Beneath, in the lower register of Fig. 330, are the Four Great Kings. They too are illustrated in royal regalia, but are less richly attired than Byamma and Thakya Min. Although each is identified by the text underneath their illustration, they also wear an identifying headdress: Datarahtha, king of the *gandabba*, is shown at far left wearing a crown; and at far right, Kuwera, chief of the *yakkha*, wears a headdress with the finial in the form of a *yakkha*'s head. At his left, *Wirupakkha*, chief of the *nagà*, wears a headdress with the finial in the form of a *nagà*, while Wirulaka, king of the *gounban*, is shown wearing a *gāloun* headdress. This may be the artist's way of including the *gāloun* — the fifth supernatural guardian of Mt Myinmo — in the imagery of these protective figures. Meanwhile, sculptural representations of the *dewa* nats, as seen in

⁴¹⁰ Singer, "Royal Ancestral Images," 116, fig. 12. This illustration is taken from folio of a *parabaiq* dated 1894. The illustration in Singer's article is captioned "Parabaiq painting of the ten Hindu gods which guarded the Hmannan (glass palace)." The measurements are given in traditional abbreviations. One *taun* equals 45.72mm, one *maiq* equals 15.24mm, and one *leqthiq* equals 19.05mm. The traditional abbreviations are given in Okell, *Introduction to the Script*, 424. The modern equivalents are found in *The Dictionary*, i (at the end of the book).

⁴¹¹ The original illustrations were most likely coloured — see Figs. 332 and 333 for similar imagery.

Fig. 331, continue to be carved in a standardised manner, with artists relying on minor postural or decorative details to distinguish their work and bring life to their images.

Summary

The nat statues shown in Figs. 323 to 327 were all carved in the formal, rather hieratic manner suitable for placement in a milieu where devotees will pay homage to them. Their power is underscored by the richness of their decoration and an increased emphasis on their gaze, which heightens the impression they will be able to intercede in secular affairs. This has moved the nats further away from the almost toy-like appearance of the earlier styles and is in marked contrast to the stylised artistic treatment given to contemporary images of the *dewa* nats. Although the facial features and bodily proportions of the nat Lords and local guardian nats are now completely natural, if idealised, their postures are extremely formal, lacking the more relaxed attitudes of the imagery of the earlier eras.

Depictions of the *dewa* nats were completely conventionalised by this time. There is little variation in the *parabaiq* illustrations shown here, with artists relying on differentiating their position in the Buddhist heavens by using ever increasing amounts of royal regalia, alongside colour, pattern and gold leaf, to indicate their status as one moves upwards through the heavenly realms. This is also true for the sculptural representations surveyed, with the small stylistic differences seen being a true indication of the carver's skill and imagination. It is perhaps the rather ubiquitous presence of these *dewa* nats that led to the emergence of the more lively and engaging 'Salay' style of woodcarving in the 1880s.

THE SALAY STYLE: 1880 TO PRESENT

The sense of playfulness and natural poses of the figures in the carvings created by master carver U Po Kyi, that decorate the Yokson monastery at Salay, are fine examples of a highly individual and recognisably Myanmar style that emerged during the 1880s, one I refer to as the 'Salay' style after the location of the Yokson. The narrative structure of the *Jātaka* tales, Myanmar folk tales and the well-known legends of the nats provided artists like U Po Kyi with a wealth of characters

and drama to draw upon, and popular scenes from these tales, such as the *Padasayi*, featured in Figs. 332 and 333, were often the subject of decorative panels or architectural features adorning temples and monasteries in the late 19th century.⁴¹²

The distinctive features of the Salay style are a flattened U-shaped treatment of the facial plane that often terminates in a sweetly pointed chin. Naturalistic facial features, a dynamic and often playfully humorous pose, are combined with a restrained and stylised ornamentation of the characters and their surroundings. For example, the earth and palm tree surrounding the figures in Fig. 333 are approaching abstraction, and the court costume of the *keinnaya* (in Pāli *kinnarā*, a mythical creature) surmounting this panel, Fig. 332, is rendered in an active, bold style with clearly defined and more angular planes. These carvings lack both the formality and the intricate decoration seen on carvings of images carved in the contemporary Mandalay style of the late 19th century.

Other imagery in the Salay style is shown at Figs. 334 to 336. All these scenes depict the Taungbyon Brothers and their tigers, while Figs. 335 and 336 show the younger Brother's tiger carrying off Ma Me U, a virtuous wife and weaver who spurned the younger Brother's amorous advances. In the highly decorative panel at the Shwedagon in Yangon, the tiger is portrayed snatching Ma Me U from her loom while the younger Brother, riding a horse, watches from above (Fig. 336). The arrangement of the scenes in Figs. 333 to 336 demonstrate how cleverly depictions of nat legends and *Jātaka* tales were incorporated into the decorative schemes of Myanmar's monasteries, and the imagery ranks among the most beautiful ever produced by Myanmar's woodcarvers. The playful characteristic of the style and its conventional placement in a sacred Buddhist setting may have been a means of normalising the 'lower' nats and bringing them into a realm where they could be seen as essentially harmless.

The Salay style was used for the production of images of people, nats and *weiza* well into the 20th century, with varying degrees of abstraction and *thayò* ornamentation (Figs. 337 to 339). The conventional lacquer and gold leaf of earlier eras is still a popular means of decoration, and

⁴¹² Salay style carvings are found at other late 19th century buildings in Upper Myanmar that have survived the ravages of time and Myanmar's climate. For a detailed and painstaking record of Myanmar's wooden monasteries and their decoration, see Fraser-Lu, *Splendour in Wood*, in particular 233-5.

a dull red coloured painted base mimicking traditional *hinthapada* is commonly found. Nat imagery continues to be made in this style, alongside the more highly decorated Mandalay style figures featuring larger amounts of decorative *thayò* moulding and glass mosaic decoration.

THE MODERN ERA: 1930 TO PRESENT

Thakya Min

Easily identifiable statues of Thakya Min appear to have become more ubiquitous in the modern era. In 1988, art historian Sarah Bekker noticed that the animal symbols on the signs marking the planetary posts at the Shwedagon had been replaced by carved golden lotuses, as seen in a photo of the Tuesday planetary post taken in 1995 (Fig. 340, directly above the silver umbrella). Bekker argued that the stress on supernatural elements at Myanmar's pagodas was being disguised by making them appear purely Buddhist.⁴¹³ Her argument is bolstered by the addition of the large images of Thakya Min that now stand guard at the rear of each post. Fig. 341, a photograph of the same post taken in 2012, shows this relatively recent addition standing behind the Buddha, whose image is covered with garlands of flowers.

The appearance of these images of Thakya Min on the Shwedagon's platform marks his relatively recent rise to prominence in Myanmar's art. Today, modern paintings or statues of this *dewa* nat are commonly found at Myanmar's pagodas, replacing the more anonymous *dāgà* nats of early times.

The nat Lords and local guardian nats

Somewhat surprisingly, two erstwhile members of the *saṅgha* played important roles in the emergence of modern styles of nat imagery in the 20th century. Between them, the charismatic monks U Khanti and U Parama Wunna Theikdi were responsible, as patrons, for imagery at two popular nat pilgrimage sites in Myanmar today: Mandalay Hill and Popa Taung Kalat.

⁴¹³ Sarah M. Bekker, "Changes and Continuities in Burmese Buddhism," in *Independent Burma at Forty Years: Six Assessments*, ed. Josef Silverstein (New York: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1989), 59.

U Khanti (1867-1949)

U Khanti was a famous monk well known for his prodigious fund-raising efforts that helped promote Mandalay Hill as a place of pilgrimage for the Buddhist faithful.⁴¹⁴ He established hundreds of shrines throughout Myanmar, some of which include nat imagery. Fig. 342 shows one of several life-size cast iron nat statues at one of his shrine complexes, Ma Shwe U Myo, on the outskirts of Mandalay.⁴¹⁵ The raised inscription on the base of the statue records that it was cast in 1930 and weighs 851 *peittha* (approximately 1,390kg), an accounting of the merit, expressed in the weight of the iron, of the donor.⁴¹⁶ Statues of both Taungbyon Brothers are also present at the complex, and Fig. 332, the younger Brother, was cast in 1929 and weighs 700 *peittha*. Close by is the site known as Yakkansin Ywa or Ma Shwe U Kyardwin (“Ma Shwe U tiger hole”), where Ma Me U (known here as Ma Shwe U), was killed by the tiger sent by the younger Taungbyon Brother. Another cast iron statue of Ma Me U is found here (Fig. 344).⁴¹⁷ This was cast in 1936, and is placed in front of a modern poster showing her seated within her forest domain. Ma Ma Saw Khin, who is seated to her left (Fig. 345), was a Shan woman whom the king wanted to marry, but because she was young and he was old, she fled on a white horse, dying of exhaustion nearby. She became a nat and was taken under the wing of Ma Me U. This is a common scenario, where nats are often accompanied by other nats, supporting players in their creation legend, family members, or attendants.⁴¹⁸ For example, similar cast iron statues at the top of Mandalay Hill, probably commissioned by U Khanti, feature the Four Great Kings in postures of homage, with their *bilu* followers lined up behind them (Fig. 346).

⁴¹⁴ U Khanti was granted control of the shrines on Mandalay Hill by the British colonial administration in 1907. For his biography, see Mark Woodward, “When One Wheel Stops: Theravada Buddhism and the British Raj in Upper Burma,” *Crossroads* 4, no. 1 (1988): 57-90.

⁴¹⁵ Ma Me U's shrine complex is configured in the shape of a cross laid out on a hill. At the foot, inside the entrance, is a cast iron image of Ko Yin Maung, Ma Me U's husband, who was a woodcutter. He was floating his logs down the river when the Taungbyon Brothers caused their bindings to unravel, causing him to drown and become a nat. At the very top is an image of the Buddha, with another cast iron image, this time of U Khanti himself, kneeling in the posture of homage immediately in front. The layout of the complex appears reflective of U Khanti's position on the relative status of the Buddha and the nats.

⁴¹⁶ One *peittha* = 1.6329 kg. *The Dictionary*, ii.

⁴¹⁷ Ma Me U appeared in dreams of the local people, who realised she wanted to have her shrine built, along with a pagoda to make merit for her. The pagoda was duly erected at the same time as her shrine. Interview with local informant, January 24, 2014. It was not clear whether these images were commissioned by U Khanti, however, they were made in the same style.

⁴¹⁸ Hnamedaw Taungyi Shin Nat's statue at Sagaing's Aungmyelawka pagoda was accompanied by a female servant nat statue, who is recorded as “sitting decorously.” BUR MS 200, 41.

U Parama Wunna Theikdi and the Popa Taung Kalat style

Some forty years after U Khanti's images were cast, the former monk U Parama Wunna Theikdi (?-1994), whose portrait is shown at Fig. 347, established a major *natnàn* to the *bilumá* nat, Popa Medaw, at the base of Popa Taung Kalat.⁴¹⁹ Having heard that one of Mandalay's master woodcarvers, U Ba Tint (now U Pandita), was famous for his naturalistic and beautiful carvings of the human face and form, he engaged him to carve the larger than life size nat statues still present there today, which include popular nat Lords, and other guardian nats, Shan and other ethnic nats, alongside Hindu deities and figures of *weíza* (Figs. 348 and 349). U Parama Wunna Theikdi subsequently became a *zawgyi* (wizard) and moved to the top of the hill, before commissioning a further set of life-size statues of nats which are housed in another *natnàn* at Popa Taung Kalat (Fig. 350). These carvings were made by U Pandita's eldest son, U Kya Min.⁴²⁰

The imagery commissioned by U Khanti and U Parama Wunna Theikdi marked an abrupt change in the portrayal of the nats from the Mandalay/Yadanapon style of wooden statues decorated with lacquer, gold leaf and mosaic. The nats are now portrayed as idealised humans, figuratively and often literally clothed in the accoutrements of the powerful and influential, which appears to be equated with wealth. Earlier imagery was designed to strike fear into the viewer, but the growing sophistication of Myanmar society has prompted a shift towards these modern expressions of power and influence. As one informant put it, "All the people love the pretty ones, so they change the style ... Now they are looking at movie stars, adding to the old story ..."⁴²¹

As U Khanti commissioned statues in a medium that could be accounted to a donor's merit, the size of the nats' imagery increased dramatically to around the size of the average Myanmar man or woman, with the style moving into the realms of portraiture. U Parama Wunna Theikdi's statues started a trend of depicting the nats larger than life, conventionally standing upright,

⁴¹⁹ U Parama Wunna Theikdi believed he was Popa Medaw's son in a prior existence. Interview with local informant, March 8, 2015. For a discussion of U Parama Wunna Theikdi's role in the promotion of Popa Taung Kalat as a pilgrimage site, see Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière, "Spirits versus Weikza: Two Competing Ways of Mediation," in Crosby et al., *Champions of Buddhism* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2014), 57-60.

⁴²⁰ U Pandita, discussion. U Kyaw Win's carvings are in the Zawa Kyaung, located at the top of the hill before the road dips down to the base of the volcanic plug. U Pandita referred to his son as *atízatá*, a child who has eclipsed his father, because he believes his carving skills are superior to his own.

⁴²¹ U Win Maung (Tampawaddy), discussion.

while retaining the straightforward gaze and emphasised eyes of the earlier images, and in the traditional wood medium. Other life size or larger images commissioned during the post-colonial era were made in a new medium — plaster — such as the Mandalay Bodaw's statue commissioned by U Khanti (Fig. 13).

The increased size of these nat images is both a simple reflection of the money available for their manufacture and decoration, and an expression of their status. Most strikingly, modern paints were used in preference to the traditional lacquer and gold leaf for their decoration. In the case of the statues at Popa Taung Kalat, this was a deliberate choice on the part of U Parama Wunna Theikdi, even though, in the words of U Pandita, “he could well afford gold leaf.”⁴²²

This expression of status is found in all the female nat images created in the Popa Taung Kalat style seen during fieldwork. They were literally clothed in the expensive women's silk *loungyi*, often woven in Myanmar's famous *acheiq lùntäya* pattern, that are conventionally purchased and worn at weddings and other important social events.⁴²³ Figs. 351 and 352 are photographs of the same female nat taken approximately a year apart, showing how her dress, handbag and jewellery had been updated in the intervening time, probably through a donation from a grateful recipient of the nat's favour. Both male and female nats created from the 1970s onward are commonly painted in gloss paint in a pale flesh tone, with their eyes, eyebrows, lashes and lips coloured in black and red paint respectively, as though wearing heavy makeup.

This dramatic shift to creating life size imagery of nats in wholly human form continued the trajectory of humanising the appearance of the nats, a trend noted in 1988 by Sarah Bekker who wrote

These nats are losing their lower cosmological status and becoming both humanised and Burmanised. The sweetly bland faces and the idealised human figures are a far cry from

⁴²² U Pandita, discussion.

⁴²³ At the time of research, silk *loungyi* of this style and quality started at around US\$80 at Bogyoke Aung San market in Yangon.

the strange remoteness [of earlier images]. No longer do the nats show by their appearances that they are less than human, or that their natures are fearsome.⁴²⁴

While modern Western eyes may liken these images to depersonalised department store mannequins, it is clear from the devotional traffic at these and other modern shrines containing images in the Popa Taung Kalat style that the nats have lost none of their aura. Fearsome they may no longer be, but powerful they certainly still are. What has changed most significantly is the way in which their supernatural nature is portrayed — this is now expressed in terms of modern notions of beauty and power, which can be equated with the wealth that allows white skin to be maintained, along with the acquisition of expensive textiles, elaborate jewellery and heavy make-up, even down to the addition of the false eyelashes seen on the image of Saw Hmun Hla at Fig. 353. A comparison of the Popa Taung Kalat style nat images with the contemporary — and very aspirational — advertisements shown in Figs. 354 and 355, demonstrates how contemporary notions of beauty and wealth, and their associated power, have been appropriated for images of female nats in particular. Images such as this also mirror the heavily made-up appearance of *natkadaw* at *natpwèh*, where they dance to invite the nat to manifest — another display of power and strength (Figs. 356 and 357).

Sadly, while the rather blandly uniform appearance and increased size of the Popa Taung Kalat style nats indicates their agelessness, power, and supernatural nature, it has stripped the interpretation of their characters of much of the liveliness and individuality seen, for instance, in the Salay style carvings. It was left to artists working in paint and print media to continue the portrayal of the nats in a more dynamic manner, in reverse glass paintings and illustrations produced during the 20th century (Figs. 358 to 360).⁴²⁵ These popular scenes show the nats as

⁴²⁴ Although Bekker made this observation in relation to the carvings commissioned by Temple, it is pertinent to images made in the Popa Taung Kalat style. She also noted an example of a nat being portrayed as human within a few years. In 1961, when filming a nat festival in honour of the Mon nat, Pegu Medaw, the image that was the focus of the ceremony was “a small bronze gilt naturalistic buffalo. In less than 20 years, the appropriate image ... has become a comely young woman, with her buffalo nature shown by a buffalo head on top of her own human head.” Bekker argued that the process of progressively humanising nat imagery served to make them less terrifying, and more “predictable and tractable beings”. This even led to the ‘demotion’ of Thakya Min to a nat renamed U Ma Ga who had been provided with a human story and was noted for looking after his village and keeping it clean in a previous life. For this interesting discussion see Bekker, “Transformation of the Nats,” 43-5.

⁴²⁵ The origin of reverse glass painting in Myanmar is poorly understood. It is currently the focus of a collaborative study between the Northern University of Illinois’s Centre for Burma Studies and the Yadanabon University in Myanmar. See Northern Illinois University, “The Art History Division Newsletter”, <https://issuu.com/northernillinoisuniversity/docs/art-history-newsletter14-15> (accessed February 22, 2016).

strong, dynamic beings in traditional clothing, often in romanticised heroic poses, complete with their familiar iconography. This style of imagery moved the nats from ‘fearsome’ supernaturals or idealised, powerful humans to ‘heroes of the common people’ — a not unnatural response to Myanmar’s political landscape at the time.

POST-CENSORSHIP AND CONTEMPORARY ART

Government censorship of modern art under the military regime severely limited the use of certain colours by painters.⁴²⁶ However, this does not appear to have extended to the production of illustrations, prints and reverse glass paintings of the nats, nor to the decoration of three-dimensional nat imagery. This is probably because its production was seen as representative of local tradition, and not ‘modern’ or counter to Myanmar cultural norms. For example, the watercolour by Paw Oo Thet, Fig. 360, could easily be read as a critique of a brutal regime, but as it is titled “Me U Being Dragged by the Tiger,” and the story is well known in Myanmar, it may not have attracted the ire of the regime.

The Censorship Board under the military regime also discouraged or actively prevented contemporary and abstract works of art being displayed. Images like the gaunt and geometric figures painted by Aung Khaing, for example, were viewed as a critique of the despair enveloping Myanmar society under military rule, and nearly all of the 120 works he painted for a solo exhibition in 1984 were not permitted to be shown.⁴²⁷ A gentler form of censorship still persists, as laid out in a set of rules for art exhibitions issued in 2013, but as argued by scholar Melissa Carlson, this official version is giving way to a more community based perspective on what is artistically acceptable. Artists are now free to depict the nats according to their own

⁴²⁶ Melissa Carlson has researched the role of Myanmar’s Censorship Board and its affect on modern artists, identifying the major themes that triggered censorship during the military regime. Censorship extended to the use of certain colours in paintings, with red seen to symbolise blood or violence, white being symbolic of the National League for Democracy and Aung San Suu Kyi, and an abundant use of black signifying despair or dark times, which was seen as a comment on the regime. Carlson argues that artists had to develop a subtle artistic vocabulary to express themselves or risk not being able to exhibit their work during the SLORC-SPDC era from 1988 to 2011. She also notes that the censors have become more sensitive to portrayals of Buddhism. Melissa Carlson, “Painting between the Lines,” *ArtAsiaPacific*, no. 91 (2014); “Painting as Cipher: Censorship of the Visual Arts in Post-1988 Myanmar,” *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 31, no. 1 (2016): 150-2.

⁴²⁷ Aung Khaing (artist), in discussion with the author, November 20, 2015. Aung Khaing, *Myanmar Nats on Canvas* (Yangon: Culture Bridge Gallery, 2014), 3.

imaginations, and several including Thein Thein, Shein Myint, Satt Aung T.T. and Aung Khaing have painted series of works featuring the better known nats in their own boldly colourful and modern styles (Figs. 361 to 365). Shein Myint enjoyed painting the nats as “he likes to paint movement,” and both Satt Aung T.T. and Aung Khaing are painting the nats because they see them as an integral part of Myanmar culture.⁴²⁸

Artist Shein Myint’s abstracted paintings of the patron nat of cock-fighters, drunkards and gamblers, Ko Gyi Kyaw, were executed with broad brush-strokes and bright colours that call to mind the wild behaviour reported at the nat’s festivals, where smoking, drinking and wild dancing feature heavily (Figs. 361 and 362). Yet elements of the nat’s conventional iconography are still present — in the painting at Fig. 361 he still rides his brown horse, and his fighting cock, rendered in minimal sweeps of the artist’s brush, can be made out at the bottom left-hand corner of the painting. In the other work featured here, Fig. 362, the artist moved further away from these conventions, almost merging horse and rider into the background as though to emphasise the supernaturalness of both.

Satt Aung T.T. is also familiar with the nats’ traditional iconography, as demonstrated in his painting of Aungzwa Magyi Nat, (Fig. 363). The artist is taking the Mandalay and Popa Taung Kalat style sculptures into account too, in his emphasised treatment of the nats’ eyes (Fig. 364). The crowded backgrounds in his paintings feature motifs from Myanmar’s artistic heritage, alongside objects seen at *natpweh*, such as the traditional offering of a green coconut and bananas at the bottom right-hand side of Fig. 365. In this respect, he is uniting a long history of artistic and cultural tradition in his paintings, yet the vision of the nats as heroes of the common people persists. As the curator of his 2015 exhibition, titled “Unconcealed Souls”, wrote

[Satt Aung T.T. sees the nats] as the victims of autocracy who immolated their lives, love, families and the dreams by force ... At that time of autocracy, many of human being, scholars, Knights and souls were killed and effaced with indefinite reasons. But by the ways how people tried to memorialise them even under fearful situation, they are still involved and existed as one of the religious beliefs ... Lots of shrines were arisen, still uprising and kept those souls alive. That is the way how they survive ... Satt Aung T.T. shows his honours and respect to them by his art ... He paints not their portrait ... not

⁴²⁸ Yan Naung Oo (Curator, Culture Bridge Gallery, Yangon), in discussion with the author, September 18, 2015. Satt Aung T.T. and Aung Khaing, in discussion with the author, November 20, 2015. My thanks to Pyay Way at Yangon’s Nawaday Thalar Gallery for arranging for me to meet with these artists. Sadly I was unable to interview Shein Myint personally before he passed away.

even about the religious relationship. But it is of the respects between human and the souls and he present that with his art. And he recorded as the survivors and the ones who couldn't be concealed by the command or by the power.⁴²⁹

S U M M A R Y

When Bagan's artists began to create ceramic plaques illustrating the *Jātaka* tales, an artistic choice was made to give both nature spirits and *dewa* nats a standardised human form. The *dewa* were differentiated, and in some cases identified, via their costume, attributes and placement in the artistic composition. The many thousands of narrative plaques and paintings at Bagan indicate these choices were well understood by the donors and artists, if not contemporary viewers, and so the conception of certain supernaturals as humanistic has a long history in Myanmar art. So too do the main themes expressed in Bagan's nat imagery — expressions of power, guardianship and the presentation of narrative. The nats placed in guardianship positions were also clearly differentiated by their style and placement in relation to the Buddhist monuments they protect. These choices may well have their roots in the art of the Pyu, and were undoubtedly informed by reference to Buddhist texts.

By the 16th to 17th centuries, three-dimensional wooden imagery of *dewa*, nat Lords and local guardian nats were clearly being created according to conventional models. However, artists were moving away from the cookie-cutter representations of the Bagan era and were expressing the individual narrative of each nat via a variety of iconographical postures and attributes. A notable deviation from the Bagan era was the move towards a more overt expression of supernaturality in the images. At some point in the intervening centuries artists began to express the 'true nature' of local nats by retaining an essentially human form, but exaggerating elements that would make it clear to the viewer the image was supernaturally powerful. By this time their guardianship function is implicit in their placement in the landscape, as they were plainly

⁴²⁹ Haymann Oo, "The Unconcealed Souls," (Yangon: New Zero Artplace, 2015), 2. This quotation is taken directly from Satt Aung T.T.'s exhibition catalogue, which is, of course, written in Burmese. The English translation provided in the catalogue may not be grammatically correct, but the meaning is clear. The curator of the exhibition, who wrote the entries, certainly appears to see strong parallels with the darker aspects of Myanmar's recent political past in Satt Aung T.T.'s work. Satt Aung T.T. provided me with a handwritten account of the history of the nats, including the reigns of which kings each nat emerged in, and I thank him for taking the time to assist me.

created to play a role in local ritual. Meanwhile, the *dewa* nats continued to be conventionally represented in contemporary court dress in artistic alignment with the monarchy.

The Myawaddy Mingyi's *Inventory* provides a description of the form and iconography specific to the nat Lords in the pantheon of the Outside Thirty-Seven Lords as at the beginning of the 19th century. Whether this represents the codifying of an artistic process that had been ongoing from some time is uncertain, as the *Inventory* describes images in place at particular nat shrines, and statues of the same nats at other locations may well have been created differently. Nevertheless, given the ubiquitous presence of guardian nat imagery elsewhere in the community, the use of artistic conventions in their creation was a response to the important anthropological need for the nat, and its legend and function, to be recognisable. Thus we find more personality expressed in nat statues, with a clear division between those with human and supernatural pedigrees. There was an increased emphasis on the gaze, and individual attributes and gestures were being highlighted to serve several functions: identification; reminders of power; and as a means of interacting with the nat. At this time, imagery of the *dewa* nats, their faces idealistically humanised, were still portrayed in contemporary court costume and regalia, but now the *k'abounsa* and flying *kānouq* elements were being used to differentiate each *dewa*'s position in the cosmological hierarchy.

By the Mandalay/Yadanapon era, imagery of the *dewa* nats had coalesced into extremely standardised formats that rendered them more of a motif than an individualised deity. Images of the nat Lords and local guardian nats were humanised, but posed in formal, hieratic poses, with lacquer and gold leaf used to emphasise their power and status. This was heightened with an increased accentuation of the gaze via the use of stone or glass eyes that contrast so markedly with their costumes. Nat imagery in the Mandalay/Yadanapon era's distinctive, highly decorative style appears to have been widespread in Upper Myanmar, and it is possible the playful and very dynamic Salay style imagery was partly a response to that expression of *lāwkiyè* art.

It is difficult to say whether U Khanti and U Parama Wunna Theikdi, the two men responsible for the most abrupt and dramatic change in nat imagery, were also attempting to shift it into a

more ordinary sphere by commissioning statues in a completely human form. If so, it is rather ironic they were both monks at the time, albeit monks each with one foot firmly in the *làwkiyè* world. U Khanti's life-size cast iron statues functioned as accounts of merit for their donors, blurring the line between Buddhist merit-making donations and the donation of a nat image to a shrine in thanks for the nat's assistance. Not long afterwards, the oversized Popa Taung Kalat style statues also had a profound impact on the way the 'lower' nats are conceptualised, created and interacted with, in a country where bigger is often perceived as better. The establishment of the *natnàn* at Popa Taung Kalat marked a change in how nat images were located within the community and accessed by devotees. Having them collectively placed at pilgrimage sites instead of in individual shrines within the nats' domain, allows devotees to pay homage to the nats of their choice, rather than being limited to those they were bound to by familial obligation or place of origin. Nevertheless, images with traditional iconography were still being created, with depictions of popular nats in the print media in particular moving to an expression of heroic narrative.

Today, some of Myanmar's modern painters are including images of the more popular nats in their oeuvre, thus bringing them out of their shrines, where they could be dismissed as examples of 'folk art', and into the 'fine art' end of the art historical discourse. Contemporary painters are exploring a variety of styles in their work, but their conceptions of each nat are still largely driven by tradition. Nevertheless, each artist's perception of a particular nat is reflective of their own mental space, and modern artists have accommodated this by presenting the nats in modern styles as two-dimensional paintings. The legends of the nats provide a fascinating backstory, and although representations of the nats as 'fine art' is a new concept, modern paintings are now found in private collections and institutions, with the names of their artists recorded for posterity. This, too, is a new concept. Although the names of many artists working in traditional artforms who produced pieces of acknowledged beauty are known to history, the vast majority of artworks were not signed by their creators. In the main, therefore, once living memory had passed on, they became anonymous. Similarly, the original name and meaning of the more 'ancient' nat images may have changed once the original donors were no longer alive, as evidenced by my reappraisal of the statues of Thakya Min.

CHAPTER 6

The Inside Thirty-Seven Lords

When the building of the majestic Shwezigon was complete, the King, using his magic wand, summoned the spirits of the sea. The father and son nats Shwe Nyo Thin and Shwe Zaga, together with their father's friend, Pweza Gyi, journeyed to Bagan from the south. En route, Shwe Nyo Thin and Pweza Gyi broke their journey in order to attend a conference of spirits, so Shwe Zaga went on ahead and arrived at the Shwezigon alone, one month earlier than Shwe Nyo Thin and Pweza Gyi.

The King had summoned the nats to accommodate them within the precincts of the great zedi, so that they could act as guardians of Buddhism. Because Shwe Zaga arrived one month earlier than his father and Pweza Gyi, he was given a higher position and a higher seat in the shrine. The two latecomers were accorded a status lower than Shwe Zaga's — Shwe Nyo Thin occupies a seat lower than his son's within the same shrine, and Pweza Gyi was given a shrine lower still on ground level.

Today, Shwe Zaga and his father are known as “Ap'a teq thà tã la gyi” — “the son one month older than the father” — as Shwe Zaga has served both the king and Buddhism for one month longer than his companions.⁴³⁰

⁴³⁰ After Luce, *OBEP*, Vol 1, 275-6. Sein Win records several slightly differing versions of this legend, both involving Anawrahta and the legendary sacking of Thaton. See Sein Win, *Sigouñ Mye*, 95-6.

INTRODUCTION

The great Shwezigon *zedi* on the bank of the Ayeyarwaddy River at Bagan has been an object of reverence for over 900 years (Fig. 366). According to local history, its construction commenced in 1059 under Anawrahta (1044-1077), but it was not completed until 1090 during Kyanzittha's reign. In its lifetime, the *zedi* and its surrounding *pāyà* complex have acquired hundreds of supplementary works of merit, from bells and *t'i* donated by kings, to images and other objects that have become the focus of devotion in their own right.⁴³¹ Like many of Myanmar's ancient monuments, its history is shrouded in legend, recorded orally, in court Chronicles, and even celebrated in verse.⁴³² Quite aside from its importance as a major Buddhist monument, the Shwezigon is the home of a unique pantheon of nats — the အဝွင်: ၃၇ မင်း: (*Ātwin Thoùns'eh-k'niq Min*), the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords. According to legend, images of these nats were placed within the *pāyà* complex to guard the site and the sacred relics interred within the *zedi* itself. This pantheon includes nats one would expect to find guarding an important Buddhist site, such as Thakya Min and the Four Great Kings, along with important indigenous nats, Brahmanic/Hindu deities and tree spirits (see table 6.1 below).

There are numerous images set in positions of guardianship or homage to be seen at the Shwezigon — if one looks closely. Most are unidentified and were placed there at an unknown time during the past 900 years, their legends adding to the overall narrative that has accumulated around the site over centuries. Images are found housed in shrines on the main *pāyà* platform; decorating the three square terraces supporting the *zedi*; carved above and to the sides of its terrace doorways and staircases; set either side of entrances to the inner wall, now lost, that once marked the limits of the main platform; and at the corners and entrances to the high outer walls of the complex. Many of these are 'hidden in plain sight', blending into the overall decorative schema of the *zedi* and its surrounding structures, and go unremarked by local and

⁴³¹ Shwezigon Pagoda Trustees, *A Guide to Shwezigon Pagoda* (Yangon: U Aung Gyi, 1994), 13-20. The *zedi* is unique in that it was built from stone rather than brick. Its inner sanctum is said to enshrine two sacred relics: the Buddha's frontal bone unearthed from an older *zedi* in Thaye Khittea and brought to Bagan, and a replica tooth relic from Sri Lanka. Kyanzittha's patronage of the Shwezigon is supported by the presence of his inscription stones, although as noted by Stadtner, they are not formal donation inscriptions. Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 219.

⁴³² Local historian Sein Win's history of the Shwezigon records some of its traditional lore, including the *linga* written in celebration of the Shwezigon's nats by the Kinwun Mingyi, Myanmar's famous 19th century scholar and diplomat. Sein Win, *Sigouñ Mye* (Yangon: Ngamòyeiq Sape, 1997), 102-3. Sein Win cites the Sayadaw Shin Nandawatha Mahawthera's "new *thamain*", unfortunately undated, for his list of the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords.

foreign visitors alike. Additionally, a nat pavilion in the southeastern corner of the grounds houses statuettes of nat Lords included in the Outside Thirty-Seven alongside other guardian nats, many believed to have been prominent at the end of the Bagan era (Fig. 367). These images are the subject of the following chapter.⁴³³

Although all these images have much to tell us about spiritual practices at Bagan, until now there has been little analysis of the iconography of the Inside Thirty-Seven or the significance of their placement in relation to the *zedi* itself. My analysis of the extant images was enabled by a site plan provided to me by the Shwezigon's Trustees (Appendix I.2). I used this to create the site plan at Fig. 368, showing the location of each image, as well as the pavilion containing the statuettes of the nat Lords and other guardian nats that are the subject of the following chapter. An English key and numbering is given on the following page of Volume II, and the imagery discussed below will make reference to this plan and key.

The historiography of the Shwezigon, and its imagery, is bound up in the grand narrative surrounding Anawrahta's establishment of Buddhism as the dominant belief system following his unification of the kingdom in the early 11th century. This chapter begins by unpacking this particular legend from a key formative period in Myanmar's history, to show that the current cult-like status accorded to Anawrahta has obscured the probable original intent and meaning of this particular pantheon of nats. It has also contributed to the common conflation of the pantheons of Inside and Outside Thirty-Seven Lords in both Myanmar and the West.

⁴³³ Maung Htin Aung, *Folk Elements*, 108.

THE 'THIRTY-SEVEN NATS' AND 'THE ANAWRAHTA LEGEND'

... the people, in spite of the king's edicts, went on worshipping the Nats, and Anawrahta finally decided to bring them over into Buddhism. The figures of the Thirty-six Lords were taken from their shrines and placed in the king's great pagoda [the Shwezigon] in an attitude of worship; he declared that the number was now thirty-seven, because Sakra [Thakya Min], the king of the gods and guardian of Buddhism, was at the head of the pantheon. The cult of Thirty-Six Lords, therefore, became the cult of the Thirty-Seven Lords, and Anawrahta placed some of the earlier lords with the Nat spirits of some of his dead heroes.

Maung Htin Aung, *Folk Elements in Burmese Buddhism*, 1962⁴³⁴

When a standard history of Burma comes to be written, it will be necessary to divide the reigns of such kings as Anawrahta into two parts; the first part will be The Evidence, [for example], inscriptions showing him to have actually existed and what he did, and the second part will be The Anawrahta Legend.

G. E. Harvey, *History of Burma*, 1967⁴³⁵

Anawrahta's legendary placement of nat images at the Shwezigon in submission to the Buddha is commonplace in the broader contemporary narrative surrounding the nats. It crops up in conversations; is told to local and foreign tourists visiting the Shwezigon's nat pavilion; and is found in both scholarly and popular literature. As many people are unaware of the existence of the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords, the statuettes of the nat Lords and other guardian nats housed in the Shwezigon's nat pavilion shown at Fig. 367 are widely understood as being those gathered by

⁴³⁴ Maung Htin Aung, *Folk Elements*, 4 and 61-109. The Thirty-Seven Lords Maung Htin Aung wrote about are those from the *Inventory*.

⁴³⁵ Harvey, *History of Burma*, xvii.

Anawrahta as part of a policy to subjugate local beliefs to Buddhism.⁴³⁶ However, it is the images of the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords — a mixture of Buddhist and Brahmanic *dewa*, the Four Great Kings and indigenous local guardian nats — that are believed by local scholars to have been placed within the walls of the Shwezigon at the time of its construction to serve as its guardians. This proposition is supported by their iconography and the placement of many within the architectural framework of the *pāyà* itself. These images are unique to the Shwezigon, while many of the images within the nat pavilion have counterpart images at other locations within Myanmar.⁴³⁷

Exactly how Buddhism was practiced during the Bagan era is still unclear, but it certainly included influences beyond the canonical Theravada tradition practiced today, as evidenced, for example, by the art included in temples like the Abeyadana and the Nat Hlaung Kyaung.⁴³⁸ The Theravada tradition is widely believed within Myanmar to have commenced with Anawrahta's defrocking of a sect of monks known as the Ari, the arrival of a monk named Shin Arahan from the Lower Myanmar kingdom of Thaton, and Anawrahta's sacking of that city in order to bring

⁴³⁶ Many scholarly and lay sources perpetuate this aspect of the Anawrahta Legend. See, for example, Spiro's *Burmese Supernaturalism*: "... only thirty-three nats comprised the original royal list of nats, whose images Anawrahta placed in the Shwezigon pagoda of Pagan in 1059. These included a group of thirty-two nats, plus the Hindu-derived Buddhist deva, Sakka [Thakya Min]." Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism*, 52 and 248. Brac de la Perrière's earliest publication on the nats, *Les Rituels de Possession en Birmanie*, also recounts the Anawrahta Legend. She wrote "[Anawrahta] first tried to repress the popular practises, but after noting the commitment of his people to these religions, united 36 in the enclosure of one of his Buddhist foundations, the Shwezigon pagoda, under the Hindu divinity Sakra ... to form the 37. All the statues were set facing the Shwezigon to signify their homage to the Buddha." Brac de la Perrière correctly notes there is nothing to attest that the statues were deposited there during Anawrahta's reign, but states that the decision to do so was Anawrahta's. She cited Luce as the source of the statement that the nats were set facing the Shwezigon in homage. Brac de la Perrière, *Les Rituels*, ps. 17, 23 and 45. Maxine Boutry, citing Brac de la Perrière, wrote: "King Anawrahta's success in founding the first united Burmese Kingdom in the 11th century is often linked to his capacity to federate its subjects under Theravada Buddhism and at the same time institute the cult of the 37 nat (a Burmese spirits possession cult) in an attempt to reduce the diversity of animist cults under his sphere of power." Boutry, *National Identity*, p. 111-12. *The World of Buddhism* records "To establish a link between these Burmese deities and the old mythology of canonical Buddhist texts, a thirty-seventh Nat, the Indian 'king of the gods' Thakya Min (Indra or Sakra) was set above the thirty-six national Nat deities." Bechert, "To Be a Burmese Is to Be a Buddhist," 155. *The Art of East Asia*, records: "In an unassuming side building are housed the 37 nats of the older religious tradition of Burma; King Anawrahta permitted their worship during what he saw as a transition period to the full adoption of the new beliefs, Theravada Buddhism." Gabriele Fahr-Becker, *The Art of East Asia*, (Tandem Verlag: Konemann, 2006), 423. I have overheard both local and Western tour guides recounting the Anawrahta Legend on numerous occasions during visits to the Shwezigon over the past five years.

⁴³⁷ U Win Maung Myint, discussion.

⁴³⁸ The Nat Hlaung Kyaung is occasionally caught up in the Anawrahta Legend too, as a site where Anawrahta bound the nats in chains. See, for example, Rodrigue, *Nat-Pwe*, 24.

its copy of Sri Lanka's Buddhist scriptures to Bagan.⁴³⁹ Although this version of history has been contested in recent years, even as far back as 1817, Bodawpaya refuted it in no uncertain terms, writing

... Buddhism thrived in Thayekhitteya where twenty seven kings ruled; from there it spread to Arimaddanapura or Pagan where forty one kings ruled; nevertheless there is a popular story that Anawyatha *put an end to old beliefs* and introduced Buddhism in Pagan; this story even gets into the chronicles...⁴⁴⁰

While Bodawpaya's Royal Order could be understood as a means of placing the practice of Buddhism in Myanmar prior to the 11th century, Anawrahta's placement of nat images at the Shwezigon is notably absent from other extant historical and even early Western sources where one would expect to encounter it. It is not, for example, found in the *MMOS*, which only relates the demise of the doctrine of the Ari, and the arrival of Shin Araham at Bagan with the "true teaching".⁴⁴¹ Nor is the Legend related in Myanmar's 18th and 19th century Chronicles.⁴⁴² The *Mahayazawingyi* and the *Hmannan Yazawin* only relate Anawrahta commencing work on the Shwezigon with Thakya Min's assistance, and Kyanzitha and Alaungsithu's interactions with

⁴³⁹ The *GPC* attributes Anawrahta's search for a copy of the Buddhist scriptures and the sacking of Thaton to his disgust with the Ari sect, as does Maung Htin Aung, who links the Ari with the nats by stating they presided over nat festivals. Luce and Pe Maung Tin, *GPC*, 72-80; Maung Htin Aung, *Folk Elements*, 1 and 125-39. Arthur Phayre recorded this aspect of the Anawrahta Legend too, and also wrote that Anawrahta "had a deep dislike to the Naga or dragon-worship which prevailed in his country." Phayre, *History of Burma*, 33-4. The canonical Buddhist texts followed in Myanmar have undergone a series of reviews to ensure their correctness, culminating in the Sixth Buddhist Synod held in the mid-1950s under then Prime Minister U Nu's sponsorship. Today, responsibility for the *Thathana* (in Pāli: Sasana), the Buddhist teachings, is taken by the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

⁴⁴⁰ Italics added. Recent revision of primary and secondary sources on Anawrahta by Geok Yian Goh has questioned his role as both king and promulgator of Buddhism at the time of his reign. She argues that the image of Anawrahta as an ideal Buddhist *cakkavattin* is not supported by any evidence, but is one Myanmar's 18th and 19th century chroniclers wished to perpetuate. Geok Yian Goh, *The Wheel-Turner*, 2015. Michael Aung-Thwin has also questioned the veracity of the Anawrahta Legend in the past decade, in Michael Aung-Thwin, *Mists of Ramanna*, 2005. See also Michael Aung-Thwin and Maitrii Aung-Thwin, *A History of Myanmar since Ancient Times*, 2012. Bodawpaya's refutation is recorded in Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma, AD 1598-1885, Part VII, AD 1811-1819* (Kyoto: The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1988), 118. Elsewhere in the extant Royal Orders, references to the Shwezigon only concern other foundations built at the same time, and an order for its regilding. See Than Tun, *Royal Orders of Burma Part V*, 122 and 316.

⁴⁴¹ Bagshawe, *MMOS*, 334-6. Bayinnaung is recorded as abolishing blood sacrifices to the "Spirits". Bagshawe, *MMOS*, 333 and 346. Elsewhere in the *MMOS*, the section covering "support of services and offerings to the Spirits" records there were 12 nats who received offerings every three years; while Mindon Min's Thirty-Seven Nats received offerings every year. The author, U Tin, refers to a "Guardian Spirit of the Capital" (Mandalay) but unfortunately it is not named. *Ibid.*, 523-4.

⁴⁴² The *MMOS* records that the story of Maung Tinde and his family is included in the "Book of the Thirty-Seven Princely Spirits, in the old and the new Chronicles of Pagan and in the Condensed Chronicle of Pagan." Bagshawe, *MMOS*, 346. I have not been able to view a copy of these two Chronicles, although I understand a *parabaiq* copy of the "old" chronicle, the *Bagan Yazawin Haung*, believed to have been composed in the 16th century, is stored in the Universities Historical Research Centre in Yangon. Victor Leiberan, "How Reliable is U Kala's Burmese Chronicle," 236.

Min Mahagiri. There is no mention of nat suppression being a policy of either kings, or as part of the Shwezigon's history.⁴⁴³ This is despite the context of Theravada kingship operating at the time the Chronicles were compiled, which, Moore argues, emphasised the Buddhist record at the expense of traditional viewpoints and the Brahmanic rituals still employed at the Court.⁴⁴⁴ Kyanzitha's Shwezigon inscription makes no reference to 'old beliefs' being suppressed, but it does extol the upholding of Buddhism and the carrying out of good works by the king (identified as the sage Bisnu in a former life), with the assistance of Thakya Min, the *naga* king, and the Four Great Kings — the latter being included in the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords.⁴⁴⁵

Harvey's *History of Burma*, which he based on the Chronicles, makes no mention of Anawrahta's use of the nats as a conversion tool; nor did he attribute this to Kyanzitha. He did, however, record an oral tradition attributed to Anawrahta current in the 1920s: "Men will not come [to the Shwezigon] for the sake of the new faith. Let them come for their old gods and gradually they will be won over."⁴⁴⁶ This example of what historian Eric Hobsbawm (1917-2012) termed an 'invented tradition' linked the nats with a suitably historic past in the form of a king credited with establishing, and purifying, Buddhism. As Hobsbawm noted, the continuity of invented traditions is largely factitious, and should be expected to occur at times of rapid societal transformation — such as the coming of the British to Myanmar.⁴⁴⁷ Whether the oral tradition actually referred to the Inside Thirty-Seven or the Outside Thirty-Seven is unclear, although it appears to refer to the images in the forerunner of today's nat pavilion at the Shwezigon. These were recorded in 1914 by an early Western visitor, C. M. Enriquez: "... in one corner there are some 33 nats, kept by an old woman. In the same shed is an antique wooden figure, eight feet high, now called a nat ..."⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴³ Luce and Pe Maung Tin, *GPC*, 87-8 and 109-10. *Mahayazawingyi*, ed. Saya Pwa, vol. 1, (Yangon: Burma Research Society, 1961), 190 and 234. King Alaungsithu's conversation with Min Mahagiri is also recorded.

⁴⁴⁴ Moore, *Early Landscapes*, 25.

⁴⁴⁵ Charles Duroiselle, *Epigraphia Birmanica: Being Lithic and Other Inscriptions of Burma*, vol. 1, Part II (Rangoon: Superintendent, Government Printing and Stationery, Union of Burma, 1960), 128. The Shwezigon inscription is essentially a panegyric to Kyanzitha.

⁴⁴⁶ Harvey, *History of Burma*, 33.

⁴⁴⁷ Eric Hobsbawm in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1-4.

⁴⁴⁸ C. M. Enriquez, *Pagan* (Rangoon: Hanthawaddy Press, 1914), 34. The "antique wooden figure, eight feet high" corresponds to the Bagan period image now known as Thakya Min, which is still housed with the nat statuettes in the modern nat pavilion.

At the time of his visit, Harvey noted the popularity of the Shwezigon was due to the exceptional sanctity of its Buddhist relics “and to the shrines of the entire pantheon of the Thirty-Seven Nat spirits who, *as it were*, have come circling round in homage to those relics.”⁴⁴⁹ Although Harvey clearly ascribed the popularity of the Shwezigon to both Buddhist relics and the nats — as did Yule — his choice of words may well have lent weight to the Anawrahta Legend. Luce’s later comments in 1969 on two of the nat statues at the Shwezigon also further the Legend, although he thought their presence represented Kyanzittha’s religious policy rather than Anawrahta’s:

Kyanzittha ... was bent above all things on propagating the Religion. [One method] is to admit the old gods to pay service to the new, and so induce gradual transfer of devotion from the one to the other. Kyanzittha's policy was the latter. His method here is obvious. On the main platform of the pagoda, near the S.W. corner ... is a shrine containing two 'Nat' images in gilded stone, one placed high above the other ...⁴⁵⁰

These two statues, Shwe Nyo Thin and Shwe Zaga, are two of the members of the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords (Fig. 369). Luce did not include this information in his analysis, although the Shwezigon’s Trustees had published their *thamain* (history) of the *pāyā* nine years prior to *OBEP*, and it clearly explains and lists the names of the Inside and Outside Thirty-Seven.⁴⁵¹ Only nine of the 25 extant images appear on Luce’s site plan, their locations circled in red on Fig. 370. These are Thakya Min, in the nats’ pavilion marked with a red X; Shwe Nyo Thin and Shwe Zaga in their shrine near the southwest corner of the *zedi*, recorded by Luce as “Stone Dvarapalas, now nats” (Fig. 371); the two pairs of seated nats at the inner and outer eastern gates; and the pair of standing ten-armed nats at the southern entrance of the outer wall.⁴⁵²

The Western literature on the Shwezigon’s nats goes some way to explain how the confusion between the two very different pantheons of Inside and Outside Thirty-Seven Lords arose and has been perpetuated. As discussed in Chapter 2, early Western scholars focused on the

⁴⁴⁹ Italics added. Harvey, *History of Burma*, 26-33. Harvey did not specify which pantheon of “Thirty-Seven spirits” he was writing about, although it can be presumed he understood them to be those written about by Temple, as *The Thirty-Seven Nats* is cited throughout Harvey’s *History*. See page 34 of this text for Yule’s view.

⁴⁵⁰ Luce, *OBEP*, Vol. 1, 275. Given the esteem in which Luce’s work is held, his analysis may have helped perpetuate this aspect of Anawrahta’s hagiography.

⁴⁵¹ Tan Tyaun Sayadaw Shin Zagarama Teik, *Shwesigoun Zeditawgyi Thamain Kyouq* (Yangon: Pagoda Trustee Board, 1960), 57-60. (Hereafter Shwezigon *Thamain*).

⁴⁵² Luce, *OBEP*, Vol. I, 276 and Luce, *OBEP*, Vol. III, plate 170. On these last two, Luce wrote “Other Devas in stone, ten-handed, 6 ft. 10 in. high, stand on guard as Dvarapalas on each side of the S. Gate ... They are passing, slowly but steadily, out of the world of Indian Devas into that of Burmese Nats: plain evidence and symbol of popular Buddhism in Burma.” As Luce’s site plan does not include any of 19th or 20th century structures within the complex, it seems likely he thought the other extant images postdated the Bagan period.

popularly recognised Outside Thirty-Seven Lords and were seemingly unaware of the existence of, or distinctions between, the two very different pantheons. However, the distinction — or lack of it — between the Inside and Outside Thirty-Seven has also varied according to local sources.⁴⁵³ As noted earlier, Spiro’s informants nominated the Inside Thirty-Seven as those included in one of the royal lists of nats, while the Outside Thirty-Seven — a number adopted for “symmetry” as there were more than 37 — were not.⁴⁵⁴

To add to the confusion between the two pantheons whose imagery is present at the Shwezigon, a painted sign within the nat pavilion is headed “The Thirty-Seven Lords inside the Royal Shwezigon *zedi*” (Fig. 372). As the sign is written in Burmese, Western visitors are unlikely to pay it any attention, but undoubtedly it has contributed to the Anawrahta Legend in the minds of local visitors.⁴⁵⁵

The common conflation of the Inside and Outside Thirty-Seven Lords in Myanmar and the West serves both pantheons poorly in several respects. Firstly, attributing an intent on the part of Anawrahta to put an end to nat propitiation pushes them into the realms of folk superstition, and negates the very important role the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords play at the Shwezigon as guardians of the *zedi* and its precious relics. Secondly, it entangles the nats included in the Outside Thirty-Seven Lords in a problematic perspective as a national and/or royal pantheon, one created by Anawrahta and continued by later kings, as a means of controlling the potentially threatening power of the nats included within it.⁴⁵⁶ This supports a Buddhist-centric reading of their role in accordance with the Anawrahta Legend, yet it was never these nats who were placed as guardians of the Shwezigon. Conflating the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords with the nat Lords and other guardian nats within the nat pavilion presents two problems: firstly, it prohibits an

⁴⁵³ The terminology has a cultural history. Historian and author Thant Myint-U has noted a sense of difference between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ was very important in Burman society, and was traced through many generations of descent with varying categories of ‘outsiderness’. Thant Myint-U, *The Making of Modern Burma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 30.

⁴⁵⁴ Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism*, p. 52.

⁴⁵⁵ This sign lists 29 nat names, whose images, according to the Shwezigon Trustees’ *thamain*, were placed at the Shwezigon because they were famous. Three of the names, — Ngazishin, Hlaing Nanthawara and Aungpinle — are suffixed with the term *hniq pà* meaning ‘two sacred persons’, bringing the total to 32. As no. 13 on the sign is the collective name for the two Taungbyon brothers, this list actually contains up to 33 individual nats in total — depending on how they are counted. Presuming Enriquez counted correctly, as he noted at the time of his visit, there were 33 statues at the Shwezigon, plus the tall wooden figure now identified as Thakya Min. Enriquez, *Pagan*, 34.

⁴⁵⁶ See, for example, Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière, “The Cult of the ‘Thirty-Seven Lords,’” 2001.

understanding of the dynamic interplay of spiritual beliefs in existence at Bagan at the time of the Shwezigon's construction; and secondly, it provides a skewed interpretation of the role of both pantheons.

IMAGERY OF THE INSIDE THIRTY-SEVEN LORDS

When it comes to the images of the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords, historical detail is scarce. While there are certainly statues and other images that are believed to date to its construction and consecration, the original placement of some is uncertain. I was told that the knowledge of their original locations comes from ancient literature and oral history. This has changed at least once even in recent decades, as the Trustees' list upon which I based my site plan omits Mahawthara (Siva), whose location is given as at the Saturday post, or the southwestern corner, in the Trustees' *thamain* published in 1960.⁴⁵⁷ The Trustees' latest site plan may reflect changes in the placement of images within the *pāyā* complex, if not opinion as to their identity, as Enriquez recorded in 1914 that there were two statues of Siva at the eastern gate.⁴⁵⁸ Both Po Kya and Bagan historian Sein Win also provide a record of iconography and placement, and these are provided in Appendix C.⁴⁵⁹

Today, there are images of the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords found at only some of the locations shown on my site plan. In other cases it is not possible to attribute a name to an image, or know its exact location, just the general area within the complex where the image was placed in relation to the central *zedi*.⁴⁶⁰ Only 27 images are now placed in positions marked on the site plan. The provenance and age of each is unverified; although as noted above most are believed locally to date to the Bagan era. Some may be later additions to the *pāyā* complex, full or partial restorations, or were moved into their current position from another location. Nevertheless, the

⁴⁵⁷ U Win Maung Myint, discussion; Shwezigon *Thamain*, 61. I was told it was not possible to view the 'ancient literature' referred to, but am uncertain if this is because it no longer exists or if it is no longer in the hands of the Trustees. According to Myanmar astrology, the Saturday post and the south-west corner have the same meaning, as the planetary post for people born on a Saturday is at the southwestern point of a *zedi*.

⁴⁵⁸ Enriquez, *Pagan*, 34. How he came to identify these statues as Siva is not known.

⁴⁵⁹ Min Sithu's book provides a list of names and their corresponding locations within the Shwezigon complex, but in a few instances the locations are different to those identified by the Trustees. The author's source is unknown. Min Sithu, *Naqkòkwehmu Thamain*, 242-5..

⁴⁶⁰ U Win Maung Myint, discussion.

positioning, posture and iconography of the majority of the images reveals their sculptors conceptualised them as guardians.

Five pairs of images are set at the entrances to the pagoda complex, and four are located in towers on top of the corners of the outer complex wall. Twelve are located at the corners and stairway entrances to the terraces of the main *zedi*, four decorate its terraces, and the remaining seven are located within the grounds of the complex. Table 6.1 below gives their locations, and the key numbers as per my site plan at Fig. 368.

Table 6.1 Locations of the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords

At the corners and entrances	On the <i>zedi</i>'s terrace corners	On the <i>zedi</i>'s terraces	Within the grounds of the <i>pāyā</i>
2. Nga Swe Thin (SW corner)	5. Zambuthabye * (SE corner)	17. Shwe Pyi Thin ^	1. Thakya Min
3. Hpet Ma Thin (NW corner)	6. Zambu Tansaun (SW corner)	28. Shwe Thet So (north of the SE corner)	31. Thawdapan # (Khaye Pin Saunt)
4. Myin Hpyu Shin (NE corner)	7. Zambu Tamuq (NW corner)	29. Yin Hnin	33. Anagan # (Inkyin Saunt)
32. Hsin Hpyu Shin (SE corner)	8. Zambu Yan Aung (NE corner)	30. Thabeit Saunt (Pataman)	34. Pyatha Min Gyi
18. Ahlawi (E)			35. Shwe Nyo Thin
19. Ahlawa (E)	At the stairways to the <i>zedi</i>'s terraces		36. Shwe Zaga
20. Ma Kye Pin Saunt (S)	9. Datarata (E)		37. Pweza Gyi
21. Man Nat (S)	10. Wirulaka (S)		
22. Nga Nwe Thin (W)*	11. Wirupakkha (W)^		
23. Thurathati (W)*	12. Zambudipa (W)^		
24. Mahapeinne (N)	13. Zambu Tanseit (W)^		
25. Htoun Thin Gyi (N)	14. Zambu Chantha (W)^		
26. Kye Sandi (E)	15. Zambu Chethaye (W)^		
27. Kye Sanda (E)	16. Kuwera (N)		

* Images are no longer extant. ^ Images exist close to known location, but cannot be attributed with certainty to the names on the list. # Tree spirits. Thawdapan is an *ariya* of the first stage of enlightenment, and Anagan is an *ariya* of the third stage of enlightenment. There are currently trees at these two locations; the *inkyin* (*Shorea robusta*, commonly sal tree), was planted by the Trustees in 2015.

Images at the *pāyā*'s corners

Large brick turrets are set atop the four corners of the *pāyā*'s outer walls (Fig. 373). Within three of these are massive statues of the nats guarding these important intercardinal positions, their bulky forms and features only dimly visible from below. The statue of Myin Hpyu Shin, stationed at the northeast corner, is attributed to the Bagan era (Fig. 374). From what can be seen from below, his facial features and crown are similar to those of Shwe Nyo Thin and Shwe Zaga (Fig. 369), whose sculptures are also attributed to that era. The sculpture of Hsin Hpyu Shin, Lord of the White Elephant, is similarly massive (Fig. 375). Only a partial glimpse of the statue of Nga Swe Thin can be seen from below, and as I was unable to gain better access, no definitive discussion of this nat is possible.

The turret and original image of the nat at the north-west corner, Hpet Ma Thin, were destroyed during World War II. When they were replaced around 1950, the replacement statue was set on the outside of the pavilion, facing east (Figs. 376 and 377). This more recent statue was made in a more humanistic style, although still in the *bilūt'ain* posture, but my informants were not able to say why the statue was placed on the outside of the turret.⁴⁶¹

Images at the entrances

Figs. 378 to 385, key nos. 18, 19, 26 and 27, are the two pairs of “seated stone dvarapalas” noted at K on Luce’s plan, but described in the Shwezigon’s guide as “ancient guardian nat images.”⁴⁶² One pair, key nos. 26 and 27, is placed either side of the eastern entrance of the outer enclosure wall, facing east, and the other pair, key nos. 18 and 19, is placed on the eastern side of two small buildings that once marked the entrance to the inner enclosure — the ground level platform of the main *zedi*. All four images were sculpted with a thick body, large head set directly on top of

⁴⁶¹ U Sein Win, (historian), in discussion with the author, February 10, 2014; U Win Maung Myint, discussion.

⁴⁶² Luce, *OBEP*, Vol. III Plate 170b; Pagoda Trustees, *Shwezigon Pagoda*, 62.

the torso with no visible neck, and large eyes under arching brows — as described in Chapter 4, a style generally associated with this period. Nevertheless, the small discernible differences discussed below may be present to differentiate each nat.

The nats Ahlawi and Ahlawā, Figs. 378 to 381, appear to have been created as a pair as their postures are mirror-images. Both are seated in *bilūt'ain* and appear to have once held a *thanlyeq* or fly-whisk to their left and right shoulders respectively. Both wear a *thinkyít*, the decorative frontlet worn by Myanmar kings, studded with diamond shapes. Ahlawi wears large plug earrings, wrist bangles, and has either a moulded and incised triangular collar, or this may represent a beard. His facial features include bushy moulded eyebrows and a pair of fangs showing in the corners of his upper teeth. The view of his head in Fig. 379 shows incisions that seem to represent hair scraped back into a top-knot. Ahlawā's statue wears wrist bangles and plug earrings represented only by incised circles. He has the same bushy eyebrows, fangs and chest-piece or beard, but his eyes are more prominent and slanted than his twin, he has an incised and moulded moustache, and his open mouth has a sharper curve. A belly-button has been incised in the centre of his drooping paunch. Both statues sit facing east, on top of plinths that back onto the eastern wall of the small adjoining pagodas at either side of the entrance.

Kye Sandi and Kye Sanda, Figs. 382 to 385, sit cross-legged, mirroring each other's position, and were sculpted in high relief as part of a stela and plinth. Both hold an indiscernible object to their right and left shoulders respectively, as seen in Fig. 383. Both wear Bagan era style crowns, earrings, bangles and have remnants of sculpted regalia covering their chests. Although Kye Sanda retains the squat, neckless body, his facial features are more humanistic and the gaps between the fingers of his left hand are more marked than his fellow nats. While this may be a deliberate choice on the part of the sculptor or donor, the difference in styling of his backing stele, compared to Kye Sandi's, suggests they were not originally paired.

The standing, stela-backed figures of Ma Kye Pin Saunt, the Guardian of the Tamarind Tree, and Man Nat, have either been moved to their current position from another location, or were attached to a structure at this spot that has been replaced (Figs. 386 to 390, key nos. 20 and 21).

Both images were sculpted with five arms on each side. The statue of Ma Kye Pin Saunt has two arms bent into his chest that hold what appear to be *thanlyeq*, but the other four pairs of arms hold attributes that are now unidentifiable.⁴⁶³ He wears a moulded breastplate and a tiara style crown. In Fig. 386, the photograph of this statue published by Luce in 1969, the statue appears to have originally had a stucco loincloth under a rounded belly, both features that have since eroded away. Ma Kye Pin Saunt has elongated ears, earplugs and wrist bangles, and the facial features are human, with a more naturalistic eyebrow arch, and downcast eyelids. There is an obvious bellybutton.

The figure of Man Nat is also carved with ten arms, and some of the stucco ornamentation looks to have been repaired since Luce's photograph. The facial features are recognisably human, with the mouth set in an oddly disturbing smile, which perhaps reflects an understanding of Mara as the embodiment of temptation. His crown is different to Ma Kye Pin Saunt's, but the heads of both statues abut the lotus-petal shaped finial of their stela backings. Man Nat appears to have no buttocks, with the thick upper thighs of the figure joining the torso at waist level. In Luce's photograph he appears to hold a *thanlyeq* in one hand, and the statue has since been repaired to show one held in each of the two front arms. The attributes of the other arms are not identifiable beyond what may be a water pot held in the right lower hand which is held down alongside the right thigh. His fingers are indicated by deep incisions and he wears wrist bangles.

Images of Nga Nwe Thin and Thurathati (key nos. 22 and 23) once guarded the western entrance to the complex, but are no longer extant.

The statues of Mahapeinne and Htoun Thin Gyi, Figs. 391 and 392, key nos. 24 and 25, were not recorded by Luce, nor by Pierre Pichard in his 1992 inventory.⁴⁶⁴ However, Fig. 393 may be the original head of one of these statues. It was found just to the viewer's right of the Mahapeinne

⁴⁶³ Stadtner records that one of Man Nat's (Mara's) usual attributes is a bow. Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 213.

⁴⁶⁴ Pierre Pichard, *Inventory of Monuments*, Vol. 1, (Gartmore: Kiscadale, 1992), 76. Pichard noted that a sculpture of Mahapeinne was located here according to an "old list" but I have not been able to contact him for further information regarding this.

statue, and is attributed to the Bagan era.⁴⁶⁵ The Trustees have mounted it on a plinth at its find spot, which corresponds to key no. 24. Although now badly weathered, the head appears to wear a Bagan style crown, and it may well be part of the original statue from this location. The current statues are heavily restored in the more humanistic Bagan style, although it appears they were originally carved in the conventional *bilùt'ain* posture to mirror each other. Their slimmer figures resemble the guardian figures at the entrances to the Ananda Temple, another foundation attributed to Kyanzittha, although these, too, are heavily restored (Fig. 394).

Images on the corners of the *zedi's* terraces

According to the Trustees, a nat image was located at each corner of the *zedi's* first terrace (key nos. 5 to 8), and the three extant images appear to have been sculpted as part of the terrace's corner decoration. Unfortunately, an image of key no. 5, Zambuthabye, is now missing. The remaining three were formed from brick with an overlay of stucco and gold leaf. Each nat has a more humanistic appearance than those positioned at the entrances, and all are dressed in royal regalia, but are subtly different. Their iconography suggests they were conceived as *bilù* guardians.

Zambu Tansaun, Fig. 395, key no. 30, occupies the southwest corner and faces in that direction. He is portrayed in a kneeling position with his hands held in homage — the only nat positioned on the terraces in this posture. He has a distinctive four-tiered crown, and wears a sleeved garment underneath a breastplate with padded shoulders, and a short, possibly three-panelled *k'àbounsa* with flared panels over his lower body. As proposed in Chapter 5, this may date the image to the 16th century. I was not able to access the upper levels of the *zedi*, so a closer examination is required to confirm the *k'àbounsa's* design, as the flowered ornament on the terrace corner obscures the view from below.

Zambu Tamuq, Fig. 396, key no. 31, is set at the northwest corner, facing that direction. This nat is portrayed in a squatting position with his right forearm resting on his upraised right knee — a

⁴⁶⁵ U Win Maung Myint, discussion.

variant of the *bilūt'ain* posture. His right hand holds something of which only the lower end is now extant — probably a *thanlyeq* or a fly whisk, and his left hand holds a small, round shield. He has a petal-shaped breastplate, and a triple-sawtooth Bagan style crown with upwardly curving side points. His ears have earplugs, but the lobes are not elongated. He is rather flat-faced, with an aquiline nose, rounded eyes and thick molded eyebrows.

Zambu Yan Aung, Fig. 397, key no. 8, was placed at the northeastern corner, facing that direction. He is portrayed with his right leg doubled beneath him, the left leg raised and bent at the knee, another variant of the guardianship posture. He holds a fly whisk in his right hand, held up to his right shoulder, has a thick triangular breastplate, no visible neck, and wears the same style of crown as Zambu Tansaun. His face is rather rounded and flat, with thick wing-like eyebrows, a wide nose and gently curving lips.

Images on the *zedi*'s terraces

Thabeit Saunt (Pataman), Fig. 398, is located at key no. 28 on the first terrace, facing southeast. He sits with his right leg raised and bent at the knee, and holds a *thanlyeq* in his right hand up to his right shoulder. He appears unclothed apart from a short loincloth, has a visible bellybutton, and wears a crown of four circular rings with a pointed tip. His face is full-cheeked, with flat, elongated eyes rendered in a simple incised line, that gaze outward to the southeast.

The nat image near the southeastern corner of the second terrace, identified as Shwe Thet So (Fig. 399, key no. 30), is regarded as a post-Bagan era addition to the *zedi* by the Trustees.⁴⁶⁶ He is kneeling, with his hands in the gesture of homage, and appears to be dressed in the full *malika k'aboun* costume with a flanged crown. In relation to this image, historian Win Sein wrote

The image of Shwe Thet So Nat is located to the east of Shwezigon stupa. It is at the southern corner of the lowest terrace near the Tuesday Chinthe [lion]. It is not the image created in the Bagan era. No one knows why it is called Shwe Thet So Nat. The name was not recorded in the historical notes and in the stone inscription of Shwezigon stupa. Whether it is the name when he was a human being before becoming a Nat spirit

⁴⁶⁶ Pagoda Trustees, *Shwezigon Pagoda*, 20.

or it is the name given after, the meaning that he can rule over the lives of other people (*a thet ko a so ya thu*) is anybody's guess.⁴⁶⁷

An image of Shwe Pyi Thin, key no. 17, is no longer extant.

Stylistically, the most singular nat image at the Shwezigon is undoubtedly Yin Hnin (Fig. 400, key no. 29), whose image is carved in relief at ground level on the eastern side of the lower terrace. His Inwa-period style crown suggests his image was added to the wall in the 14th century or later, possibly as a replacement for an earlier image. He wears long earplugs, wrist guards and bangles. The fly whisk held in his right hand flows over his right shoulder, and his left hand is extended away from his body, holding two oval objects. The sculptor has carved the nat's head, and his left shoulder and arm — which are much larger than the right — to face the viewer, but the right shoulder and lower legs are portrayed in side view. This attempt at rendering the figure in perspective gives the nat a dynamism, albeit an awkward one, that is lacking in the more formally posed images.

Images within the grounds of the *păyà*, on the main platform

The famous Bagan era wooden statue of Thakya Min, key no. 1, is discussed separately at the end of this chapter, as he is common to the pantheons of Inside and Outside Thirty-Seven Lords. However, there are four other nat images who reside on the main platform, within the area once enclosed by the now lost wooden inner wall.

If there was a small shrine housing Pyatha Min Gyi at the Shwezigon at the time Luce's site plan was drawn, it was considered too minor, or too modern, a shrine to be included (Figs. 401 and 402, key no. 34). The current pavilion housing this image was built in 1989, and the statue has been redecorated with *thayò* moulding since the early 1990s, as Pichard's photograph shows her

⁴⁶⁷ Sein Win, *Sigouin Mye*, 92. The late addition of this figure is also noted in the Shwezigon's guide. Pagoda Trustees, *Shwezigon Pagoda*, 20.

as a simply rendered kneeling figure, adorned only with wrist bangles and plug earrings.⁴⁶⁸ This new *thayò* moulding includes the front fold of a *loungyi* resting on her thighs. Her wrist bangles, earplugs and simple coiled hairstyle appear to be original. She is portrayed in a kneeling position, with her hands held in homage, and sits facing north in line with the western edge of the *zedi's* bottom terrace.

Shwe Nyo Thin (the Father) and Shwe Zaga (the Son), Fig. 369 and detail at Figs. 403 to 405, key nos. 35 and 36, occupy their own shrine near the southwestern corner of the *zedi*. Both have been sculpted in the massive style used for the other images that guard the entrances to the complex and platform (see, for example, Fig. 381). Pichard's photograph shows the pupils and eyelids of Shwe Zaga painted in, but now the front of both statues are heavily gilded.⁴⁶⁹ Luce's photograph, Fig. 371, appears to show that only the upper two-thirds of Shwe Nyo Thin was covered in gold leaf, possibly because the lower part was usually swathed in a textile offering, as was the case on all of my visits. Their Bagan style crowns remain ungilded, and Fig. 404 shows how the sculptor did not complete the chiselling out of Shwe Zaga's arm to continue the raised and patterned arm bangles around to the rear of the figure. This detail suggests the statue originally sat within a niche, or with its back to a wall where this would not be noticeable. Both statues were carved in the *bilùt'ain* posture and wear massive earplugs and bangles, and now hold gilded wooden *thanlyeq* up to their left shoulders (Fig. 405).

Bekker recorded that the image of Pweza Gyi, key no. 37, had disappeared, and there is no mention of the statue in Luce's *OBEP*. Pichard, however, recorded the image in its current position (Figs. 406 and 407).⁴⁷⁰ The nat is sculpted in high relief attached to a tongue-shaped stela, and only his front is currently covered in gold leaf. As he has been heavily swathed in offered textiles on all of my visits, it was not possible to get a clearer picture, but Pichard's photograph, Fig. 407, shows him seated in *bilùt'ain*, wearing a Bagan style crown, dangling

⁴⁶⁸ The date is given on the outside of the pavilion itself. For the earlier photograph, see Pichard, *Inventory of Monuments at Pagan*, vol. 1, 72. Than Tun and U Aye Myint have a drawing of a similarly posed statue, made of copper, dated to the Inwa period and recorded as being in the Shwezigon library. See Than Tun, *Ancient Myanmar Designs*, 283.

⁴⁶⁹ This photograph is in Pichard, *Inventory of Monuments* Vol. 1, 71. It is supported by a photograph in the Shwezigon guide, see Pagoda Trustees, *Shwezigon Pagoda*, 62.

⁴⁷⁰ Bekker, "Transformation of the Nats," 40; Pichard, *Inventory of Monuments* Vol 1, 73.

earplugs and upper arm bangles. He is very similar in appearance to Kye Sanda (Fig. 385), particularly in the artistic treatment of the nat's hands, although that nat's stela has a more rounded top.

Images at the stairways to the *zedi*'s terraces

There is an abundance of nat imagery clustered around the four stairways leading up from the main platform to the upper levels of the *zedi*. These stairways are located at the cardinal points, and each has a doorway with a surrounding archway (Fig. 408). Each archway features a standing figure beneath the centre finial, (B); and a pair of seated figures on the terminal of the balustrade leading to the upper level, (A). The pair of standing figures in a three-panelled *k'abounsa* either side of the door, (D), and the pair of kneeling figures at the base of the arch, (E), appear to be later additions and are only found on this (western) side.

According to the Trustees' records, images of five nats were located at the western side of the *zedi* near this stairway, but only one can now be provisionally identified. The seated figure above the doorway shown in Fig. 408, (C), may be one of these missing images: Zambudipa; Zambu Tanseit; Zambu Chantha; or Zambu Chethaye, key nos. 12 to 15. The one image that can be provisionally identified is the standing figure at (B), which is likely to be the guardian of the west and the chief of the *nagà*, Wirupakkha.⁴⁷¹ His position corresponds to the other standing figures beneath the finials of the archway at the other three cardinal points. These can all be provisionally identified through their iconography. Fig. 409 shows Datarata, king of the *gandabba*, above the eastern doorway wearing a crown (key no. 9); Fig. 410 shows Wirulaka, king of the *gounban*, underneath a *bilù*'s face at the southern stairway (key no. 10); and Fig. 411 shows Kuwera, chief of the *yakkha*, underneath a *bilù*'s face at the northern stairway (key no. 16). The finial above the image that probably represents Wirupakkha, Fig. 412, is now blank, but may have had a *nagà*'s face in the past.

⁴⁷¹ According to Sein Win's history of the Shwezigon, "King Nawrahta [Anawrahta] stationed these four deities at each corner of the stupa as if the stupa were the great Mount Meru." Sein Win, *Sigoin Mye*, 99-100.

Intriguingly, there is a large stone image of a *nagà* in a shrine outside the northern entrance to the Shwezigon, also believed to date to the Bagan era (Fig. 413). The sculpture was recovered from this location and housed at its find spot by the Trustees, and now receives a lot of attention from devotees, who queue to offer it rice, milk and eggs.⁴⁷² The presence of the *nagà* at the Shwezigon along with other imagery that correlates to the 15th century votive tablets discussed in Chapter 3 suggests at least some of these figures were originally placed at the Shwezigon to correspond with the hierarchy of figures that guard Mt Myinmo. If so, the *nagà* is positioned where we would expect to find him — at the base of the *zedi*. As the *nagà* are also the guardians of watercourses, this placement on the northern side of the monument corresponds nicely with the entrance pathway to the *pāyà* complex leading up from the bank of the Ayeyarwaddy River.

Thakya Min at the Shwezigon

According to two sources, the original statue of Thakya Min was located outside the large southern door to the exterior wall (see Appendix C).⁴⁷³ Today, a rare 11th to 13th century wooden statue, covered in gold leaf and featuring the regalia of the Bagan era, is housed behind bars at the far end of the Shwezigon's nat pavilion (key 1, Figs. 414 to 416). This is now identified as an image of Thakya Min, but whether it is the original from the southern side of the complex is not known. When Luce surveyed the *pāyà* complex he identified the statue in the pavilion as Sakka [Thakya Min], even though the local people referred to it at the time as a Bo Bo Gyi, and Luce's attribution has been generally accepted.⁴⁷⁴ In fact, the statue is more likely to be a Bagan era image of the Mahayanist bodhisattva Vajrapani, who is also conceptually a Buddhist adaptation of Indra in early Buddhist legends.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷² U Win Maung Myint, discussion.

⁴⁷³ Sein Win, *Sigouñ Mye*, 101. Min Sithu, *Naqkòkwehmu Thamain*, 242.

⁴⁷⁴ Luce wrote: "In the E. Sanctum of the same building stands the Lord of the Spirits, the Bo-bo-gyi Nat, heavily gilded, dowdily loaded with votive shawls and garments. Under these, one discovers an ancient wooden image of Sakka or Indra, king of the Sakra Devas ..." Luce, *OBEP*, Vol. I, 276. Pierre Pichard also recorded the image as "Bobogyi (Indra?)" and noted it had an unknown construction date. Pichard, *Inventory of Monuments* Vol. 1, 70. As it was carved wearing the same style lower garment as other Bagan period imagery, it can be provisionally dated to between the 11th to 13th century.

⁴⁷⁵ This identification was first suggested to me by historian Tilman Frasch in 2012. Thomas E. Donaldson records Vajrapani as the protector of *nagà*, and that he was regarded as a rain-god by those following the Mahayana tradition, making him a useful deity in the dry climate of Upper Myanmar. This attribution may have travelled across the Bay of Bengal from Orissa. Thomas E. Donaldson, *Iconography of the Buddhist Sculpture of Orissa* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts, 2001), 214.

Vajrapani is known as the chief of the *yakkha* mentioned in the Mahayanist *Lalitavistara*, the earliest account of the Buddha's life story. The *Lalitavistara*, while associated with Theravada traditions, became popular in Mahayana Buddhism and was known in the Bagan era, but as argued by Galloway, it was often overlooked in favour of the Theravada *Nidānakathā* as a source text for Bagan's art.⁴⁷⁶ Vajrapani's main attribute, the *vajra* (thunderbolt) is still recognisable in the Shwezigon's statue's left hand, but what was once held in the upwardly bent right arm and hand is no longer discernible, due to weathering over time and the heavy application of gold leaf, which has fortuitously helped preserve the wood beneath.⁴⁷⁷ As posited above, the presence of a large image of a deity known as the chief of the *yakkha* accords with other imagery at the Shwezigon representing the hierarchy of Mt Myinmo's guardians. Although this Bagan era statue was re-identified at a time between its original carving and Luce's visit as a Bo Bo Gyi, a local tradition recorded in 1997 holds that the statue was placed there to honour Thakya Min's legendary contribution in building the *zedi* alongside Anawrahta and Kyanzitha, once again showing how easily and quickly attributions can shift.⁴⁷⁸

Images of Thakya Min are now easily identifiable due to his conventionalised iconography — he is portrayed in the *malika k'aboun* costume and holds a conch. Although the conch and the royal regalia have been used since the Bagan era, by the time of the *Inventory* Thakya Min's iconography had developed considerably:

သိကြားမင်းတုလုပ်ရသည်မှာ။ အောက်ခုံဆင်ရုပ်ခေါင်း၃လုံး။ ၎င်းအပေါ်
ပဒုမ္မာကြာပွင့်သဏ္ဍာန်။ ၎င်းအပေါ်သကြားရုပ်မတ္တတ်ရုပ်လျက်။ လက်ယာခရသင်း။
လက်ဝဲသားမြီးရုပ်ခွဲ ကိုင်၍။ သိကြားတံဆာအစုံနှင့်တုလုပ်ရသည်။ ပုဂံရွှေစည်းခုံဘုရားတွင်
တားသည်မှာ အုပ်ကူအနောက်မျက်နှာပြု။ နတ်ရုပ်ဆင်ကြာရုံပါ အရပ် ၎င်းတောင် ၂မိုက်
တုလုပ်သည်။

To make the Thakya Min statue. Underneath stand an elephant form with three heads. He is above on a *pādounma* lotus blossom. Above this Thakya statue stands upright. Right hand holds a conch. Left hand holds a yak-tail fly whisk. The Thakya statue has

⁴⁷⁶ The Buddha's life story is a narrative that features heavily in Bagan period art and the influence of the *Lalitavistara* is explored in Charlotte Galloway's thesis. Galloway, "Burmese Buddhist Imagery," 240. Vajrapani's role as chief of the *yakkha* is recorded in Sten Konow, "Note on Vajrapani-Indra," *Acta Orientalia* (1930).

⁴⁷⁷ Luce thought this second object may be a conch, one of Thakya Min's usual attributes in Bagan art, which probably accounts for his identification of the statue as Sakka. Luce, *OBEP*, Vol I, 276.

⁴⁷⁸ Sein Win, *Sigouin Mye*, 92.

complete regalia. It is placed at Bagan Shwezigon *payà* in a brick *gu* facing west. The sculpture elephant, lotus stand height is 4 *taun* 2 *maiq* [2m 13cm].⁴⁷⁹

S U M M A R Y

This chapter highlights the gulf between local history, tradition and understanding of this important and very unique pantheon of nats, and the lack of Western consciousness regarding its very existence. While there is still much research to be done, I have provided the first detailed description and analysis of the extant images of the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords, so long ignored in Western accounts of the famous *pāyà* and its history. Future analysis of extant primary texts — if they can be traced — may well explain the anomalies highlighted by the comparison of sources summarised in Appendix C.

The great antiquity of the Shwezigon and the lack of documentation on its art precludes a definitive explanation for all its imagery, although the role of the figures posed in *bilūt'ain* or in the gesture of homage seems clear. The three images of the Four Great Kings that can be securely identified highlight the important role of Buddhist cosmology when the Shwezigon was constructed, and the understanding of the *zedi* as a physical manifestation of Mt Myinmo, the cosmic mountain. Further, the similarities in the iconography of the figures on the votive tablets discussed in Chapter 3 with some of the statues identified as members of the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords is unmistakable. This suggests the images incorporated into the *pāyà*'s architecture were also originally conceived as the guardians of Mt Myinmo: the massive *gounban* or *yakkha* figures at the intercardinal points of the outer wall (Keys 4, 32 and presumably 2 and 3); and the *gandabba*, *yakkha* or *gounban* figures at the intercardinal points of the *zedi*'s first terrace (Keys 6, 7, 8 and 28).

The uncertainty of the original locations of the images not physically attached to the *zedi* leaves their identification as per the Trustees' list more conjectural. However, based on the similarities

⁴⁷⁹ BUR MS 200, 40. The manuscript uses the customary shorthand symbols for *taun* and *maiq* which I am unable to reproduce using a computer.

to the votive tablets, they too could be interpreted as either *gounban* (pot-bellied and without a crown) or *yakkha* (crowned), as per the following table.

Table 6.2 Iconographic correlations with the followers of the Four Great Kings

Key No.	Name	Current Position	Iconography
18	Ahlawi	Eastern entrance of inner wall	<i>Gounban</i>
19	Ahlawa	Eastern entrance of inner wall	<i>Gounban</i>
26	Kye Sandi	Eastern entrance of outer wall	<i>Yakkha</i>
27	Kye Sanda	Eastern entrance of outer wall	<i>Yakkha</i>
35	Shwe Nyo Thin	Shrine at southwest corner of <i>zedi</i>	<i>Yakkha</i>
36	Shwe Zaga	Shrine at southwest corner of <i>zedi</i>	<i>Yakkha</i>
37	Pweza Gyi	Shrine at southwest corner of <i>zedi</i>	<i>Yakkha</i>

Given their similarity to the guardian figures placed on the corners of the Shwesandaw *zedi* at Bagan (Fig. 253), perhaps the original placement of Kye Sandi, Kye Sanda and Pweza Gyi — the three with stela backings as shown in Figs. 382, 384 and 407 — was on one of the upper terraces of the Shwezigon itself, or they were transferred to the Shwezigon from another location (perhaps even the Shwesandaw) at an unknown time. Guardian figures with stela backings are also found on the corners of the upper terraces of the Ananda temple, which is traditionally attributed to Kyanzittha, suggesting a degree of standardisation during the period. The image of Yin Hnin, and the standing, ten-armed figures at the Shwezigon's southern entrance are more enigmatic, although the identification of Fig. 390 as Man Nat accords with the iconography seen at Bagan's Lokahteikpan temple.

Regardless of when they were created, for whatever purpose and with whatever understanding of the type of nat being depicted at the time, the guardianship posture of three of the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords reflect their legend: Shwe Nyo Thin, Shwe Zaga and Pweza Gyi, tasked with the protection of Buddhism. The belief that Anawrahta placed the nats at the Shwezigon in homage to the Buddha in an effort to wipe out nat propitiation is disabused by both this legend and the interpretation of all the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords as the guardians of the *pāyā* and its

important relics.⁴⁸⁰ This role is conceptually reflected in both the iconography and placement of their images, which have clear links to the guardian imagery discussed in Chapter 3. It appears that artists creating images of nats for locations outside the environs of the Shwezigon drew on some of this iconography — the *bilūt'ain* posture in particular — as discussed in the next chapter.

⁴⁸⁰ It is more likely, however, that Kyanzitha, who completed the construction of the Shwezigon, was responsible for the original placement of the images.

CHAPTER 7

The Outside Thirty-Seven Lords

After the Crown Prince Narapatisithu had killed his equerry, Nga Pyi, he selected his best Captain, Aungzwa, and ordered him to lead the advance party back to Bagan. “I will give you one of my Queens if you can kill the King”, the Crown Prince promised. Captain Aungzwa duly marched on Bagan, entered the palace and slew the King.

When the Crown Prince arrived, he asked his gallant Captain to make his choice amongst the three Queens. But the women wept and pleaded, “Surely you would not give us to an ordinary army Captain? Let us only serve thee in thy royal house as watchers of crows, as scarers of fowl!” The King relented, and said to Aungzwa, “I did promise you a Queen, but now I will give you the daughter of a Minister.” “Pish!” said the Captain, in contempt. For this act of insubordination, the King had him executed, and he became the nat known as Aungzwa Magyi.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁸¹ After Maung Htin Aung, *Folk Elements*, 96-7 and *GPC*, 138-9.

INTRODUCTION

They are often the victims of assassination, execution, or strange accidents. They leave widows and mistresses behind distraught with grief. Depraved princes are swept away by drugs and alcohol. Foreign princes languish ill in royal prisons. Valiant soldiers are the victims of a king's ungratefulness. There is a crown prince who hanged himself and another stung to death by a cobra in the monastery he had retired to. Kings may be assassinated by their children. Nobles struck down by leprosy, dysentery or the smell of raw onions. There is a tea merchant who was devoured by a tiger. Amongst all this misery there is one ray of light: a small girl who plays the flute ...

Yves Rodrigue, *Nat-Pwe*, 1992⁴⁸²

The legends of the 'lower' nats so vividly described by Rodrigue are full of drama and excitement. Many are recounted as folk tales, performed in theatre and marionette shows, published in a wide range of popular and scholarly literature, and acted out in part by *natkadaw* during *natpwèh*. Vignettes from these legends are depicted in textiles and glass paintings, on lacquerware, popular posters and in the design and decoration of nat shrines — and, of course, there are the images themselves, many of which have already been encountered throughout my thesis. Yet as argued in Chapter 2, exactly who the nat Lords were, and why they were included in the pantheon of Outside Thirty-Seven Lords, is poorly understood. This is particularly so in the Western literature, where they are usually referred to generically as the 'Thirty-Seven Nats', and as a 'royal' and/or 'national' pantheon, without any qualification of those terms.

Although the nat Lords have underlying creation legends, like that of Min Mahagiri, that reveal more ancient roots as nature spirits, it is often pointed out that with the exception of Thakya Min and Maung Po Tu Nat, the nat Lords were all royal, or directly or indirectly connected with royalty. This has led to their appointment to the pantheon being construed as a means of controlling their potential subversiveness. Brac de la Perrière, for example, who has researched the modern rituals associated with the nats extensively over the past two decades, considers the pantheon to be a construct of Myanmar's Buddhist kingship, its genesis a decision to create a controllable cult at the state level. Their relationship with the king is characterised as one where the king exercises his authority over the nats by installing them in a *natnàn* and giving them a

⁴⁸² Rodrigue, *Nat-Pwe*, 25.

fief and the worship of the people in that area. Her analysis, which has been taken up by other scholars, is summarised as follows:

[The ‘Thirty-Seven Nats’] are a product of the religious policy of later Burmese kings ... A king is supposed to have transformed them into potentially positive spirits by having a local cult established around them, that is to say, he had them incorporated ... into an image and a shrine, and then appointed them tutelary spirits of a region. In short, the nats are subversive local powers captured by the central kingship. This process of capture continued until the nineteenth century when local figures of nats were replaced by nats of royal blood. In this way, the religious policy of the Burmese Buddhist kings concerning local or autochthonous cults is responsible for their unification into a centralised pantheon, as well as for their Burmanisation, due to the casting of royal Burmese personalities on particular local cult figures.⁴⁸³

As my own analysis of primary sources progressed and I began to understand the strong connection between the nats and place more clearly, I began to form a different view of the relationship between Myanmar’s rulers and the different types of nat. This chapter therefore begins with what the extant primary sources actually tell us about the nats *vis-a-vis* Myanmar’s kings. The sources are considered chronologically, to build a clearer picture of how the kings interacted with their kingdom’s nats historically. These sources suggest a different interpretation for the creation of the pantheon, and I will argue that they were appointed not because they were killed on the order of a king and therefore needed to be controlled, but because their royal lineage, royal service, or connection with particular ‘victory grounds’ made them suitable guardians of the royal cities. Maung Htin Aung’s analysis of the ‘Thirty-Seven’ notes that nine were kings, four were queens, eight were “princes of the blood”, eleven were in the service of the king, and four were commoners.⁴⁸⁴ Of these last four, three were from the original family of nats from Mt Popa, and the fourth, Maung Po Tu, was from the early 14th century kingdom of Pinya, an historic ‘victory ground’. Maung Htin Aung’s simple analysis demonstrates a dynastic line; and the royal pedigree, or connection of each nat Lord with royalty, was recorded by both the Myawaddy Mingyi and the KDKT in their histories.

⁴⁸³ Brac de la Perrière, “The Cult of the 37”. Brac de la Perrière used the term ‘naq’ in her article, which I have changed here to the more commonly seen Romanisation of the Burmese word. See also Brac de la Perrière, “Spirit Possession,” 12. F. K. Lehman had a similar view, writing “... they were a threat to the king, the court, and the throne ... appointed such a spirit as presiding guardian over a portion of the kingdom ... converted the dangerous hungry ghosts into guardian spirits (nat) in service of the throne and the Buddhist religion ... from time to time new lords have replaced old ones, again by Royal Order.” Lehman, “Founders’ Cults,” 28. As discussed below, I have not been able to find any Royal Orders to this effect.

⁴⁸⁴ Maung Htin Aung, *Folk Elements*, 102-3.

In the second section of this chapter, I present my analysis of the statuettes of the nats housed in the Shwezigon's nat pavilion, evaluating their iconography in relation to the stylistic chronology outlined in Chapter 5, the Myawaddy Mingyi's *Inventory*, and the KDKT's *parabaiq*. The third section of this chapter presents two sets of statues displaying arguably the most unique and striking iconography of any of the nat Lords seen during fieldwork: the six-armed Brothers known as Taung Magyi and Myauk Min Shin Hpyu. As an image of Taung Magyi from the Wynford Album was chosen to decorate Temple's *The Thirty-Seven Nats*, but incorrectly identified, this influential book has led to a dramatic change in the way one of the most prominent nats from the pantheon of Outside Thirty-Seven Lords has been identified and portrayed in more recent publications. Temple's oversight of the second part of the *Inventory* also led to other wrongly identified illustrations, which has obscured the identity of a 'Thirty-Eighth Nat' omitted from his book. Temple's visual sources, and the choices he made when selecting imagery to accompany his text, continues to influence Myanmar's artists. and this is discussed in the final section of this chapter.

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE NAT LORDS

The earliest historical record of a Myanmar king paying homage to nats references the Lower Myanmar kingdom of the Mon king, Dhammazedi (r. 1472-1492). These nats are listed in the *Nidana arambhakatha*, a posthumous mid-16th century encomium on the king, which records that he offered white umbrellas, prayer-flags and gold and silver lamps to 36 nats, mainly tree-spirits. They were known as the *dewatau sotapān*, (royal 'stream-winner' *dewa*), and were venerated "in order to ensure the spiritual advancement of the nation, and so as to avert all kinds of perils." The designation 'sotapān' (in Burmese, *tháwdaban*), meant the nats had heard enough Buddhist sermons to have moved through the first of the four stages to enlightenment, indicating the enfolding of autochthonous belief within a Buddhist framework. However, at the same time, the king offered gold and silver lamps and feasts to 15 other nats, also mainly tree-spirits, and "Because he honoured them, the nation flourished, famine was unknown, and all creatures were free from sickness and need."⁴⁸⁵ This early record from the Mon kingdom

⁴⁸⁵ Shorto, *Dewatau Sotapan*, 128-31. As recorded by Shorto, Dhammazedi's complete inventory of important Lower Myanmar nats numbers 51.

provides a clear division between 36 nats considered ‘higher’, and a further 15 that were still in the ‘lower’ realm. Notably, all the nats in Dhammazedī’s two pantheons are local guardian nats, indicating Thakya Min’s elevation to the ‘head’ of a pantheon of ‘lower’ nats was yet to be formalised.

The next extant source is also from a Lower Myanmar king, Bayinnaung, in his Royal Order of September 1573, quoted in Chapter 2 on page 49. There is no evidence as to whether or not Royal Orders referencing the nats were issued earlier than this, but many later Orders reference guardians of specific locations in the kingdom, demonstrating that local guardian nats played a pivotal role in its affairs. Seven nats referred to as guardian spirits of the kingdom — a group that could therefore correctly be considered a ‘national’ pantheon for the time — were recorded in another Order of Bayinnaung’s from the same year:

Taungthaman Nat, Taungbyon Nat, Taung Myint Nat, Nga Taunggyi Nat, Mahagiri Nat [Min Mahagiri] and Two Brother Nats called Min Nyi Naung, who are supposed to be the guardian spirits of the kingdom, shall afford the supernatural assistance to the fighting forces to realise a quick victory over Kaw Wila, Chief of Bangkok, who is an arch enemy of the Religion.⁴⁸⁶

The wording of this Royal Order rather infers that Bayinnaung was acting on advice rather than belief. It is notable that there is no mention of the ‘Thirty-Seven Nats’ being the kingdom’s guardians, suggesting this is a construction yet to be formalised, or, as I argue, that the ‘Thirty-Seven Nats’ were never recognised as such.

Four of the seven nats cited in Bayinnaung’s Order — Nga Taungbyon, Nga Taunggyi, Nga Taung Myint and Nga Taung Thaman — retained their important status into the early 19th century — and by this time are found in Upper Myanmar. At this time, in 1815, Bodawpaya ordered the magical objects embedded along Amarapura’s city walls were to be dumped in the river, excepting the the statues of these four nats. They were referred to as “nat *bilu*”, and were

⁴⁸⁶ Than Tun, *Royal Orders Part II*, 7. Min Nyi Naung, meaning two brother Lords, may be the Taunbyon Brother Nats whose legend is related in the *Mahayazawingyi* and *Hmannan Yazawin*. Taungthaman is an important historic site that has yielded Neolithic and Iron Age artefacts. For a discussion of this site see Moore, *Early Landscapes*, 64-8.

therefore ‘higher’ nats, which may explain why they escaped the king’s purge.⁴⁸⁷ Images of these four nat *bilu* were also placed in shrines at Mandalay, and are discussed in the next chapter.

Returning to the chronology, the next source we have is from April 1597, when the kingdom had fractured into petty kingdoms and Nyaungyan, one of Bayinnaung’s sons, held the territory around Inwa.⁴⁸⁸ He passed a Royal Order ordering the reconstruction of Inwa as the royal city, with its western side extended, but to exclude “the guardian spirits called *Kyauk maun hnamá*”, the Brother and Sister of Kyauk, demonstrating the use of local nat shrines as land markers.⁴⁸⁹ Experts in mantra and astrology were sent to the Inwa site, where the re-established royal city was to have nine gates and shrines to Aungzwa (the guardian of horsemen), and Ngazishin (the guardian of the elephant-men). In May 1597, a group of nature spirits, Buddhist nats and the city’s guardian nats (unfortunately unnamed) were propitiated by 50 Brahmin priests. One of the Buddhist nats was simply titled *Thathanadaw*, a guardian of Buddhism, again suggesting Thakya Min’s position at the head of the pantheon was yet to be codified.⁴⁹⁰ He is, however, present as a local guardian nat named Sujampati around this time, recorded at several villages during the early 1600s.⁴⁹¹

The next references are from the reign of Pindale Min’s predecessor and father, Thalun (r. 1629-48). In 1630 his Order regarding the determination of the boundaries of religious lands also records that one of the markers used were the shrines of local guardian nats.⁴⁹² In 1635, the year the royal city eventually moved from Bago north to Inwa, he ordered that “... the lands given in maintenance of the Shrines of Local Guardian Spirits” be checked, suggesting ongoing

⁴⁸⁷ Than Tun, *Royal Orders Part VII*, 90-1. Than Tun’s English translation of Bodawpaya’s Royal Order includes the description “ogres of [a] higher plane in the Spiritual World”. The term ‘*bilu*’, rather than ‘ogre’, is used in the original Burmese language version. The other nats from Bayinnaung’s Order, Mahagiri Nat and the “Two Brother Nats” were not mentioned in Bodawpaya’s 1815 Order, but this is not to say they were not important— as shown in Appendices D.1 and D.2, they were included in the Myawaddy Mingyi’s *Inventory*.

⁴⁸⁸ Harvey, *History of Burma*, 184.

⁴⁸⁹ Than Tun, *Royal Orders Part II*, 8-11; Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma, AD 1598-1885, Epilogue* (Kyoto: The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1990), 40. Than Tun records that Nyaungyan eventually occupied Inwa (renamed Shwe Wa) in August 1597.

⁴⁹⁰ Than Tun, *Royal Orders Part II*, 120 (Burmese version). The nature spirits were named as Yokkkaso (trees), Bhumaso (earth), and Akkathaso (the celestial regions). The Buddhist nats were named as Thawdaban, Thagadagan and Anagan (*ariya* of the first, second and third stages), and *Thathanadaw*, (guardian of Buddhism).

⁴⁹¹ Than Tun, *Royal Orders Epilogue*, 49. Than Tun records that Sujampati is the husband of Sujita, that is, Sakka (Thakya Min).

⁴⁹² Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma, AD 1598-1885 Part I, AD 1598-1648* (Kyoto: The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1983), 207 (Burmese); 33 (English).

patronage of the site re-established by Nyaungyan.⁴⁹³ In 1637, another Order of Thalun's provided for the restoration of old pagodas, temples, ordination halls and monasteries, and for the repair of weirs, canals and old Buddha images — and also for the construction of buildings for “each guardian spirit of a locality.”⁴⁹⁴ These Orders demonstrate how important it was for the king to ensure the local guardian nats throughout the kingdom were well cared for.

It is at this point in history that the earliest recognised iteration of the pantheon of the Outside Thirty-Seven Lords comes into focus — as the guardians of Inwa. This first iteration, from the reign of Pindale Min (see page 11), is known from the KDKT's 1856 *parabaiq*. Eleven nats are recorded as being added to the Thirty-Seven nat Lords by Pindale Min — including Thakya Min, the first time he is present in an extant list.⁴⁹⁵

The inclusion of several nats from the Bagan era in Pindale Min's iteration connects his reign with that of the earlier kingdom. Moreover, newly conquered territory was spiritually incorporated within the kingdom by the inclusion of Yun Bayin, the former King of Chiang Mai, following that city's annexation by Bayinnaung in 1569.⁴⁹⁶ Two nats in this iteration stand out: the aforementioned Aungzwa Magyi (the guardian of horsemen); and Ngazishin (the guardian of the elephant men).⁴⁹⁷ These two nat Lords, affiliated with important sections of the royal armies, continued to serve as guardians of the royal cities right up to the demise of the monarchy, being included in Mindon Min's pantheons of Thirty-Seven Nats as well as his Thirty-Seven *Min* Nats (see page 11).

The second iteration of the pantheon recognised by Myanmar scholars is based on the view that the the Wungyi Padetheyaza, court composer to Mahadama Yazadipati, the last king of the Nyaungyan dynasty (r. 1733-52), composed odes for 22 nats to add to Pindale Min's 15, thereby creating the second iteration of the Outside Thirty-Seven Lords and the first to number 37.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹³ Than Tun, *Royal Orders Part I*, 34.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴⁹⁵ SMMK, *Foundation Report*, 242-58. The KDKT was Mindon Min's ritual specialist, but how he came about the information regarding Pindale Min's pantheon is unknown.

⁴⁹⁶ Chiang Mai was annexed by Bayinnaung in 1569, and its king died in exile in Myanmar soon afterwards.

⁴⁹⁷ Than Tun, *Royal Orders Part II*, 10.

⁴⁹⁸ I have not been able to find out whether the 15 nats associated with Pindale Min had odes at that time, but that appears to be the inference.

Eight of these nats were from Pindale Min's iteration, while the other nats were people from earlier periods of history, with the stories of two, Ananta Pyissi and Yanta Pyissi, related in the *Hmannan Yazawin*. Others are former Burmese kings, presumably a popular topic in a court setting.⁴⁹⁹ The odes composed by the Wungyi were a mix of *natthán*, which recount the previous existence of a nat, and *natkyin*, odes sung in a nat's honour at their *natpwèh*.⁵⁰⁰ Whether these were all composed with the intention of forming a royal iteration of the pantheon is, however, arguable. The composition of *natkyin* indicates those nats were the subject of royal homage, but the *natthán* may simply have been composed for court entertainment — the legend of one in particular, Htilat, is still well-known and recounted today.⁵⁰¹ Notably, the 19 nats listed from Ananta Pyissi and after in Appendix D.1 were not recorded by the KDKT, nor included in the later two iterations of the pantheon, indicating they played no part in the guardianship of the royal cities.

In 1752, Alaungpaya founded the Konbaung dynasty, and began to build his capital at Shwebo. As recorded by Than Tun in his translation of Myanmar's Royal Orders, astrological considerations were paramount during Shwebo's construction.⁵⁰² In 1755, mantras were recited at strategic points, and protective *in* were drawn on the city's walls, the panels of its gates, their arched ceilings, and inside the drums stationed at each gate. Figures of Thakya Min, the Four Great Kings, five Brahmanic/Hindu nats, and spirits of the natural elements, in groups of 108, 124 and 550, were painted on the doors; or their statues were placed in niches at the entrances to the city, palace or its temples, and regular offerings were made to them to ensure the protection of the city.⁵⁰³ Whether any of Inwa's nat Lords took up new positions at Shwebo is not recorded.

⁴⁹⁹ Thado Minsaw served as viceroy of Inwa under both Bayinnaung (r. 1551-81) and Ngazudayaka (1581-99), who was the last king of the dynasty known as the First Taungngu or First Inwa (1486-1597). Min Sithu's book provides brief biographies of these nats. Min Sithu, *Naqkòkwehmu Thamain*, 446-54.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 251-2.

⁵⁰¹ Htilat murdered his pregnant wife for magical purposes in the 14th century, and who was himself killed for his crime and became a nat. His story was dramatised and performed regularly on stage during the colonial period, and images of the more dramatic and magical elements of the legend were popularly etched onto sword blades. The legend is still well-known today. Tin Maung Kyi, *Adventures in Shamanism* (Yangon: U Myint Aung, 2014), 19-23. Wai Phyo Maung (Translator, Inya Institute, in discussion with the author, March 5 2015).

⁵⁰² Than Tun, *Royal Orders Part III*, 9. The city was "so built that it was a miniature universe and the clock tower would be in the centre of the city as Mt Meru [Mt Myinmo] is in the centre of the universe."

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, 103 (Burmese version). When Alaungpaya was away on military campaigns and his eldest son was in charge, only five things had to be done during his absence: keeping the city safe from fire, suppressing thieves, giving the city an adequate water supply, feeding the monks and sending offerings to the nats. Than Tun, *Royal Orders Epilogue*, 40.

In 1763 the royal city returned to Inwa. 19 years later in 1782, Bodawpaya commissioned a report on Inwa's guardian nats ahead of its next move, from Inwa to Amarapura, which was recorded in the KDKT's *parabaiq*. In 1784, Bodawpaya ordered that *in* be drawn on Amarapura's walls, its gate and turrets, together with Buddhist *paritta*, in order to protect the city.⁵⁰⁴ The following year, 1785, the king offered new gilded heads to Min Mahagiri and Hnamedaw Taungyi Shin at Mt Popa, and in 1805 his heir apparent gave the order for the Myawaddy Mingyi to commence drawing up his *Inventory* — thereby recording the third iteration of the pantheon, the one made famous in the West by Temple.⁵⁰⁵ A year later, Bodawpaya issued a Royal Order for a pavilion to be built for the “Thirty-Seven *Min*” — to my knowledge, the first mention in a primary source of a pantheon of ‘Thirty-Seven Lords/Nats’.⁵⁰⁶ The Order was issued in the context of capturing an auspicious white elephant, and its tone, as translated by Than Tun, is suitably imperious:

Build a special pavilion to make offerings to Thon Ze Hku Na Min — Thirty-Seven Spirits [Lords], and ask Poppa Mahagiri [Min Mahagiri], who is one of the Thirty Seven, why he does not help to get Poppa white elephant captured quickly; warn him that if he fails to cooperate, he would be punished.⁵⁰⁷

Although the ‘Thirty-Seven Spirits’ were not named, it is probable they were the same nats that would appear in the Myawaddy Mingyi's finalised *Inventory* some 14 years later, as that document records images already in existence.

In 1810, Bodawpaya issued another Royal Order, stipulating that “good alabaster be used for the images of five major guardian nats including Taung Magyi to be kept in shrines at the Pahtodawgyi pagoda.”⁵⁰⁸ He also decreed that gold be applied to the eight statuettes of Thakya Min on its western side. The wording of this Order suggests a hierarchy of guardian nats, but unfortunately only one, Taung Magyi, was named. Taung Magyi does indeed appear in the 1820 *Inventory*, but his position in relation to Bodawpaya's ‘Thirty-Seven Spirits’ is unclear.

⁵⁰⁴ Than Tun, *Royal Orders Part IV*, 43.

⁵⁰⁵ The history of royal offerings to Min Mahagiri and Hnamedaw Taungyi Shin at their *natnàn* on Mt Popa is given in the *Inventory*. The king offered gilded heads rather than complete statues because the heads were placed on top of the remnants of the *sagà* log. BUR MS 200, 40-1.

⁵⁰⁶ Than Tun, *Royal Orders Part V*, 314-5.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, see also Than Tun, *Royal Orders Part VII*, 90-1.

⁵⁰⁸ Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma, AD 1598-1885 Part VI* (Kyoto: The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1987), 287.

By 1815, the king appears to have lost faith in supernatural means of protection. As noted earlier, his Royal Order of 17 September that year decreed that the magical objects at Amarapura, including those under the nat shrines, be dumped in the river, although the four *nat bilu*, Nga Taungbyon, Nga Taungyi, Nga Taung Myint and Nga Taung Thaman, all ‘higher’ nats, were to be kept. It may be at this point, as described in Chapter 2, that the Myawaddy Mingyi’s work on the *Inventory* went into hiatus.

Bodawpaya was succeeded by Bagyidaw in 1819, and the Myawaddy Mingyi and his colleagues finished their *Inventory* in 1820, prior to the royal city’s return to Inwa. At this point it is worth reiterating that the *Inventory* was compiled in consultation with other experts regarding existing guardian nats at Amarapura and elsewhere in the kingdom, the conduct of their ceremonies, and the location of their existing shrines — it is not a document recording the royal appointment of nats and the allocation of fiefs. The intention was to ensure that the correct guardian nats, based on precedent, would be placed at Inwa, and the *Inventory* duly recorded these, along with the iconography of existing statues. Bagyidaw was also a king who clearly distinguished between the *thathanadaw saún thammadewa nat*, (guardian spirits of the Buddha’s Religion) and local guardian nats. In his Order of 21 October 1827, the latter were exhorted to “step up their watchfulness and suppress the devils who were the cause of [an epidemic].”⁵⁰⁹

The Royal Orders, the *Inventory* and the KDKT’s *parabaiq* confirm that there were nats considered guardians of the kingdom, nats considered guardians of the royal cities, and a wide range of local guardian nats throughout the kingdom — some named, some anonymous — that the kings called upon for assistance from time to time. Taungthaman Nat, Taungbyon Nat, Taung Myint Nat, and Taungyi Nat, all named in Bayinnaung’s Royal Order in 1573 as guardians of the kingdom, were still venerated by Bodawpaya over 200 years later. As shown in Appendix H, they were also included in Mindon Min’s pantheon of Thirty-Seven Nats, alongside other ‘higher’ nats, spirits of the natural elements, and the indigenous nat Lords Aungzwa Magyi and Ngazishin, in 1857. This pantheon, as well as Mindon Min’s Thirty-Seven *Min* Nats, the fourth and final iteration of the pantheon of Outside Thirty-Seven Lords

⁵⁰⁹ Than Tun, *Royal Orders Part VIII*, 131-2 (English) and 518 (Burmese). There are many such Royal Orders providing for local guardian spirits. Only a few are cited for reasons of space.

recognised by Myanmar scholars (refer table on page 11), were propitiated in ceremonies conducted during the founding of Myanmar's last royal city, Mandalay.

There are no Royal Orders, or other primary sources I am aware of, that record the establishment of 'cults' or fiefs to all 37 by Myanmar's kings, only Orders regarding maintenance of the shrines of local guardian nats and offerings made to gain their favour and assistance. The *Hmannan Yazawin*, commissioned by Bagyidaw in 1829, records the legendary founding of shrines by two kings, but there are only three instances of this. Anawrahta is said to have built a *natnàn* for the Taungbyon Brothers, and ordered "that it be worshipped by the people living throughout the length of Kyawzi." He is also said to have founded a temple "called ... Minye after Minye-sish-sin his minister, founder of towns, who died and became a spirit. North of the town, moreover, he built a spirit-house for the people to worship", but whether this spirit-house was for Minye or the local guardian nats is unclear. The third instance tells the legend of the 12th century king Narapatisithu (r. 1173-1210), who slew his equerry, Nga Pyi, for dereliction of duty. After Nga Pyi's body floated downriver near the royal raft, the king commanded it be buried on a nearby island, and that "it be worshipped by all people in this place."⁵¹⁰

These three legends recounting the building of shrines for particular nats cannot be regarded as a royal religious policy in relation to all the nats recorded in the *Inventory* or the KDKT's *parabaiq*. Bagyidaw's stated purpose for the compilation of the *Hmannan Yazawin*, as given by its translator, reads

The king of the law ... being convinced that a chronicle of kings should be the standard, a balance ... for all duties of the king, for all affairs of state, for all matters of religion ... caused the chronicle to be purified by comparing it with other chronicles and a number

⁵¹⁰ *GPC*, 83-4, 97 and 136-8. Nga Pyi is also known as Aung Pyi, and is probably the nat at the Shwezigon named as Ko Aung Pyay.

of inscriptions each with the other, and adopting the truth in the light of reason and the traditional books.⁵¹¹

In this regard, dealing with the kingdom's nats was a necessary and proper duty of kings, consistent with the interaction described in the Royal Orders quoted here. These Orders, and many others, make a clear distinction between local guardian nats, the 'lower' nats translated as "guardian spirits" in the English translation of the Royal Orders, and the 'higher' Buddhist nats. Local guardian nats are clearly propitiated to assist the king in getting what he desires, and they are addressed in tones of exhortation. For example, in October 1855 during Mindon Min's reign, an Order was issued recording the names of ten local guardian nats resident at Mogok. This is similar to the *Inventory* in that it lists the names of the nats, alongside what they are to be offered, and the dates of their annual ceremonies. In a fine example of a king's acknowledgement and appropriation of the power of terrestrial nats and their connection to a specific place, the very next day a follow-up order was issued, calling upon these nats to "put forth everything in their power to produce the best of rubies hidden underground."⁵¹²

The different names recorded at different times in Myanmar's history have led to the commonly encountered statement that nats on later 'lists' replaced those on earlier 'lists', giving a mistaken impression there have been many.⁵¹³ If we discount the iteration associated with the Wungyi Padetheyaza's odes, there are actually only three 'lists' of Outside Thirty-Seven Lords. The nats associated with Pindale Min and the initial royal city at Inwa are mainly 'carried forward' through to Mandalay, and as noted above, it is not until Bodawpaya's 1806 Royal Order that we

⁵¹¹ GPC, ix. Victor Lieberman and Michael Aung-Thwin also regard the chronicles as royal handbooks. Michael Aung-Thwin noted that "Chronicles were written mainly by secular members of the court for the benefit of their contemporary rulers ... but in every case, one chronicle was built upon another ... What "revisionism" occurred did not deal with "factual" events per se but with the significance, in religious or moral terms, of those events." He also commented that early chroniclers used prophecies, omens and dialogues to give their "narrative history the moral, didactic, often miraculous content it was expected to have." Michael Aung-Thwin, "Prophecies, Omens and Dialogue: Tools of the Trade in Burmese Historiography," in *Historical Essays in Honor of Kenneth R. Rossman*, ed. Kent Newmyer (Nebraska: Doane College, 1980), 2-3. Lieberman found that the record of royal precedents in the Chronicles provided rulers with "an indispensable guide to proper behaviour, and could therefore contribute to the physical security and spiritual salvation of the population." Lieberman, "U Kala," 251.

⁵¹² Than Tun, *Royal Orders Part IX*, 33-4. The Royal Order was to be read three times at each of the shrines to the ten nats. Orders that follow this one describe the clothing and other offerings that were presented to the nats.

⁵¹³ For example, Spiro wrote "As some nats became defunct and others became prominent the Burmese Court issued new lists of the Thirty-Seven." Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism*, 52. This point of view probably came from Maung Htin Aung, who wrote "From time to time official lists of the thirty-seven Nats were drawn up by royal authority ..." Maung Htin Aung, *Folk Elements*, 83. See also the *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* cited on page 7.

have a primary source referring to ‘Thirty-Seven Lords.’⁵¹⁴ It seems likely that the title, if not the actual number, referred to a category of nat — those included, like Mindon Min’s Thirty-Seven *Min* Nats, in the guardianship of royal cities.

It is important to recognise, however, that these nat Lords were not alone in performing this important duty. The four nat *bilù* named in 1573 as the kingdom’s guardians, honoured with fine alabaster statues in 1810, and included in Mindon Min’s Thirty-Seven Nats in 1857, could more properly be regarded as the ‘national’ pantheon of the time. However, as outlined above, the safety of Myanmar’s royal cities relied just as much on cosmological and astrological means of protection alongside the different typologies of nat.

Early primary sources on the nats are few and far between, but even the earliest confirm the local understanding that nats inhabit the ‘higher’ Buddhist realms, and the ‘lower’ earthly environments. It is fortunate so many of the Royal Orders were saved from destruction in the early days of colonial rule, as they provide valuable insights into how the nats were viewed by Myanmar’s kings — as guardians of the royal cities and other areas of the kingdom. Considered as a whole, the historic sources surveyed in this chapter confirm the nats played a very commonplace, but nonetheless important role, in the cultural lives of the people at all levels of Myanmar society. This importance is reflected in the *thamain* published by the Shwezigon’s Board of Trustees in 1960, which records that according to the Chronicles of former kings, the nats were famous, and therefore their images, discussed below, were placed at the Shwezigon so they would not disappear.⁵¹⁵

⁵¹⁴ Than Tun, *Royal Orders Part V*, 314-5.

⁵¹⁵ *Shwezigon Thamain*, 57-60.

THE NAT STATUETTES AT THE SHWEZIGON, BAGAN

The Shwezigon's nat pavilion, shown at Fig. 367, holds a unique and historically important collection of nat imagery. Aside from Bekker's comparison of these images with Temple's collection at the Ashmolean, the Shwezigon's statuettes have otherwise been entirely overlooked by art historians. As with the Inside Thirty-Seven, historical comment on these images is meagre. In the late 19th century, Taw Sein Ko told Temple that the images of the "Thirty-Seven Rulers are being carefully preserved within the precincts of the Shwezigon Pagoda at Pagan", but Temple's book does not provide a description, nor a location for them within the *pāyà* complex.⁵¹⁶ Harvey described them as "barbarous images of heathen gods", but unfortunately did not specify which images he saw. He made an intriguing reference to "shrines of the entire pantheon of Thirty-Seven", but if 37 shrines did exist they had disappeared by the time Luce completed his survey, or were simply not recorded.⁵¹⁷

Although there were many structures around the *zedi* at the time that were not included in Luce's site plan, presumably because they post-date the Bagan era, the nat pavilion was recorded, shown marked with a red X on Fig. 370. His site plan shows the long shelf on the southern edge, now enclosed by glass, that holds the statuettes of local guardian nats and nat Lords, indicating the pavilion as it stands today existed at the time of Luce's survey.⁵¹⁸ As noted in the previous chapter, the *thamain* published by the Shwezigon Trustees in 1960 records that there were only 30 nats present, whose names are listed in Appendix D.1.⁵¹⁹ Pichard's description of the pavilion housing the image of Thakya Min also mentions "the images of the 37 nats", but unfortunately his *Inventory*, published in 1992, does not supply any further information.⁵²⁰ Stadtner's *Ancient Pagan* mistakenly records that all 37 are in the pavilion, and

⁵¹⁶ Taw Sein Ko, quoted in Temple, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, 33-4. This quote from Taw Sein Ko suggests that Temple himself never visited the Shwezigon, saw the images there or had any information provided to him by the *pāyà* trustees at the time, a terribly sad circumstance given his interest in the nats and the wealth of information he recorded on their genealogies and legends.

⁵¹⁷ Harvey, *History of Burma*, 33.

⁵¹⁸ My informants could not tell me when the nats' pavilion was built, but as it is pictured in the Shwezigon *thamain* published by the Trustees in 1960, it predates that year.

⁵¹⁹ *Shwezigon Thamain*, 59. The *thamain* includes a photograph of the current nat pavilion, along with photographs of some of the 30 statues of the nats then inside. Unfortunately the copy in my possession— a photo of a bad photocopy— is too degraded to see the photograph of the nat statues with any clarity. However, it is apparent that the arrangement of the figures within the glass cabinet has changed since the photograph was taken.

⁵²⁰ Pichard, *Inventory of Monuments* Vol. 1, 70. Pichard's site plan, drawn in the early 1990s, is more complete than Luce's, and obviously formed the basis for the site plan given to me by the Trustees.

that with the exception of the tall wooden image of Thakya Min they are all from the 20th century.⁵²¹ My own research, presented below, tells a very different story.⁵²²

My research findings

In February 2014, when my research was conducted, there were 41 statuettes on display, ranged side by side in their locked glass cabinet within the nat pavilion. Many of the statues have been expertly inserted into new bases, painted in a uniform dark red to match the conventional *hinthapada* used on old nat statues, and others have been placed on similarly painted wooden boxes. All the bases or boxes feature the nat's name in moulded *thiqsègyò* string, painted white, on the front. Five of the nats have old labels of various styles affixed to them, indicating an inventory was taken at some point in the past, or they once formed part of a collection. In more recent years, images of currently popular nats have been placed in the pavilion, some with their older counterparts within the glass cabinet, and some on the narrow shelf that runs along outside the front of the glass.⁵²³

From the viewer's left to right, the images in the locked cabinet have been placed in groupings that reflect their familial ties, their mounts or physical similarity. However, in order to evaluate them from an art historical viewpoint I have grouped them stylistically. Some of them were included in the *Inventory* and/or the KDKT's *parabaiq*, and the iconography recorded in these two primary sources is included with my description for comparison. The name of each nat recorded below follows the labelling on the base of each statue, but I have supplied the nat's name as per the *Inventory*, in brackets, where these differ.

The Shwezigon's nat images may have been overlooked by art historians in the past — but not by devotees or collectors. Occasionally families bring their sons to pay their respects to the nats housed here, before the boys first enter a monastery to begin their formal instruction in

⁵²¹ Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 225-6.

⁵²² I have relied on the opinion of U Win Maung (Tampawaddy) for the dating of the older statuettes to the 16th or 17th centuries.

⁵²³ These more recent images include the popular nats Bago Medaw, Mya Ngan Nwe, Pakhan Min and Ko Gyi Kyaw. These images are not included in my analysis.

Buddhism.⁵²⁴ The features of at least one image have been altered in the past 40 years by the application of gold leaf, and others were sold.⁵²⁵ The remaining statuettes are now in a locked cabinet. My survey of these images was conducted not only to try to determine their age via an analysis of their styles, but to record each image, and its features, for posterity.

U Tinde (Min Mahagiri) and Ma Myat Hla (Hnamedaw Taungyi Shin, his sister):

Figs. 417, 418 and 420

ဆင်ဖြူပေါ်တွင်ဘီလူးရုပ် ဆင့်သည်။ ၎င်းအပေါ်။ မဟာဂီရိနတ်ရုပ်မတ်တပ်။ မင်းသားဆောင်းသည် ဗောင်းနာတောင်းနှင့်။ လက်ယာရုပ်နှင့်ဟာလွေးဟံ။ လက်ဝဲကတားဆွဲတမ်းဟံ အရုပ်ခုံပါ ဘတောင် ဘမိုက် တုလုပ်သည်။ နှမတော်တောင်ကြီးရှင်နတ် မိမ္မမှာခုံဆင်မနက်ရုပ်။ ၎င်းအပေါ်ဘီလူး။ ၎င်းအပေါ်နတ်မိမ္မ မတ်တတ်ရုပ်ဟံ တံဆာအစုံ။ လက်ယာက။ လက်ညှိနှင့် လကမကျစုသီးကိုကိုင်၍ ယင်ကိုပိုက်ဟံ။ လက်ဝဲလက်ကိုယ်ကို မျှောင်၍ ချဟံတုလုပ်သည်။

On a white elephant stand place a *bilu*. He is above. Mahagiri nat image stands upright. Depict as a prince with a turban and earplugs. Right hand fan with arm swinging style. Left hand holds a *dah* on shoulder style, make the image height stand 1 *taun* 1 *maiq* [61cm]. Hnamedaw Taungyi Shin Nat is a female nat. Stand is black elephant image. Above this a *bilu*. Above that the female nat stands very upright with complete regalia. Right side hand. Thumb and forefinger, holds a *chezu* fruit close to chest style. Left side hand put down alongside body style.⁵²⁶

These two images are drawn in red and black lacquer and gold leaf on wooden planks, the technique known as *shwezawa ye* (drawing with gold leaf on lacquer), which can clearly be seen at the lower left-hand side of Fig. 417 and at the base of Fig. 420. The *Inventory* relates how King Thinlikaung took the *saga* log to Mt Popa and had their images drawn on it in *shwezawa*, and these particular images of the two nats may have been created in this manner to reference the legend.⁵²⁷ Today, their faces and other details are only just discernible under repeated applications of gold leaf, but a photograph taken in the 1970s, Fig. 418, shows Min Mahagiri's eyes more clearly. From what can still be seen, he was drawn as a tall, willowy figure, wearing a *pas'o* patterned with large multi-lobed flowers within a circle and edged with a banded border —

⁵²⁴ I have witnessed families bringing their sons to the nat pavilion as part of the *shinbyu* ritual on several occasions over the past five years.

⁵²⁵ U Win Maung (Tampawaddy), discussion; U Win Maung Myint, discussion.

⁵²⁶ BUR MS 200, 41.

⁵²⁷ BUR MS 200, 40-1. In 1988, Sarah Bekker wrote "These images of Mahagiri and Shwe Myethna [Hnamedaw Taungyi Shin] suggest strongly the view of the nats as lower than human or even as pre-human. The red lacquer blocks with sketchy gold forms probably refer to their dreadful deaths by being burned." Bekker, "Transformations," 41.

motifs seen in wall paintings from the Nyaungyan era.⁵²⁸ He wears a jacket or cloak with a long sweeping front, edged with a horizontal band featuring a repeated vertical line motif within the central band of three. The front edges appear to cross at waist level. Similarly styled jackets can be seen in a 17th century wall painting from Sagaing (Fig. 419). At some point in its history, the plank has had a large wedge-shaped piece removed from the bottom, and as the nat's right foot, which looks to be illustrated in side-on view, is right at the very bottom of the plank it is probable a portion of it is now missing. Both planks are now attached to wooden bases.

Ma Myat Hla's hair, eyes and eyebrows were also rendered in black lacquer, and her figure is posed kneeling on a base decorated with a series of roundels containing a four-pointed motif (Fig. 420).⁵²⁹ Her lower body is drawn side on, but her upper body is twisted to face the viewer, a posture found in 17th century wall murals.⁵³⁰ Her *t'amein* features a repeated motif of five-lobed flowers interspersed with little crosses, and has the usual horizontally striped train at the bottom edge (this appears vertical due to her posture). The edge of her left sleeve can still be discerned, with her hand twisted sideways and the suggestion of an outwardly flexed arm rendered here in two dimensions. The presence of the sleeve suggests she was depicted wearing an *eingyi* (jacket), a garment worn in pre-colonial times, and a section of fabric, perhaps a scarf, patterned in bands with small dots and wavy lines, can be seen extending from underneath the sleeve. Sleeved jackets and figures in a similar posture feature in wall paintings in Bagan's Taungbi library, which is dated to 1702 (Fig. 421).⁵³¹ Ma Myat Hla's hair is shown falling behind her right ear, which has a large petalled ear plug in the lobe, another feature common to the frieze of kneeling ladies in the Taungbi library, and a design recorded by Chew at the Po Win Taun Caves.⁵³² Something with a curving edge, possibly a hair ornament similar to that shown

⁵²⁸ For a comprehensive survey of textile designs in Nyaungyan era paintings, see Chew, *Cave-temples of Po Win Taung*, 116-20. Chew recorded most of the designs seen in wall paintings at Po Win Taung featured circular designs, the circle being the symbol of totality.

⁵²⁹ A very similar design can be seen in a mural in the 12th century Lokahteikpan temple at Bagan. A drawing of this is given in Than Tun, *Ancient Myanmar Designs*, 310 illustration 6.2 (at bottom right).

⁵³⁰ Many female figures drawn in this style are shown in Jane Terry Bailey's series on Sagaing's wall paintings. A good example can be seen in Bailey, "Some Burmese Paintings Part I," 49 fig. 3.

⁵³¹ In her analysis of wall paintings completed during the 18th century at Bagan, Jane Terry Bailey argues that in late 18th century paintings, "figures are elongated and willowy, and the faces are slender ovals; men of rank wear the long-sleeved fitted jacket over a paso woven in akyeik pattern ... ladies wear bodices, with or without scarves; and their [*htabi*] are of striped or akyeik patterns." Jane Terry Bailey, "Some Burmese Paintings of the Seventeenth Century and Later —Part II: The Return to Pagan," *Artibus Asiae* 40, no. 1 (1976): 46. For an overview of traditional pre-colonial Myanmar clothing see Fraser-Lu, *Burmese Crafts*, 261-3.

⁵³² Chew, *Cave-temples of Po Win Taung*, 115, fig. 77.2.

in Fig. 277, can be just discerned above the thin line of black lacquer at the top of her forehead. Careful removal of the gold leaf obscuring this detail may reveal the presence of an Inwa era hairstyle.

From the media used, the styling of the two figures and the motifs appearing on their clothing, these planks can be dated to the Nyaungyan era. As the small Shwebontha pagoda within the grounds of the Shwezigon is dated to this time, and a similar figure features in one of its frescoes, it is possible both planks were originally part of its original fittings or decoration.⁵³³

Hti Hpyu Saung: Figs. 422 and 423

အောက်ခံ ပလ္လင်ပြန်ခုံပေါ်တွင် နတ်ရုပ်တင်ပြင်ခွေတိုင်လျက်။ သင်္ကာန်းပတ်လျက်။
ဒုက္ခတိုင်တံနှင့်။ လက်ယာ သရပါတ်ကိုင်း။ လက်ဝဲလက်က။ လက်ဝဲဒူးကိုတောက်လျက်။
မိုးကြိုးသွား ဒေါချာနှင့်တုလုပ်ရသည်။

Underneath a stand, on top a throne nat image sits cross-legged. Form encircled with monk's robes *dugouq* style [mantle-like, double layered vestment of a Buddhist monk]. Right hand holding a *tarabaq* fan. Left side hand. Left hand supported on left knee. Make the sculpture with a *mògyòthwà* [thunderbolt hermit's hat].⁵³⁴

တင်ပလ္လင်ခွေ တောက်ချာဆောင်း။ လကျာလက်ပိုက်။ လက်ဝဲလက်ဒူးတင်။ သရဖူဆောင်း။
ရွှေပိန်းချ။

On a throne ... Sits cross-legged and wears a hermit's headdress. Arms are folded. Left knee upright. Wears a crown. Statue is painted gold.⁵³⁵

This nat was Anawrahta's father, Kunsaw Kyaung Hpyu (r. 964-986), who was dethroned and became a monk. Assuming the statuette was created to represent Hti Hpyu Saung, the tall crown references his royal status rather than his religious one. The size and style of the statuette points to the Inwa/Nyaungyan era, and the *bilùt'ain* posture suggests it was created to be placed in a position of guardianship or to portray that function. Repeated layers of gold leaf have now obscured its features, and the statue has been inserted into a new base. As noted above, by the time of the *Inventory*, Hti Hpyu Saung's iconography had been conventionalised to portray him as a monk.

⁵³³ A black and white photograph in the Shwezigon guide published in 1975 features this image, but its quality is so poor I have not included it here. The Shwebontha is shown on my site plan as the black cross-shaped building immediately to the north of the nat pavilion at key 1. Shwezigon Trustees, *Shwezigon*, 43.

⁵³⁴ BUR MS 200, 48.

⁵³⁵ SMMK, *Foundation Report*, 253.

Ko Nyo (Taung Magyi): Figs. 424 to 426

ကြာခံခုံပေါ်တွင်။ လက်ဝဲလက်ယာတတောင်ဆစ်က။ လက် ၃ ချောင်းစီပေါသည်။
 လက်ယာလက် ၂က အုပ်ချီ၍ ယင်မှာတသိသည်။ လက်ဝဲ ၂က။ ဒိုင်း ၁။ တုတ်သိုင်း ၁ ကိုင်သည်
 လက်ယာ ၂က တား ၁။ လှံ ၁ ကိုင် ၍ မောက်တိုဆောင်သည်။ စစ်ဝတ်တံဆာ ခါးစည်း။ အစုံ။
 On top of a lotus stand. Left and right side arms join at elbow. Three forearms are equal.
 Two left and right hands pay homage at the level of the chest. Two left hands. Hold a
 shield and a staff. Two right hands hold a *dà* and a spear. Wears a military helmet.
 Complete with military clothes and regalia. Taung Magyi Nat and Myauk Min Shin
 Hpyu Nat the two sculptures are the same.⁵³⁶

This nat is one of two brothers who were forced to box to the death by King Duttabaung, a legend related later in this chapter. His upper right arm holds a wooden *thanlyeq*, probably not original, and the central pair of arms have heavy bangles and are held in front of his chest in the gesture of homage. The lower pair of hands hold heavy clubs that extend to ground level, helping to support the statue. His feet are slab-like with long incisions to delineate the toes, which are all the same length. The heavy front fold of his *pas'ò* is incised in a checked pattern with a wavy band at the bottom, hemmed with a border of vertical stripes, and he wears a circular neckpiece. His topknot is pulled high on his head in an Inwa era style, and the statue is stylistically of that time. Assuming it was indeed created in the Nyaungyan era, it is an early example of the iconography recorded in the *Inventory*. This wooden statuette has been inserted into a newer base.

Ye Ngan Pain: Figs. 427 to 429

Ye Ngan Pain is the Lord of the Sea, a status indicated by his tall pointed crown with a crenellated brim. Although this Nyaungyan style statuette appears simply carved, the treatment of the nat's facial features give him an expression of great power, and one can imagine this nat inspiring fear in the minds of his viewers. His hands were carved as simple blocks, with incisions making it appear as if his long fingers are bent towards his chest at the knuckle. A notable feature of this carving is its almost completely flat back, indicating it was originally intended to

⁵³⁶ BUR MS 200, 46.

sit inside a niche or against a wall where the back would not be visible.⁵³⁷ The statuette's base has been attached to a newer one.

Seh Ywa Shin: Figs. 430 to 432

The name of this nat translates as the 'Lord of Ten Villages'. He was created in the Inwa/Nyaungyan style and is posed in the crouching variant of the *bilut'ain* posture. The attribute once held up to his right shoulder, probably a *thanlyeq*, has broken off. He wears a four-tiered sawtooth crown and large royal earplugs, and the heavy front fold of his *pas'o* is emphasised. The carver has given the chest a prominent curve which may indicate this is a female nat.⁵³⁸ As with Ye Ngan Pain's image, the flat back of this statuette suggests it was intended for a niche or to stand against a wall, and it too has been attached to a new base. The pronounced facial features are very similar to Ye Ngan Pain's, suggesting the two were created by the same carver and perhaps formed part of a set.

Yeyin Kadaw, (Ame Yeyin): Figs. 433 to 435

The reputation of this nat as extremely powerful is belied by her simply carved form in the Inwa/Nyaungyan style and her gentle facial features.⁵³⁹ Here she is portrayed in a kneeling position with her right hand on her thigh and her toes tucked underneath her bottom. The carver did not hollow out the wood between her knees and toes, which helps give the statue a stable base (Fig. 435). Her left arm is outwardly flexed with her flat, slab-like hand resting backwards with the palm facing upwards next to her left hip. Her topknot features an Inwa-style rosette-like hair ornament, she has heavy earplugs, and her neck has three incised lines indicating folds. This image, which once rested on a plain square base, has also been inserted into a new one, which has the number 27 on it written in Burmese.

⁵³⁷ Fraser-Lu noted that because Buddha statues are meant to be viewed from the front, the artist's attention is concentrated on the front appearance, with the side view lacking depth and the back usually flat with no attempt at natural modelling —another similarity between the two types of figures. Fraser-Lu, "Buddha Images Part III: Wood and Lacquer," *Arts of Asia* May/June (1981).

⁵³⁸ The term '*shin*' can be used to indicate a woman, a noble, or a monk. *The Dictionary*, 419.

⁵³⁹ Her name translates roughly as 'the wife of flowing water', which is particularly powerful during the monsoon.

Myaukbet Shin Ma: Figs. 436 to 438

အောက်ခုံပလ္လင်ကြာခံတွင်။ နတ်ရုပ်ကျိုတိုင်လျက်။ လက်ယာလက်ကဟင်ကိုပိုက်မဟန်။
 လက်ဝဲလက်က။ လက်ဝဲဒူးစွန်းကိုတောက်လျက်။ ဆံတုံးမြိတ်ကွင်။ ဆံတို့နှင့် တုလုပ် ရသည်။
 Stand underneath a lotus blossom throne. Nat image sits decorously. Right side hand
 held close to chest cupped style. Left side hand. Left hand supported on the edge of the
 left knee. Hair coiled in a knot with a tress left loose and a hairpin.⁵⁴⁰

This nat does indeed hold her right hand up to her chest, and she appears to have once held something in it that is now missing, or it is possible it was cupped so supplicants could place an offering within it. Her topknot is beautifully carved in the Inwa/Nyaungyan style, with the end of her ponytail shown looping around in a curve at the back of her head, and what may be a hairpin above her left ear (Fig. 436). There is a wide band marking the space between her hairline and forehead. The fingers of her left arm, which is outwardly flexed, rest on the side of what would be her left knee, although the lower part of the figure was carved in a plainly rounded form with no discernible legs. Her fingers are all the same length, with a disproportionately short thumb, and she wears wrist bangles and heavy earplugs. Again, the flat back of the carving indicates it was created to be placed against a wall or in a niche.

Nga Ywa Shin: Figs. 439 to 442

This nat is the 'Lord of Five Villages'. She is depicted in a kneeling style with her left foot tucked underneath her, the toes just visible underneath her right shin. She has an outwardly flexed left arm, and her right hand holds up what may be a *chezu* fruit in her clearly delineated fingers. She has a simply defined band around the front of her hairline, with her hair arranged in an Inwa era ponytail, its loop clearly visible from the rear, with a distinctive Inwa era petalled hair ornament sitting at its base. Her clothing is indicated by simple incisions, as is the hairline at the back of her neck, and she wears heavy plug earrings. The presence of the *chezu* fruit (if it is one) is in accordance with the *Inventory's* description of Hnamedaw Taungyi Shin's iconography.

⁵⁴⁰ BUR MS 200, 49.

Ma Dwe Hpyu, (Thonban Hla): Figs. 443 and 444

ဆင်ဘီလူးခံ။ နတ်ရုပ်မတ်တတ်။ လက်ဟာက ရင်ကိုပိုက်မဟန်။ လက်ဝဲက
ကိုယ်မှာမြောင်ဟန် ဆံကျင်မိတ်ရစ်မြိတ်ခံများနှင့်။

Elephant *bilu* stand. Nat image stands upright. Right hand held to breast. Left hand
down alongside body. Has a hairpin and a loose tress of hair.⁵⁴¹

မဟာဂီရိနတ်ကွန်းတွင်သာ နတ် မောင်နှမတို့ နတ်အိုး ၄လုံး အတူထားပါသည်။

In Mahagiri's *natnàn*, the sisters have four golden pots.⁵⁴²

This statuette of one of Min Mahagiri's sisters is depicted kneeling with her left leg crossed beneath her, and like Nga Ywa Shin, the toes of her left foot can be seen peeping underneath her kneeling right leg, which has the toes flexed beneath her. Her right hand is held up to her breast with the palm facing inward in the traditional gesture of grief, and her left hand rests on top of her left knee. Her hair is dressed in an Inwa era ponytail style with a rounded hair ornament, and she wears heavy earplugs and wrist bangles. A thick fold at her waist indicates the top of her *htabi*. The small circular base of this statue has been attached to a newer square base.⁵⁴³ Her iconography concurs with that of Myaukbet Shin Ma in the *Inventory*.

Hsin Hpyu Shin (Aung Pinle Hsin Hpyu Shin): Figs. 445 and 446

ဆင်ဖြူရုပ်မတ်တတ်ပေါ်တွင်ပလ္လင်တင်၍။ ပလ္လင်ပေါ်မှာနတ်ရုပ်တင်ပြင်ခွေ။ လက်ယာက
ရပ်ကိုင်။ လက်ဝဲက ခူးတင်။ ဇောင်းသရဘူနားတောင်းအစုံရှေ့သည်။ ဆင် ရှေ့ဦးစီးချွန်းကိုင်
ဝတ်တွားနေရသည်။ နောက်ပဲ့လူစီးဟန်လည်းပါသည်။

Stands very upright on top of a white elephant form. Placed on throne. Nat image sits
cross-legged on throne. Right hand holds a fan. Left hand placed on knee. Complete
sculpture with *baun* crown and earplugs. In front of elephant the mahout rides holding
an elephant goad lying down position. At back of throne, man rides procession style.⁵⁴⁴

This nat ruled as Thihathu II in the 14th century, and was assassinated while riding an elephant. This statuette was carved in the Inwa/Nyaungyan style with the rounded lower body, kneeling on the back of an elephant with one hand held cupped to his breast. The elephant is simply rendered and disproportionately smaller than the nat he bears, emphasising the nat's

⁵⁴¹ BUR MS 200, 44.

⁵⁴² SMMK, *Foundation Report*, 260.

⁵⁴³ Sarah Bekker recorded that Thonban Hla's image, sitting "in a sad attitude" was placed in front of the lacquered pillars representing Min Mahagiri and Hnamedaw Taung Gyi Shin. Bekker, "Transformations," 43.

⁵⁴⁴ BUR MS 200, 46.

supernaturality. This statue has also been inserted into a new base. By the time of the *Inventory* in 1820 this nat's iconography was considerably more elaborate, as discussed below.

Shwe Pyin Gyi: Figs. 447 to 449

အောက်စုံစွန်းရိုးပလ္လင်ခုံဖြန့်ပေါ်တွင်။ လက်ယာဒူးတောင်လျက်။ လက်ဝဲဒူးလှဲလျက်။
လက်ယာကတားတမ်း။ လက်ဝဲကပေါင်တောက်။ ဗောင်းသရဘူနားတောင်းလက်ကောက်
အစုံနှင့်။ နတ် ၂ ရုပ်ကိုပင်ပုံမချားကြီးငယ်သာတုရသည်။

Underneath stand, a *zùnyò* throne above. Right side knee upright. Left side knee laying down. Right side hand holds a *dà* to the shoulder. Left hand covers knee. Complete with *baùn*, earplugs and arm bangles. Make the two nat statues older and younger are not different.⁵⁴⁵

This image of Shwe Pyin Gyi, the older of the two Taungbyon Brothers, is another made in the Inwa/Nyaungyan style, and has also been expertly set into a new base. The nat sits in the *bilùt'ain* posture on the back of a feline creature with bared teeth, and his left arm was crafted with an exaggerated outward flex. He wears simple clothing indicated by molding around the waist and neckline, with a tall headdress and heavy plug earrings. As discussed in Chapter 4, the Taungbyon Brothers are now conventionally depicted with tigers.

Shwe Pyin Ngeh: Figs. 450 and 451

This statue of the younger Brother appears stylistically to be a companion piece to Shwe Pyin Gyi described above, except for the addition of decorative *thayò* moulding inset with small pieces of glass mosaic on the nat's necklace, earrings and *thanlyeq*. The nat is depicted riding a *nagà*, a mount I have not seen elsewhere in his artistic representations. The artist has carved the *nagà*'s coils and head as the base of the statue, and has rendered the crossed-over left foot in low relief on the nat's lap (Fig. 450). The *thayò* decoration and sword are probable later additions to the statue. A damaged label including the English number '1' is affixed to the front of the *nagà*'s neck.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., 48

U Po Tu (Maung Po Tu): Figs. 452 to 454

အောက်ခံကြားရုပ် မတ်တတ်အပေါ်တွင်။ နတ်ရုပ်စီးနင်း၍။ လက်ယာကြိမ်ကိုင်း။
လက်ဝဲကပေါင်တောက်။ ရောင်တုံးနှင့်တုလုပ်ရသည်။

Underneath stand a tiger image stands upright. Nat image rides. Right hand holds a cane. Left hand rests on thigh. Make the statue with a men's topknot.⁵⁴⁶

ခုံ ပါ ကျားရုပ်အလား အမြင့် ၁ တောင် ၄ လက်သစ်။ လက်ျာဒူထောင်၊ လက်ဝဲဒူးလှည်း။
လက်ျာလက် ဓား သံလျှတ်ထမ်း။ ရောင်ထုံးနှင့် ယမနေသား၊ စကားသား သင့်ရာထုလုပ်၍
ကျားရုပ် ပါ ငွေပိန်းချ။ နတ်ရုပ် ၂ မှာ ရွှေပိန်းချ။⁵⁴⁷

Stand like a tiger's body height 1 *taun* 4 *leqthiq* [53.3cm]. Right knee upright, left knee lying down. Right hand holds a *dà thanlyeq* to the shoulder. Wears a headband. *Yamane* or *sagà* wood is correct. Tiger is painted solid silver.⁵⁴⁸

Maung Po Tu is not included in the list of nats recorded by the Shwezigon's Trustees. According to the KDKT's *parabaiq*, he was a trader in tea from the Pinya kingdom, who was killed by a tiger during the reign of Minkaung I (r. 1400-1422), and was appointed to the Thirty-Seven Outside Lords by Pindale Min. This statue is stylistically from the Inwa/Nyaungyan era, carved as a simple rounded figure with no discernible legs. The left arm was carved with the outward flex and the hand joined to the nat's lap. The right hand once held an attribute which has broken off — possibly a cane held to the right shoulder — and the elbow appears to have once rested on a piece of wood that may have represented part of a saddle. The carver has emphasised the tiger's rows of sharp teeth, and its ears are recognisably feline. Its tail extends to ground level for added stability.

Shan Kosehko: Figs. 455 to 457

This is an ensemble carving showing the nat, whose name means 'the Shan Lord of 99', on horseback, attended by a retinue. Only four attendants are extant and it appears that a fifth, which would have been at the viewer's rear right of the central image, is now missing. The attendant directly behind the horse holds its tail and is not covered in gold leaf. The attendant on the left front appears to be wearing a cloak and has her(?) right arm up-stretched to the horse's reins, with her face turned towards the rider. The figure at the front right is carrying

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., 47.

⁵⁴⁷ The reference to နတ်ရုပ် ၂ မှာ refers to the image of Shwe Sitthin nat, as they shared a *natkūn*. SMMK, *Foundation Report*, 252.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 252.

something unidentifiable. The figure at the left rear holds an offering bowl and has a hand on the back of the horse's saddle. This very familiar scene may be a three-dimensional rendering of the Great Departure rather than a nat image, as this iconography does not appear in any of the primary sources. The original base, on which all the figures stand, has been inserted into a newer one and the figures have lost their feet in the process. This artwork is in a very poor condition.

Ko Aungzwa (Aungzwa Magyi): Figs. 458 and 459

နတ်ရုပ်မြင်စီးလျက်။ လက်ဝဲဆက်ကိုင် လက်ယာထားထမ်း ခေါင်ထုပ်ဖောင်။

Nat image rides a horse, left hand reins, right hand carries a *dà* on the shoulder, wears a *baùn* on his head.⁵⁴⁹

မြင်းစီးလျက် ခုံပါ မြင်းအရပ် ၂ တောင်း နတ်ရုပ်အမြင့် ၂ မိုက်။ မောက်ရူးဆောင်း။ လက်ျာ လက်မြင်းဇက်ကိုင်။ လက်ဝဲလက် မြင်းကတွင်တင်လျက်၊ မြင်းမှာ ရွှေပိန်းချ။ ကြိုး က- တန်းဆာနှင့် နတ်ရုပ်မှာ ရွှေပိန်းချ။ ယမနေဝသား၊ စကားသား သင့်ရာထုလုပ်။

Rides a horse, stand and horse height 2 *taun* [91.4cm]. Nat statue height 2 *maiq* [30.48cm]. Wears a helmet with a long spike. Right hand holds horse's reins. Left hand holds horse's saddlery(?) Horse is painted gold. Saddlery and nat painted gold. *Yamane* or *sagà* wood is correct.⁵⁵⁰

This is a solid Inwa/Nyaungyan style carving, made all in one piece, with a plug of wood attaching the horse's chin to its breast and the saddle blanket reaching to the ground. It appears the nat's right hand may have held something now lost — a *dà* would agree with the *Inventory's* iconography. Both the horse's and nat's facial features are now only faintly visible underneath the gold leaf. Their proportions to one another are more natural, although the horse's legs are overly short, suggesting a later date for its creation. This statue has also been inserted into a new base.

U Aung Pyi: Figs. 460 to 462

U Aung Pyi is not included in the *Inventory*, but his legend is related in the *Hmannan Yazawin* (as Nga Pyi), and in the KDKT's *parabaiq* as Myin Hpyu Shin (see below).⁵⁵¹ This image is very similar to that of Ko Aungzwa's, but here the horse's head and forequarters are exaggerated,

⁵⁴⁹ Burney MS, 4.

⁵⁵⁰ SMMK, *Foundation Report*, 249.

⁵⁵¹ GPC, 135-8; SMMK, *Foundation Report*, 249.

with its forelock reaching to its nose and its tail to the ground. Again, this statue has been made from the one piece of wood, and the carver did not create any space between the nat's forearms. The statue has been inserted into a new base, with the remnant of an old label visible.

Ma Hne Le (Shin Nemi): Figs. 463 and 464

အောက်ခုံပလ္လင်ကြာခံပေါ်တွင်။ မတ်ရပ် ခြေခြင်းလက် ကောက်။ စည်းပုံနှင့်ပတီး။ လက် ၂
ဘက်ကိုတွဲလွဲချ၍။ ထဘီက ချပ်နှင့်ထုလုပ်ရသည်။

Underneath stand lotus throne on top. Stands upright, anklets, arm bangles and a *siboun*. Both two arms hanging free, not very elegant. The top [black part] of her *htabi* is large [wide].⁵⁵²

This nat, the daughter of Thonban Hla, is depicted in a kneeling position with her hands resting flat on top of her plainly rounded knees. Her hair is carved in a large rounded bun on top of her head, a style accorded to commoners in the Nyaungyan era, and she wears the heavy earplugs of royalty.⁵⁵³ It appears that her hair, eyes and eyebrows were originally decorated with black lacquer that has been covered in gold leaf at a later time — indicating the beginning of the move away from the total gilding of nat statues into the Amarapura style. The bangles and costume jewellery adorning her are customary offerings for this nat, who died of grief as a child. She is often offered small toys or an egg by her supplicants.⁵⁵⁴

Myin Hpyu Shin: Figs. 465 and 466

နတ်ရုပ်မြင်းစီးလျက်၊ အရုပ်ခုံပါ ၁ တောင် ၁ မိုက်။ ဖောင်းဆောင်း၍ လက်ဝဲလက် ဇက်ကိုင်၊
လက်ျာလက် နှင်တံကိုင်။ မြင်း ငွေပိန်းချ။ နတ်မှာ မျက်နှာ ငွေပိန်းချ။ ကိုယ်၊ လက်၊ ခြေ
ရွှေပိန်းချ။ ယမနေသား စကားသား သင့်ရာထုလုပ်။

Nat image rides a horse, height of horse and stand 1 *taun 1 maiq* [60.94cm]. Wears a *baun*. Left hand holds the reins, right hand holds a cane. Horse is painted silver. Nat's face is painted silver. Body, arms and legs painted gold. *Yamane* wood or *sagà* wood is correct.⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵² BUR MS 200, 50.

⁵⁵³ Chew, *Cave-temples of Po Win Taung*, 113.

⁵⁵⁴ When Bekker recorded the image of Ma Nemi, she was “shown on the Shwezigon altar sitting in a swing, surrounded by toys given as offerings. She has been presented with so many bracelets that they have been strung and hung as a garland around her neck.” It seems likely this is the same statue Bekker saw. Bekker, “Transformation of the Nats,” 43.

⁵⁵⁵ SMMK, *Foundation Report*, 250.

Myin Hpyu Shin, the Lord of the White Horse, is now customarily depicted riding a white horse, so his image has presumably been placed next to that of Hsin Hpyu Shin in the Shwezigon’s lineup, as that nat’s name translates as ‘Lord of the White Elephant’. He rides a disproportionately small horse and his over-sized head and exaggerated facial features emphasise his supernatural nature. The carver has stabilised the composition by allowing the horse’s saddle-cloth to reach the ground on either side. Although the nat has a simple man’s topknot and unadorned clothing marked by subtle incising, the horse’s tack is highly decorated with *thayò* moulding with inset glass mosaic. The horse’s bridle is decorated with rod-shaped plastic beads, now covered in dirt, and reins that appear to be made from wire, then covered with gold leaf, are held in the nat’s left hand. The presence of the plastic beads suggests a 20th century date for this statue, although it could have been made earlier and redecorated at a later time.

U Min Kyaw: Figs. 467 and 468

မြင်းစီးလျှက်။ လက်ယာကြိမ်ကိုင် လက်ဝဲမြင်းဇက်ကိုင်ဟန်။ ရောင်တုံးနှင့်တုရသည်။

While riding a horse. Right hand holds a cane, left hand holds the horse's rein. Make the statue with a man's hairstyle.⁵⁵⁶

This statue sits in the *bilut’ain* posture atop a richly attired horse, and probably once held something up to his right shoulder. This nat is also disproportionately larger than his mount. The statue has been carved all in one piece, with the nat’s left foot part of the base of the horse’s neck, the foot itself carved in relief. The addition of moulded *thayò* and glass mosaic decoration suggests the image was made in the 19th century. Details of the nat’s eyes, mouth and ears, and the inside of the horse’s ears, have been highlighted in paint. The horse’s trappings reach to the base of the statue for added stability. This statue has also been attached to a new base.

Min Sitthu: Figs. 469 and 470

အော်ပလွင်ပြန်ပေါ်တွင်။ လက်ယာဒူးတောက်။ လက်ဝဲက ဒူးလက်တောင်နှင့် တုလုပ်ရသည်။ လက်ဝဲဒူးချလက်ယာဒူးပေါ်တွင်။ လက်ယာလက်ရုံးတင်၍။ လက်ညှိုးတိုးဟန်။ လက်ဝဲလက်က။ လက်ဝဲဒူးဝွန်းတောက်လျက်။ ဇောင်းစလွယ်နားတောင်း။ ရှေ့ဘရက်။ နောက်ဘယက်နှင့်။

⁵⁵⁶ BUR MS 200, 49.

Underneath stand throne on top. Right side knee upright and make the statue with left side knee put down. Right side knee supports right side upper arm. Finger pointing style. Left hand supported on knee. *Baùn, salwe*, earplugs. With front and back neckpiece.⁵⁵⁷

As the horses of U Min Kyaw and Myin Hpyu Shin and their decoration are stylistically almost identical, it is possible they were both carved — and/or decorated — by the same artist. This depiction of Min Sitthu riding astride sets him apart from the other two, and his facial features are different. This statue has also been attached to a new base.

There are five images of nats on horseback in the Shwezigon's collection — Ko Aungzwa, U Aung Pyi, Myin Hpyu Shin, U Min Kyaw, and Min Sitthu. As noted above, the *Inventory* does not record Min Sitthu riding a horse, but it does record Min Kyawzwa riding one. The Burney MS has both Aungzwa Magyi and Min Kyawzwa riding horses; while the KDKT's *parabaiq* records Aungzwa Magyi and Myin Hpyu Shin.⁵⁵⁸ Aungzwa Magyi's shrine was at Bagan, and as he was designated a guardian of Amarapura's *Shwe Myódaw*, he was decorated in gold or silver leaf and placed in a shrine. Min Kyawzwa is recorded in both the Burney MS and the *Inventory* as sharing a shrine with Min Sitthu at Pakhan.⁵⁵⁹ The names and legends of all of these nats are often conflated, making definitive identifications of older images impossible.

The next group of five nats are all portrayed riding elephants, and their carvings initially appear extremely similar. They are difficult to assign a style or date to. Given their iconography, which accords with Hsin Hpyu Shin's given above, I have tentatively recorded them as 19th century.

Ko Myo Shin *hníq pà* (two sacred persons): Figs. 471 and 472

This nat — a well known Upper Myanmar local guardian nat not included in the *Inventory* or the KDKT's *parabaiq* — is now usually portrayed standing in a formal, upright stance. Here he is depicted sitting cross-legged on an elephant. The attendant mahout in front, who is much smaller than the nat, has his tongue stuck out. There is another smaller attendant with a

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁵⁵⁸ SMMK, *Foundation Report*, 249-50. I have not counted Shan Kosehko as I believe this ensemble carving represents The Great Departure.

⁵⁵⁹ BUR MS 200, 49; Burney MS, 9.

distinctive headdress standing on the elephant's rear whose face is turned to the right. The nat and *mahout* both have hair styled into a small topknot, and each holds an elephant goad. The elephant is rendered naturalistically apart from his toes, which are stylised and ring the entire base of each leg. The elephant's harness has been decorated with gold leaf, but apart from a few squares applied to its forehead, the rest of the animal is simply lacquered. The iconography of this statue suggests it is actually an image of Hsin Hpyu Shin or Thado Minsaw; however, the identity of all nat images, like beauty, is very much in the eye of the beholder.

Hlaing Nanthawara *hniq pa*: Fig. 473

This statue also features the nat with an attendant at rear and a mahout in front, all rendered in different postures to Ko Myo Shin described immediately above. Here the nat sits in the *bilut'ain* posture, on top of a simple platform style *howdah*, while the attendant and *mahout* are kneeling. The nat's right arm is bent upwards, and probably once held a sword or lance which is no longer extant. All three wear a simple *pas'o* knotted in front and their hair is styled into a flame-shaped topknot. The elephant is naturalistic, with long pointed tusks and realistically depicted toenails, and has clear squares of gold leaf visible on his forehead. The upper part of the *mahout* at the rear is absent gold leaf, and like Ko Myo Shin, the elephant's harness has been gilded, but not the rest of its body. Again, this representation accords with Hsin Hpyu Shin or Thado Minsaw's iconography.

Thandawgan: Figs. 474 and 475

ကြာခံခုံပေါ်တွင်တိုင်လျက် လက်ယာက ရုပ်ပိုက်ဟံ။ လက်ဝဲကဒူးအုပ်၍။ ခေါင်းမှာမြစ်ညွန်
ပေါင်းနှင့် တုလုပ်သည်။

Sits on top of a lotus stand. Right side hand holds a fan close to the body style. Left side hand covers the knee. Make the statue with a *myiqnyun baun* on the head.⁵⁶⁰

Again the arrangement of this ensemble is very similar to that of Ko Myo Shin. The nat sits on a *howdah* in the same *bilut'ain* posture, holding a *thanlyeq* in his right hand. The attendant at the rear however has his head turned to the left rather than the right. All three figures have two small protuberances on their heads which may once have been topknots, and wear earplugs. The

⁵⁶⁰ BUR MS 200, 45.

mahout's right arm probably once held an elephant goad. Once again, this representation accords with Hsin Hpyu Shin or Thado Minsaw's iconography.

Aungpinle *hníq pà* (Hsin Hpyu Shin): Figs. 476 to 478

ဆင်ဖြူရုပ် မတ်တတ်ပေါ်တွင် ပလ္လင်တင်၍။ ပလ္လင်ပေါ်မှာနတ်ရုပ်တင်ပြန်ခွေ။ လက်ယာက
ရုပ်ကိုင်။ လက်ဝဲက ဒူးတင်။ ဗောင်းသရဘူနားတောင်းအစုံရှိသည်။ ဆင်ရှေ့ဦးစီးချွန်းကိုင်
ဝတ်တွား။ နေရသည်။ နောက်ပဲ့လူစီးဟန်လည်းပါ သည်။

White elephant stand. Nat sits cross-legged on a throne. Right hand holds a fan, left hand is placed on knee. Statue wears a *baùn tharap'u* [crown] and earplugs. *Mahout* rides in front, lying down, holding an elephant goad. At the back a man rides procession style.⁵⁶¹

The nat was identified by one of the *pāyà's* staff as the figure sitting astride the elephant at the front, holding a goad to the animal's forehead, so he has been distinguished by the length of fabric tied around his topknot. Both the nat and his attendant have the same hair style and heavy earplugs, and the elephant is rendered naturalistically. Once again the gold leaf on the elephant has been limited to its forehead and harness, in this instance a simple *howdah* with incised 'rope' around its girth.

Ngazishin *hníq pà*: Figs. 479 to 481

Ngazishin was the 14th century King Thihathu II, who died of illness. During his reign he had obtained five white elephants, considered extremely auspicious, hence he is represented here astride an elephant and holding what is probably a goad to the animal's head. The attendant behind him is also depicted riding astride, and his face is turned sharply to the right. The nat and attendant are rather crudely carved, and are in a poor condition. The elephant is more sensitively and naturalistically rendered, and has the double bump on his forehead that is a feature of Asian elephants. Its trunk curls 360 degrees and holds what appears to be a lotus bud. Part of its trappings and ears have been covered in gold leaf and the rest left as plain lacquer. Given the complex iconography prescribed for Ngazishin, it is impossible to determine whether

⁵⁶¹ Ibid., 46.

this statue does represent him, or it may again be an image of Hsin Hpyu Shin or Thado Minsaw.⁵⁶²

Anauk Medaw (Anauk Mibuya): Figs. 482 to 484

အေကံခုံပလ္လင်ကြာပေါ်တွင်။ ကျိုကျိုတိုင်လျက်။ ဆံတုံးစည်းစိန်စံမြိတ်ကွင်း။ ဆံတိုးဆံကျင်။
ရင်ခွင်တွင်သားငယ် ပိုက်ပွန့်တိုက်ဟန်နှင့် တုလုပ်ရသည်။

On top of a lotus blossom throne. Sits decorously with feet tucked underneath. Hair coiled in a knot with a tress left loose and a hairpin. Make the statue to hold her young son breast-feeding style to her chest.⁵⁶³

This image and base have been carved from a single piece of wood. The carver rendered her sitting in the *kyouq gyouq t'ain* (sitting decorously with feet tucked underneath) position, her feet shown spilling over the side of the base in Fig. 480. Both her arms were carved in the outwardly flexed position with her hands placed on her knees, and her fingers are long, elegant and clearly separated. She has a tall and heavy bun of hair and her ponytail loops around her right shoulder and falls between her breasts, as described in the *Inventory*. There is a five-pointed hair decoration resting on her forehead and she wears heavy wrist bangles, and she probably once had separate earplugs that are now missing. There is a defined band between her forehead and hairline that continues around the back of her head. It appears her hair and possibly the waistband of her *t'amein* were intended to remain ungilded as part of her decoration, and there is a wavy moulded detail beneath the waistband that continues around to the back of her waist. The base of her statue, which now sits on a wooden box, has an old label with the English number 28 affixed to it.

Shwe Nabe: Figs. 485 to 488

ကြာခုံပေါ်တွင် မတ်တတ်။ နတ်မိဗ္ဗရုပ်ထိပ်တွင်။ နဂါးလည်ပေါ်၍။ စည်းပုံကုသိုဋ်း လက်ရာ
လက်က။ ယင်ကိုပိုက်မဟံ။ လက်ဝဲလက်က။ ကိုယ်မွှားမျှောင်၍နေဟံ။
နားတွင်ဘူအနားတောင်းနှင့်တုလုပ်သည်။

Stands upright on a lotus stand. Female nat sculpture. *Naga* above. Then *siboun*. Right side hand. Hold to the chest style. Left side hand. Put down alongside body style. Make the statue with spike earrings.⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶² For Ngazishin's iconography, see Chapter 2, page 47.

⁵⁶³ BUR MS 200, 49.

⁵⁶⁴ BUR MS 200, 44.

This statue of Min Mahagiri's wife reflects her creation legend in the inclusion of two crudely carved *naga* images that curl around her kneeling figure and rear up in front of her knees (Fig. 486). Here she is portrayed as human, an unusual rendition of Shwe Nabe, as all other images seen during research featured her conventional *naga* headdress. Her hair, indicated by incised lines, is drawn up in a simple bun with a beautifully rendered petalled ornament at the front (Fig. 488). She has arm bangles, clothing indicated by incised lines, and her heavy earplugs decorated with glass mosaic suggest a date of the 19th century. Her left hand is disproportionately large, and held out in front of her, probably for the convenience of supplicants who may wish to offer her a packet of pickled tea — a common offering for nats. Her right arm is outwardly flexed with the hand resting on the ground beside her and her feet are tucked under her with her toes on the ground and heels in the air. Her eyes are represented by thin slices of white shell, with the pupils painted in as small dots, which give her an oddly staring appearance, but these may be later additions to the original image. The addition of the green textile around her hair references her *naga* origin in its colour and texture, which is similar to serpent scales. Her statue has been attached to a new base.

Daan Maung Shin: Figs. 489 and 490

အောက်ခံပလ္လင်ပြန်နံ့ပေါ်တွင်တင်ပြင်ခွေလျက်။ လက်ယာက စောင်းကိုပိုက်တီးလျက်။
လက်ဝဲလက်က ကြိုးကိုတောက်ဟန်။ ခေါင်မှာဗောင်းစလွယ်နှင့်တုလုပ်ရသည်။

Underneath a stand throne on top, sits cross-legged. Right side hand plays a *saùn* held to his body. Left hand supporting style. Make the statue with a *baùn* on the head and a *salwe*.⁵⁶⁵

Daan Maung Shin was the grandson of Alaungsithu, who reigned in the 12th century. When he was a young prince he went into a monastery and died after falling off a swing. His statue is stylistically unique among his fellow nats at the Shwezigon — he is depicted with a monk's robe draped over his head, carved to show wavy folds, and he holds what is probably meant to be a copy of the Buddhist scriptures in both hands. Two nails, one bent in a curve, have been inserted into the centre of the base of the image. A label (not visible in the photographs) with the English number '21' is affixed to the side of the nat's left knee. The *Inventory* specifies this nat plays a

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., 48.

saùn, but here the carver has preferenced his monastic life. It is impossible to assign a date to this carving on stylistic grounds.

Min Gyi (Shwe Pyin Gyi), Me Wunna (Popa Medaw) and Min Ngeh (Shwe Pyin Ngeh):
Fig. 491

Popa Medaw is not included in any of the iterations of the Outside Thirty-Seven Lords. However, she is often shown in contemporary shrines flanked by her two sons, the nat Lords known as the Taungbyon Brothers, as in this ensemble. Here she wears her conventional *bilù má* headdress and has holes in her clenched fists, probably intended to hold flowers or her now standard attribute of peacock feathers. All three statues are dressed in traditional clothing, with the two brothers having shoes decorated with the head of a mythical bird, a style worn by royalty. Small plugs of wood joining the right hands to the upraised right knees have been left by the carver to give the image greater structural integrity — a detail often seen under the upraised foreleg on statues of horses. These statuettes are not recorded in the Shwezigon *Thamain* published in 1960, so are likely to have been placed in the pavilion after that date (see Appendix D.2).

Le Kyun Maung: Figs. 492 to 494

This statuette, carved in the Salay style discussed in Chapter 5, is also missing from the Shwezigon *Thamain* (Fig. 495). The dynamism of the figure, accentuated by showing his *pas'ò* tucked up between his legs, indicates he is ready for action, and he wears an *eingyi* which flares over his hips. He holds a curved sword to his right shoulder which may not be original. Le Kyun Maung's head was made separately to his body and then attached, and at some point his left arm was broken at the shoulder and elbow and inexpertly mended. This statue is not listed in the 1960 list recorded by the Shwezigon's Trustees so must have come into the collection after that time, but when it was created is unknown. Today there is a *natkùn* for Le Kyun Maung within the grounds of the site attributed as Kyanzitha's palace.

Ko Hpyu (Myauk Min Shin Hpyu): Figs. 496 and 497

This statue of Ko Hpyu has been covered in modern paint and the statue is probably a replacement of an older statue no longer extant. His middle pair of arms is held in the gesture of

homage, and the upper and lower pairs have holes in the fists for the insertion of attributes which are missing. His iconography concurs with the *Inventory* (see Ko Nyo, above).

Taungbyon Min Gyi (Shwe Pyin Gyi) and Taungbyon Min Ngeh (Shwe Pyin Ngeh): Fig. 498

These two statues, like that of Myauk Mingyi above, were carved and decorated in a more recent style. They can be dated to the 20th century based on their naturalistic facial features and painted costumes.

S U M M A R Y

The collection of images in the Shwezigon's nat pavilion ranges in style from planks featuring typically Nyaungyan era figures drawn using the *shwezawa yè* technique, to modern 20th century carvings. Iconographical elements recorded in the 1820 *Inventory* and the KDKT's *parabaiq* are seen in several of the statuettes provisionally attributed to the Nyaungyan era. As a whole, the collection displays the stylistic evolution of three dimensional nat imagery from perhaps the 1600s through to the time of the *Inventory*, and beyond to the Salay and Popa Taung Kalat styles. Many share iconography that references their status as guardians of royal locations, such as the chest armour, bangles and earplugs conventionally seen on Bagan era statues.

The 17 images shown at Figs. 417 to 462 may well have formed part of an original set of images placed at the Shwezigon sometime during the Inwa/Nyaungyan era. Although the Shwezigon Trustees listed 30 images in 1960, which of the existing statuettes were included in that total was not known by my informants. The more modern statues may have been donated to the pavilion by grateful recipients of the existing nats' favour, or be replacements for older statues that had been sold or perished.

The four statuettes shown at Figs. 463 to 470 exhibit the beginnings of the more decorative style of statues created in the Amarapura era, and may well have arrived at the Shwezigon during that time. The five nat statues featuring elephants, Figs. 471 to 481, are more enigmatic, as they generally correspond to both Hsin Hpyu Shin's and Thado Minsaw's iconography. Further

research on their provenance may shed light on how they came to acquire their current identities. The statuettes from Fig. 491 onward can be confidently attributed to the 20th century. Despite the relatively late appearance of some of the statues, all these nat images are an extremely important part of Myanmar's cultural heritage and deserve the highest levels of conservation and care. I was told that several of the older statuettes were sold to a collector in the 1980s, and if these could be traced, a more complete record could be made for the future.⁵⁶⁶

TAUNG MAGYI AND MYAUK MIN SHIN HPYU

While dwelling in the forest, Maung Tinde took a sea-serpent named Shwe Nabe as his wife. After his death she laid two eggs on Male Hill, then she too died, some say of grief at the news of her husband's death in the king's funeral pyre. By and by the eggs hatched two brothers, the elder known as Shin Hpyu, the younger as Shin Nyo, and they were raised in the forest by a kindly deer.

Meanwhile, in the kingdom of Thaye Khittea, King Duttabaung's astrologers alerted him that two powerful men would appear in the kingdom. Believing these to be Shin Hpyu and Shin Nyo, the brothers were appointed Ministers to the King, and spent seven years collecting taxes on his behalf — Shin Nyo from the southern part of the kingdom and Shin Hpyu from the northern. But the King became suspicious of their loyalty, and ordered them to fight a boxing match in front of the palace. Shin Nyo and Shin Hpyu fought so fiercely and violently they died of exhaustion, becoming the nats known as Taung Magyi and Myauk Min Shin Hpyu.⁵⁶⁷

The violently whirling arms of the desperate boxers and the grasping hands of the hated tax collector are both expressed in art by the six arms of each nat Lord.⁵⁶⁸ Was the legend of Taung

⁵⁶⁶ U Win Maung (Tampawaddy), discussion; U Win Maung Myint, discussion.

⁵⁶⁷ Their nat names reflect their role as tax collectors; 'Taung' meaning south and 'Myauk' meaning north. As with all the nats, there are several variations to their names and legend, and that of their mother, Shwe Nabe. The *GPC* includes a passage mentioning their role and giving their names as *Pyissinbyu* and *Pyissinnyo*. *GPC*, 18. For the legends current in the 19th century as recorded by the Myawaddy Mingyi, see Temple, "A Native Account," 221-222.

⁵⁶⁸ This very literal interpretation of the iconography makes complete sense to a person with no background knowledge of Hindu art. A Mandalay *natkadaw* explained the use of the six arms on these two nats to Takatani Michio, a professor of anthropology at Hiroshima University, as being due to their being forced to box to the death. Takatani Michio, "On Narrative Formation of Spirit Legends in Burma (Myanmar)," in *Dynamics of Ethnic Cultures across National Boundaries in Southwestern China and Mainland Southeast Asia*, eds. Hayashi Yukio and Yang Guangyuan (Kyoto: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 2000), 154-68.

Magyi and Myauk Min Shin Hpyu the precursor for the sculpture, or was the legend grafted onto older sculptures of Brahmanic or Hindu deities whose histories had been lost? Either way, this pair of statues, now identified as two brother nat Lords, were the most striking and intriguing I encountered during fieldwork.

The statues are housed in individual Bagan era brick temples, now decorated with glass mosaic, images of owls and *pyiqtaint'aun*, at Kyanzittha's Nagayon temple near Singu, a village approximately 20 miles from Bagan (Figs. 499 to 502).⁵⁶⁹ The Burney MS and the *Inventory* record the location of the two nat Lords' *natkùn* at Singu Ohn village, Gupin town; and at Sigu Ohn village, Kyapin town respectively; but whether this is the same location is uncertain.

The two nats face each other across a platform containing a modern shrine housing three images of their sea-serpent mother, Shwe Nabe.⁵⁷⁰ Both statues, along with the main Buddha image within the temple itself, are made of sandstone overlaid with paint and gold leaf, and all are dated to Kyanzittha's reign.⁵⁷¹ Each statue looks to have originally been sculpted fully in the round, but this is impossible to confirm as they are now attached to their shrine's rear wall. The most striking thing about them is their great height and massiveness — they were clearly created to impress and still pack a tremendous visual punch today.

Both nats stand tall on thick, sturdy legs, supported by a lower pair of arms grasping staves which anchor them to the ground and provide stability. Each nat's upper hands hold *thanlyeq* at chest level. Both are 'dressed' in elements of royal costume: a *thinkyit* (decorative frontlet) covering their foreheads, thick earplugs, wrist and arm bangles, a breastplate and a short *pāhsò*, both heavily decorated. A spiral motif is incised into their gently swollen bellies, at a point where

⁵⁶⁹ The owl is revered for its wisdom. The *pyiqtaint'aun* is a traditional Myanmar toy that bounces back when you punch it (also known as an Everstand doll in Myanmar, or as a Tumbling Kelly in the West). They have become a visual metaphor for the resilience of the Myanmar people and are commonly seen decorating shrines and temples in Upper Myanmar.

⁵⁷⁰ Her images are set facing the main Buddha image at the complex, which faces east. Behind her and a little to the right is an image of Ko Gyi Kyaw, and a small shrine with an image of Myin Hpyu Shin has been added to the western wall of Myauk Magyi's shrine. To the north of Myauk Mingyi's shrine is another shrine housing more modern images of Shwe Nabe. These additions demonstrate the ongoing evolution of these ritual spaces.

⁵⁷¹ The beautiful five-metal Buddha now in the Bagan Archaeological Museum was discovered at this site. There are several glosses connecting Kyanzittha, and his temples, with *nagà*. U Min Swe, Deputy-Director of the Bagan Archaeological Museum, who accompanied me on my fieldwork in the Bagan area, thought these two shrines were purpose-built for these images.

a navel would be (Figs. 503 and 504). The first noticeable difference between them is their stance: Myauk Min Shin Hpyu is more dynamically posed, leaning slightly on one leg; while Taung Magyi stands more to attention. Their ‘clothing’ is also subtly different. However, the way the middle pairs of hands are posed is the most intriguing difference — Taung Magyi’s grasp small *thanlyeq*, pointing out towards the viewer with their tips touching (Fig. 503), and Myauk Min Shin Hpyu’s are cupped together as though holding a bowl, Fig. 504. The significance of these two gestures is unknown; however, the gesture of two hands held close to and facing the chest is seen in other nat images (see, for example, Fig. 427).⁵⁷²

An important design element included in these two statues is the spiral motif incised into their bellies. If we look broadly for another possible identification for these images, the presence of the spiral may indicate they are ‘*svayambhu*’ or ‘self-manifested’ images, and represent Vishnu. According to Lochtefeld:

[Svayambhu] images are believed to be intensely holy and powerful, and to have a more pronounced sense of the deity’s presence ... they are [placed] where the deities are believed to be particularly present and “awake,” and thus more receptive to requests for favours ... For the god Vishnu, the best-known self-manifested form is the shalagram, a black stone containing the spiral-shaped fossil shell of a prehistoric sea creature, which is believed to be a symbol of his discus (chakra).⁵⁷³

The spiral motif raises an interesting question as to whether these statues were originally intended to portray Vishnu — or if it simply represents a bellybutton. If they are sculptures of Vishnu, they conform to the local concept of what that deity should look like, and therefore represent a form of Vishnu unrecorded in Myanmar until now. The main image in the only surviving Hindu temple at Bagan, the Nat Hlaung Kyaùn, is of Vishnu reclining on a serpent, although early photographs of Vishnu’s avatars, Fig. 505, display similar iconography to the two statues discussed here and were also sculpted in stone. However, none of the images of Vishnu’s avatars were recorded as originally having six arms, although one, on the rear wall, had two

⁵⁷² I have not been able to find a definite meaning for this mudrā. One informant suggested it denoted “peacefulness, kindness”, a very Buddhist interpretation. U Win Maung Myint, discussion.

⁵⁷³ Svayambhu imagery is believed to exist by virtue of divine manifestation rather than being made or established by human hands. James G. Lochtefeld, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Hinduism* Vol. II (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, Inc., 2002), 679.

added to the original four at a later date.⁵⁷⁴ Images of six-armed deities however do exist in Bagan's art, for example in the Abeyadana temple, another of Kyanzittha's Buddhist temples.⁵⁷⁵ Conversely, it may be that the sculptor borrowed the concept of six arms equalling great power as an appropriate form for a local nat to take — whether the legend of the two Brothers was current at the time or not.

No less impressive are similar and equally massive sculptures of three six-armed nats known as Ba Nyo (Father Brown), Ba Hpyu Older Brother (Father White Older Brother) and Ba Hpyu Middle Brother (Father White Middle Brother), who occupy a shrine located at the southwestern corner of the Shinbin Nga Myethna Myatswa temple, a few hours drive from Bagan (Fig. 506).⁵⁷⁶ This temple was founded by Alaungsithu (r. 1112-67), and the nats' images are also believed to date to this time, although whether they have always been located here is unknown. All three stand on their original bases, now set into a concrete floor partly overlaid with linoleum, in a small cave-like shrine entered through a short narrow tunnel.

The first sight of Ba Nyo, Fig. 507, has tremendous impact. His statue is easily two metres high, and as he is set at the centre of the shrine's rear wall his is the first image seen on entering. On the viewer's left is Ba Hpyu Middle Brother, and facing him on the viewer's right is Ba Hpyu Older Brother. I was unable to closely inspect the statues as much of their detail was covered by heavily draped cloth and masses of red and white ribbons. What could be discerned is that Ba Nyo's statue was made fully in the round, making him easily the largest and one of the most impressive images seen.

Of the three statues, Ba Nyo most resembles those at the Nagayon. His face features large dome-shaped staring eyes, but here they are set under carved lids surrounding the top and sides of the

⁵⁷⁴ Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 144. A stone sculpture showing Vishnu reclining on his serpent, with another four-armed portrayal seated cross-legged above, was discovered at Thaton and dated to between the 8th and 10th centuries. Stadtner, *Sacred Sites*, 170.

⁵⁷⁵ As noted by Stadtner, "Hindu deities were also part of Mahayana Buddhism prevalent in eastern India, but this is the clearest expression of these themes at Pagan." Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan*, 189. Luce noted the Abeyadana images are shown in their 'fierce' aspects: "with tusks and tushes, lolling tongues, necklaces of skulls; holding, or twined with, snakes; carrying off women; brandishing weapons or human heads." A six-armed image, identified as Avalokiteshvara, was also found at Thaye Khittaya, and a six-armed image of Ganesha was once in the 'Rangoon Museum'. Luce, *OBEP* Vol. 1, 195, 200 and 206.

⁵⁷⁶ According to a local informant there was once a fourth statue, Ba Hpyu Younger, which is now missing.

dome (Fig. 508). A thicker ridge outlines the curve of both eyes and the bridge of the nose, rather like an elongated single eyebrow. His ears have holes bored in them that probably once held earplugs, and he wears Bagan style shoulder armour and upper arm bangles, of the same style as Min Mahagiri's statue at the Tharaba Gate (Fig. 254). His middle pair of hands are placed in prayer position, meeting in the centre of his chest, his upper hands brandish *thanlyeq*, and the lower pair grasp wooden staves.

Ba Hpyu Older Brother's face has the most exaggerated features, now emphasised by added paint (Fig. 509). Again the eyes are large, round and staring, set beneath highly arched brows whose shape runs down to form the side of his nose. His lips are set in a gentle smile, softening what would otherwise be a fierce expression. His front pair of hands are held in the position of homage, but lower, allowing a view of the four-petalled ornament at the base of his panelled collar. His Bagan-style crown is decorated with small six-petalled flowers around the lower brim, and with a saw-tooth motif running above an intervening band, now painted red.

Ba Hpyu Middle Brother's face is narrower than Ba Nyo's, and he still has a large petalled earplug with a narrow stem inserted in the hole bored in his right ear (Fig. 510). His crown features a flower motif running around its lower border. His eyes are round, but flat, set either side of a flattened nose above a thin upper lip, and his eyebrows are moulded in a higher arch as two separate features. His nose is reminiscent of the Bodaw Stele figure discussed in Chapter 3, and his lips are moulded in the same manner as the Shwezigon's nats shown in Fig. 369. The Middle Brother's central pair of hands are also set in the position of homage, but much closer to his chest and raised higher than Ba Nyo's. Both upper hands hold *thanlyeq*, as do his two lower hands — one held out front, swathed in a thick mass of ribbons, the other down by his side. The sculptor gave him Bagan era shoulder armour, wrist and ankle bangles, and a short version of a scalloped *k'àbounsa*, the top part fashioned to appear to be tucked into a waistband (Figs. 511 and 512). The design of the *k'àbounsa* on the Middle Brother suggests this image, if not all three, can be dated to the late 17th to 18th centuries.

The six-armed iconography recorded for Taung Magyi and Myauk Min Shin Hpyu in the *Inventory* is more clearly seen in Figs. 513 and 514, from the collection of the Burma Studies

Center at the National Illinois University. Although these are undated and the weapons are missing, the central pair of hands held in the posture of homage and the presence of the military helmets suggests they were created according to the *Inventory's* iconography. There is at least one variation of this where all six arms hold weapons, where the Brothers have also been portrayed riding horses — iconography not seen elsewhere (Fig. 515). All the pairs of these nat Brothers viewed during research were distinguished from each other by slightly different coloured clothing, or a slightly different artistic treatment of their helmet or other small detail, as in the images presented here.

Local guardian nats with six arms are also not uncommon. Fig. 516 was identified as Ame Yeyin's brother, and is a subsidiary figure in one of her *natnàn*. This statue may be a reattribution, or its depiction with six arms may simply be because the carver was comfortable appropriating well-known iconography for another nat, possibly as a way of linking him with the well known and powerful Brothers via the iconography. Two small paintings of the nats Ko Thein Shin and Bo Min Kyaw from a folio of the Wynford Album were also depicted with six arms (Figs. 517 and 518). Ko Thein Shin was appointed to the Thirty-Seven Lords by Pindale Min, although the KDKT's *parabaiq* records he has eight arms. Bo Min Kyaw is included in Mindon Min's pantheon of Thirty-Seven Nats, and was recorded as the husband of Shin Goun Mya in the KDKT's *parabaiq*, but his iconography was not recorded. The Wynford Album's artist may well have used the six-arm motif as a means of distinguishing him from the other nats depicted on the same folio, which is discussed below.

TEMPLE'S VISUAL SOURCES

As a rule, images of Nats are uncouth objects, generally made of wood, with some sort of human countenance. Those of the 'Thirty-Seven Rulers' are being carefully preserved within the precincts of the Shwezigon Pagoda at Pagan.

Taw Sein Ko, quoted in Temple's *The Thirty-Seven Nats*⁵⁷⁷

My specimens are, however, I am glad to say, fine examples of indigenous art.

Temple, *The Thirty-Seven Nats*⁵⁷⁸

In 1857, some 28 years before Temple's arrival in Mandalay, the fourth and final iteration of the Outside Thirty-Seven Lords was compiled by the KDKT and his colleagues in the court of Mindon Min, then at Amarapura (see page 11). This iteration, known as the ခုနစ် (the Thirty-Seven Lords), was first propitiated as part of the protection rites undertaken to secure the land at the king's future royal city at Mandalay.⁵⁷⁹ At the same time, and very confusingly, a completely separate pantheon called the ခုနစ် (the Thirty-Seven Nats) — without the modifier 'min', meaning Lord — was propitiated as part of the same ceremonies.⁵⁸⁰ This pantheon of Thirty-Seven Nats is similar in makeup to the Shwezigon's Inside Thirty-Seven Lords, as it comprises both 'higher' and 'lower' guardian nats, including Thakya Min, Byamma, the Four Great Kings, nats representing the main elements and other indigenous local guardian nats (see Appendix H).

By 1885, when the annexation of Myanmar by the British was complete, and Temple was put in charge of the city of Mandalay and the royal palace, the complexities of this cultural landscape were probably only understood in any real depth by a few members of the court and the *natt'ain* appointed by Mindon Min to maintain the royal city's nat shrines.⁵⁸¹ With Mindon Min long dead and his court largely dispersed by the time Temple was put in charge, it is possible that the

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., 33-4. Taw Sein Ko translated the suffix 'min' as 'ruler' rather than 'Lord'.

⁵⁷⁸ Temple, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, 34.

⁵⁷⁹ Thakya Min was omitted, and other names differ slightly from those recorded by the Myawaddy Mingyi. See Appendix H for a full list.

⁵⁸⁰ Tainturier, "The Foundation of Mandalay," 274-5 and 327-33.

⁵⁸¹ An account of the *natt'ain* appointed to tend Mandalay's nat shrines is given in SSMK *Foundation Report*, 90-1.

people he spoke with about the nats were unaware of the existence of the former king's pantheons of Thirty-Seven Nats and Thirty-Seven Lords, or the distinctions between them. Additionally, Temple's informants appear to have been unaware of the existence of the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords at the Shwezigon, as these are not mentioned anywhere in his book. Nevertheless, a group of nats known as the 'Thirty-Seven Nats' was well-known, even if, as Temple noted, he had difficulty finding out about them at the time. Still, the colourful legends of the more popular nat Lords and local guardian nats were known to local people, and their oral histories formed the basis for his research.⁵⁸²

Over a hundred years after its original publication, Temple's *The Thirty-Seven Nats* remains a remarkably beautiful book, richly illustrated with pictures of the nats from his choice of visual sources. These include the lovely coloured *parabaiq* paintings of nat statues that form the book's front endpapers, the black and white illustrations that form the book's rear endpapers, and the dozens of smaller coloured illustrations taken from the Wynford Album scattered throughout. The main illustrations — those in the book's two sets of endpapers — conform to the iconography set out in Maung Kyaw Yan's copy of the Myawaddy Mingyi's *Inventory*. Not surprisingly, so too do the carvings of the nats created by Maung Kyaw Yan and his workshop for Temple's private collection.

Although the *Inventory* and the KDKT's *parabaiq* specify the species of wood to be used for creating nat images, all of Temple's carvings were made in teak.⁵⁸³ Given the British government's hunger for this particular resource at the time, teak is a wood Temple probably would have valued more highly. Viewed as a group, his collection first appears heavily standardised as the statues are all the same colour and of similar size.⁵⁸⁴ Contemporary statues would have been lacquered then decorated with *thayò* moulding, gold leaf and mosaic decoration in the conventional Mandalay style of the time, indicating Temple also made an aesthetic choice to leave them undecorated. Although this makes them appear rather drab, especially when seen together, they all display the subtle differences recorded in the *Inventory*

⁵⁸² Temple, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, 33.

⁵⁸³ BUR MS 200, 40; SMMK, *Foundation Report*, 246–63. The *Inventory* specifies either *sagà*, *yamane*, *pādaug* or *sagàthiq*, but the statues created for Mandalay were made from *yamane* or *sagà* wood.

⁵⁸⁴ Temple's statues were displayed at his home in England, and were photographed for the sale catalogue when his collection was sold. See Herbert, in Temple, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, IX.

and the KDKT's *parabaiq* — in the elements of regalia given to each one, the position of their arms and legs, or the gestures they make. The decorative elements that would conventionally have been rendered in *thayò* moulding and gold leaf have instead been wrought by finely detailed incising by the carvers, details only appreciable at close view.⁵⁸⁵ As with many of the nats with similar iconography, knowledge of the nuances recorded in the primary sources is required to identify each accurately. For example, Mintha Maung Shin Nat, Fig. 519, is the one whose right hand is shown upheld, playing the *saùn*, while Minye Aungdin, Fig. 520, merely holds one.

Given the similarities between so many of the nats, it is perhaps unsurprising that my examination of Temple's statues, the majority of which are now in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, revealed that Thakya Min's statue was confused with that of another nat whose iconography features an elephant — Aungpinle Hsin Hpyu Shin. The *Inventory* records these two nats as follows:

အောက်ခုံဆင်ရုပ် ခေါင်း၃လုံး။ ၎င်းအပေါ် ပဒုမ္မာကြာပွင့် သက္ကနံ။ ၎င်းအပေါ်သကြားရုပ်
မတတတ်ရုပ်လျက်။ လကယာခရုသင်း။ လကဝဲသားမြီးရုပ်ခွဲကိုင်၍။ သိကြားတံဆာအစုံနှင့်
တုလုပ်ရသည်။

Underneath stand an elephant form with three heads. He is above on a *pādounma* lotus blossom form. Above this Thakya statue stands upright. Right hand holds a conch. Left hand holds a yak-tail fly whisk. Make the Thakya statue with complete regalia.⁵⁸⁶

ဆင်ဖြူရုပ်မတ်တတ်ပေါ်တွင်ပလ္လင်တင်၍။ ပလ္လင်ပေါ်မှာနတ်ရုပ်တင်ပြင်ခွေ။ လက်ယာက
ရုပ်ကိုင်။ လက်ဝဲက ဒူးတင်။ ဗောင်းသရဘူနားတောင်းအစုံရှေ့သည်။ ဆင် ရှေ့ဦးစီးချွန်းကိုင့်
ဝတ်တွားနေရသည်။ နောက်ပဲ့လူစီးဟန်လည်းပါသည်။

Hsin Hpyu Shin stands very upright on top of a white elephant form. Placed on throne. Nat image sits cross-legged on throne. Right hand holds a fan. Left hand placed on knee. Complete sculpture with *baùn* crown and earplugs. In front of elephant the *mahout* rides holding an elephant goad lying down position. At back of throne, man rides procession style.⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸⁵ The punch mark designs on Halin pottery are the same as those found on Temple's nat carvings, showing the use of a traditional tool and design persisted into the late 1800s, although the tool itself may have been of modern manufacture. San Shwe, "Ceramics in Myanmar Archaeology," paper presented at the International Burma Studies Conference, Singapore, August 2014.

⁵⁸⁶ BUR MS 200, 40.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

As we can see from the images of Thakya Min and Aungpinle Hsin Hpyu Shin from Temple's sources, Figs. 521 to 526, they accord with the respective descriptions in the *Inventory*. However, Temple's statue in the Ashmolean, although clearly of the *dewa* nat, has a nameplate attached to the front of its three-headed elephant base identifying him as Aungpinle Hsin Hpyu Shin. This error probably occurred towards the end of the period in which the collection of statues were being carved. In the words of Temple's clerk, who wrote to his employer on 21 July 1894:

I am glad to inform you that at present it is going on well, as 26 out of the 50 figures are done. You will be greatly astonished to hear that Mg Kyaw Yan contractor who promised you to finish these nats within two months, had now absconded after finishing 21 figures ... I have succeeded in managing to get hold of Mg Kyaw Yan's 3 or 4 men in my house to continue to do the work ...⁵⁸⁸

One of the figures yet to be carved was Thakya Min.

Temple's clerk wrote a follow up letter on 30 August 1894, advising Temple that 32 of the carvings were being shipped to him the following week, which included Aungpinle Hsin Hpyu Shin but not Thakya Min. The name of each nat had been written in English and Burmese on a visiting card, and pinned to the base of each.⁵⁸⁹ As the workshop's journeymen completed the carvings, it may be at that point in time that the two nat's identities were confused, or when they were packed for shipping. Temple's clerk may not have known the difference between them, and Temple himself had already left the country.

Nevertheless, it is strange the error was not picked up when Temple came to write his articles for the *Indian Antiquary* in 1900. These featured photographs of his carvings, but Aungpinle Hsin Hpyu Shin is titled 'Thakya Nat' and vice versa. The same error subsequently found its way into Temple's *The Thirty Seven Nats*, despite the illustrations of the nat statues in the *parabaiq* and the book's endpapers both clearly showing the *Inventory's* iconography.⁵⁹⁰ Although both the articles and the book were written before Temple had found his copy of Maung Kyaw Yan's copy of the *Inventory*, he still had these illustrations to refer to. Still, the error was made, and found its ways onto the small brass nameplates affixed to the base of each carving. Thakya Min's

⁵⁸⁸ Letter from Maung Po Tsu(?), Temple's clerk, dated 21 July 1894, MS EUR F98/66, The British Library. This letter, and a follow up regarding the shipment of the statues to Temple's new posting in the Andaman Islands is quoted in part in Patricia Herbert's essay on Temple. See Herbert, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, V.

⁵⁸⁹ Letter from Maung Po Tsu(?), Temple's clerk, dated 30 August 1894, MS EUR F98/66, The British Library.

⁵⁹⁰ Temple, "Thirty-Seven nats of the Burmese," plates. Temple, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, 58 and 71.

statue, now in storage at the Ashmolean, is shown next to its three-headed elephant base with the *pădounma* lotus blossom on top at Figs. 527 and 528, but is named Aungpinle Hsin Hpyu Shin. The correct Aungpinle Hsinbyushin statue and its elephant base, with the *mahout* sitting at the front of the elephant, is shown in Figs. 529 and 530.

BUR MS 208 and BUR MS 209

Aside from the illustrations published as his book's endpapers, Temple had access to other visual material, most notably another two complete sets of black and white illustrations now in the British Library. These illustrations are beautifully drawn, completely captivating, and intriguing in their own way. The first album, catalogued as BUR MS 208, contains 39 drawings, 37 of which have handwritten notes beside them identifying the nat and describing the salient points of its iconography, not all of which follow the *Inventory*. The two drawings on the last page may have been created as variants for a customer to choose from, but it is difficult to say as neither have accompanying notations. This album has a handwritten note presumably made by Temple on its cover: "NB. The list in this book is the same as in the Museum and in the painted book. That is it is the orthodox list. RT."⁵⁹¹

The second album, catalogued BUR MS 209, has many nats in common with those in the *Inventory* and the two other albums of black and white illustrations, but contains others that do not appear in any of Temple's sources. Again, this album has simple handwritten notations for many of the nats specifying what type of wood should be used, and what colour and pattern their clothing should be. An example is shown at Fig. 531, the drawing for Ma Dwe Hpyu — the notes above her head read "Younger sister Ma Dwe Hpyu, *sagà* wood", and on her lower garment "Red *acheiq t'amein*". These two albums were clearly drawn up as templates to be followed for the creation of nat statues or paintings. Taken all together, Temple's collection of illustrations strongly suggests they were acquired, if not created, when he was initially shopping around for a woodcarver to create carvings of the nats to take home with him to England.

A comparison of the illustrations of Thonban Hla from Temple's visual sources, Figs. 532 to 537, reveals that each artist was essentially following the description given in the *Inventory*.

⁵⁹¹ BUR MS 208, cover.

Ironically, the drawing of Thonban Hla that does not include the elephant and *bilù* as per the *Inventory*, Fig. 537, is from the set of black and white illustrations that Temple noted had the “orthodox list”.⁵⁹² Many of the drawings in this album do not follow the *Inventory*’s iconography, particularly those nats whose legends were perhaps more obscure at the time, as they are today. This suggests the artist was familiar with the nats’ names — perhaps from the *Mahagita Medanigyan*, as that was in circulation at the time — but not the iconography, unless he was following his own creative muse. Another outstanding exception is the artist of the images in BUR MS 209, who created images markedly different to his contemporaries. He also drew nats that do not appear in the *Inventory*, but who were clearly well-known at the time (as several still are today), such as Ame Yeyin, Fig. 538, and Ko Myo Shin, Fig. 539, shown in an unusual depiction riding a *makara*.

The anomalies across all Temple’s visual sources indicate that although at least one copy of the *Inventory* existed at the time, its circulation was not necessarily widespread. However, the artist who drew BUR MS 209 was aware of a couple of details recorded in the *Inventory*: the fact that Min Sitthu’s nat shrine was at Pakhan town, and that it was shared by Min Kyawzwa. As shown in Fig. 540, the rider on the horse is named as Pakhan Maung Min Kyaw, and next to him in the album’s folio is the illustration of Pakhan Sitthu Shin.

The Wynford Album

The one visual source Temple used in his book that he did not have when he was in British Burma was the collection of illustrations he found in the Wynford Album on his return home.⁵⁹³ This Album is a rich and astonishing collection of coloured ink paintings by different Myanmar artists, some embellished with gold leaf, depicting a variety of Myanmar related subjects, as well as illustrations of nat Lords and other local and Brahmanic nats. Its different folios were bound

⁵⁹² Ibid., cover.

⁵⁹³ Temple, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, 35.

together and presented to the India Office Library in 1849 by Lord Wynford, who, the British Library believes, probably acquired them from Henry Burney.⁵⁹⁴

Given Burney's possession of a copy of the Myawaddy Mingyi's *Inventory*, it is tempting to speculate that he commissioned at least two of the folios: those shown at Figs. 541 and 542 being the left and right-hand sides of one folio, and Fig. 543 a separate sheet. These beautifully realised little coloured ink and gold leaf illustrations were clearly made by the same artist, and every one of the Myawaddy Mingyi's nat Lords is depicted, according to the iconography he recorded. The artist appears to have included a range of ethnicities in his illustrations; Yun Bayin Nat, the former King of Chiangmai who died in exile in Myanmar, is depicted with darker skin than several other nats (Fig. 544). As these folios contain the same 37 nats as Temple's *parabaiq*, this set of drawings, alongside the black and white illustrations in BUR MS 208, undoubtedly would have reassured Temple that the list he had from the *Mahagita Medanigyan* was indeed the 'correct' one. However, had he known about the other iterations of the pantheon, he may have identified some of the other illustrations from the Wynford Album as nats from earlier periods in Myanmar's history. Folio 50, for example, contains a small illustration of Waruna Nat Min, whose image was placed in the Thursday planetary house to guard Mandalay palace (at the bottom right of Fig. 545 and at Fig. 546).⁵⁹⁵ It also contains illustrations of the nats recorded by the KDKT as being appointed to the Thirty-Seven by Pindale Min; and several who were the nat guardians of Inwa and/or Amarapura. Two of these are shown at Figs. 547 and 548: Thado Minsaw, for whom the Wungyi Padetheyaza composed an ode; and Pyaung Magyi, who was recorded in the KDKT's *parabaiq* as riding a gaur, a type of bison, as shown here.⁵⁹⁶

The faint handwriting at the bottom right of Folio 50 is a list of Temple's Thirty-Seven, and was probably made by him. Several illustrations also have faint pencil numbers alongside them, suggesting Temple was attempting to make his 'authentic' list agree with the folio. In his book,

⁵⁹⁴ Temple and Herbert provide a longer overview of the Wynford Album's contents in Temple, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, 35-6 and IV. One of the folios is now part of the British Library's Online Gallery, with the accompanying note: "The close similarity of the small annotations in European handwriting on these drawings and those on another of Burney's manuscripts suggests the drawings may have been commissioned by Burney in 1830 when he was living in Burma." British Library, "Online Gallery - Cosmological Diagram," <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/expfaith/buddmanu/cosdiag/033iolbur000203u00001000.html#notes> (last accessed February 5, 2016).

⁵⁹⁵ *Parabaiq*, Victoria and Albert Museum, IM.63-1938. This *parabaiq* is presented in more detail in the next chapter.

⁵⁹⁶ SMMK, *Foundation Report*, 255.

he described this folio as “... plainly a spurious one, as it is eked out with four *balus* ... and it is in any kind of order.”⁵⁹⁷ As Temple was unaware of the earlier iterations of the pantheon, he concluded that the folios in the Wynford Album featuring nat illustrations gave

some of the Nats in important forms, explanatory of the stories connected with them. There are also scattered throughout the pictures ... valuable variants of the forms which the Thirty-Seven assume in consequence of the traditions current about them.⁵⁹⁸

One of these variants was a nat called Shwe Pyi Gyi.

SHWE PYI GYI, THE ‘THIRTY-EIGHTH NAT’

Ko Kyaung Taga became the nat known as Shwe Pyi Gyi during Anawrahta’s reign when he was killed by a fire rocket at the Shwezigon *pāyà*’s festival. The description of how to make his sculpture was included in the *Inventory* and the KDKT’s *parabaiq*:

နတ်ရုပ်သိုးဆောင်း။ ခူးတဘက်တောင်ခူးတဗက်လှဲ။ လက်ယာတားတမ်း။ လက်ဝဲခူးတင် တုလုပ်ရသည်။

Nat image European hat. One knee upright, one knee laying down. Right hand holds a *dà* to the shoulder. Left hand covers knee.⁵⁹⁹

ရွှေပြည်ကြီးနတ်ရုပ် ခုံ ပါ ၁ တောင်။ လက်ျာခူးထောင်။ လက်ဝဲခူးလှည်း။ လက်ျာလက် ဓါးသံလျက်ထမ်း။ လက်ဝဲခူးတင်။ ရွှေချသိုဆောင်း။ မျက်နှာ ငွေပိန်းချ။ ကိုယ် ခြေ လက် ရွှေပိန်းချ။ ယမနေသားကိုထုလုပ်။

... Shwe Pyi Gyi Nat, image 1 *taun* [45.72cm] high. Right knee upright. Left knee laying down. Right hand holds a *dà thanlyeq* to the shoulder. Left hand covers knee. European hat painted gold. Face painted silver. Body legs and arms painted gold. Made from *yamane*.⁶⁰⁰

When Temple chose the illustrations from the Wynford Album to decorate his book, he was unaware of the existence of Shwe Pyi Gyi, as at the time he had overlooked the copy of the *Inventory* given to him by Maung Kyaw Yan. Therefore, when he included an illustration of Ngazishin and Shwe Pyi Gyi on page 4 of his book, he must have believed the original caption

⁵⁹⁷ Temple, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, 36. Thakya Min’s illustration, at top left, has been squeezed in by the artist. In the KDKT’s *parabaiq*, Ngazishin is recorded first, then “Thakya Magyi”. SMMK, *Foundation Report*, 246-8.

⁵⁹⁸ Temple, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, 36.

⁵⁹⁹ BUR MS 200, 46.

⁶⁰⁰ SMMK, *Foundation Report*, 247.

was incorrect. The original folio is shown at Fig. 541, with Ngazishin and Shwe Pyi Gyi — wearing his European hat — shown in the second row, third and fourth from left. Illustrations of both nats are featured again at the end of the accompanying folio, Fig. 543, and the caption beneath reads ဣကျောင်တကာနတ်၎င်းနတ်ကို ရွှေပြည်ကြီးနတ်ခေါ်သည် “Ko Kyaung Taga Nat this nat is called Shwe Pyi Gyi”. This is an interesting detail, as it suggests the artist was illustrating the nats from the *Inventory*. Ngazishin’s iconography is the tenth listed, and includes the description of Shwe Pyi Gyi, while Shwe Pyi Gyi’s details are repeated at the end, as quoted above.

Temple ignored the folio’s caption, and instead captioned the illustration “Shwebyingyi Nat (No. 25) invoking Ngagyaung-taga Nat (No. 11)”. The numbers refer to their position on his list, except No. 25 is actually Shwebyin Nyaungdaw Nat, whose image from the same folio is shown at Fig. 549.⁶⁰¹ This is an understandable error, given the small but important difference in the spelling of the two nats’ names in Burmese, ရွှေပြည်ကြီးနတ် (Shwe Pyi Gyi Nat) and ရွှေပြင်ကြီးနတ် (Shwe Pyin Gyi Nat) respectively. Temple made another error in his translation of the original notation when he transposed the number 9 in Burmese, ဉ္စ *kò*, as the number 5 ငှ *ngá*; another easy mistake to make given the characters are written as mirror images of each other. This accounts for the caption under the illustration on page 4 of his book appearing as “Ngagyaung-taga” instead of “Ko Kyaung Taga”.

The fluid nature of the different iterations of the Outside Thirty-Seven Lords is underscored by the way they are counted. Ngazishin, whose name is suffixed *hniq pà* (two sacred people) at the Shwezigon, is only counted as one nat by the Myawaddy Mingyi in the first part of his *Inventory*, but he records Shwe Pyi Gyi as a separate nat having a position in the Thirty-Seven in the second part. Similarly, the Taungbyon Brothers are counted as one nat by the Shwezigon, but as two separate nats by the Myawaddy Mingyi and the KDKT. However, as Temple was concerned with determining a definitive list of 37, when he published his partial translation of the *Inventory* in his *Indian Antiquary* article he footnoted the following comment, underneath his list of 37 names:

⁶⁰¹ Shwebyin Nyaungdaw Nat is the eldest of two famous Brother nats commonly referred to as the Taungbyon Brothers.

This list is exactly the same as to the order of the names as the list put forward by me in [The Thirty-Seven Nats] and almost identical as to the form of the names. These facts are of interest, as the correctness of my names and allocation has been disputed, and they are in strong confirmation of the other proofs of the accuracy of my list that I have already produced.⁶⁰²

When Temple rediscovered his copy of the *Inventory* he must have seen it as a vindication of the work he had done. Yet although one of his albums of black and white pencil drawings includes names that are markedly different to those on his list, and he had access to painted illustrations of others from the Wynford Album, these other names were discounted by him as incorrect, unorthodox, or as variants. Unfortunately, he did not record the sources that disputed his findings, which may even have provided him with the names of the nats recorded in the KDKT's *parabaiq*, or in Mindon Min's pantheon of Thirty-Seven Lords, which includes both Ngazishin and Ko Kyaung Taga.⁶⁰³

Where Temple acquired his painted *parabaiq* and black and white illustrations from is unknown. A comment made in his book — “I propose to explain now a series of illustrations made from the images in my possession” — certainly implies at least one set was drawn after his carvings had been made, and was essentially drawings of the carvings.⁶⁰⁴ The most likely candidate is the set of drawings in the endpapers to Temple's book — the drawing of Shin Nemi, Fig. 550, definitely appears to be of Temple's statue, shown at Fig. 551. Additionally, the drawings in the book's endpapers appear to have been made by two different hands, as some of the images have shaded contouring and others, like Fig. 550, are more simply sketched line drawings.

The provenance of Temple's painted *parabaiq* is more intriguing. Maung Kyaw Yan had his own copy of the Myawaddy Mingyi's iconography to follow when he made Temple's carvings, but it appears that Temple ordered them made in imitation of the statues featured in his *parabaiq* illustrations — or vice versa. His statue of Pareimma Mingaung (called Bayinmashin Mingaung) does not feature the crossbow held across the nat's shoulders, as specified in the

⁶⁰² Temple, “A Native Account,” 217, footnote 3.

⁶⁰³ In his book, Temple listed five lists of names, with notes, as source material for his book but the whereabouts of these are unknown. Temple, *The Thirty-Seven Nats*, 34.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

Inventory, and neither does the illustration in the *parabaiq*, nor Temple's carving (Figs. 552 and 553).⁶⁰⁵

THE INFLUENCE OF TEMPLE'S BOOK ON MYANMAR ARTISTS

The imagery of the nats reproduced in Temple's *The Thirty-Seven Nats*, painted by anonymous artists, is still a major influence on modern artists in Myanmar. For example, U Htwe Han and U Ba Nyunt's 2013 translation of Temple's book includes black and white line drawings of the *parabaiq* paintings from Temple's front endpapers (Figs. 554 to 558). This book also has drawings made by an unknown artist, who kept to the same graphic style as the *parabaiq*, but small differences in the iconography of the nats he or she drew indicate an awareness of older sources. For example, the nat pictured at Fig. 557, Pareimma Mingaung, holds a crossbow to his right shoulder, an element recorded in the *Inventory* and later texts, but a detail, as noted above, that is missing from the *parabaiq* illustration (Fig. 558). This easily obtained book was shown to me by one of my informants, Yawnathan, a popular artist living at Bagan, as the manual he turns to when a client wants a painting of one of the nats and he wants to check what it should look like. The iconography laid down by the Myawaddy Mingyi is therefore likely to continue being privileged in this artist's future work.

Another case of mistaken identity in Temple's book has had a dramatic influence on recent artistic representations of Min Mahagiri, the Lord of the Great Mountain. Fig. 559 shows an original folio from the Wynford Album depicting a powerful looking, six-armed nat brandishing different attributes on the left-hand side of the page, and the two golden heads, wrapped in red scarves, of Min Mahagiri and his Sister, Hnamedaw Taung yi Shin on the right-hand side. Both images were reproduced in *The Thirty-Seven Nats*, with the two heads captioned "The Golden Heads. Mahagiri Nat (No. 2) and his sister Hnamadawgyi Nat (No. 3), as seen at Pagan about 1826" — a caption that accords with the original Burmese notations surrounding the two images.

⁶⁰⁵ BUR MS 200, 49.

The illustration of the six-armed nat at the left of Fig. 559 was captioned “Image of Mahagiri Nat (No. 2), the Blacksmith, in the Shwezigon Pagoda at Bagan about 1826, showing Indian origin.” Again, the captions on the original folio tell a slightly different story, and again what made it into Temple’s book was complicated by his oversight of the iconography recorded in the *Inventory*. The Burmese notation at the top left above the illustration reads “Bagan area at Sigu town”, the location of the nat’s shrine according to the *Inventory*, and the one to the left of the nat’s leg reads “Taung Mingyi *meissa* Nat”. Temple appears to have translated the Burmese text literally as “Mountain Great Lord evil/heretic Nat”, and therefore identified him as Mahagiri, which translates as “Great Mountain”. However, as recorded in the *Inventory*, Taung Magyi Nat’s iconography reads

ကြာခံနံပေါ်တွင်။ လက်ဝဲလက်ယာတတောင်ဆစ်က။ လက် ၃ ချောင်းစီပေါ်သည်။
 လက်ယာလက် ၂က အုပ်ချီ၍ ယင်မှာတသံသည်။ လက်ဝဲ ၂က။ ဒိုင်း ၁။ တုတ်သိုင်း ၁ ကိုင်သည်
 လက်ယာ ၂က တား ၁။ လှံ ၁ ကိုင် ၍ မောက်တိုဆောင်သည်။ စစ်ဝတ်တံဆာ ခါးစည်း။ အစုံ။
 On top of a lotus stand. Left and right side arms join at elbow. Three forearms are equal.
 Two left and right hands pay homage at the level of the chest. Two left hands. Hold a
 shield and a staff. Two right hands hold a *dà* and a spear. Wears a military helmet.
 Complete with military clothes and regalia. Taung Magyi Nat and Myauk Min Shin
 Hpyu Nat the two sculptures are the same.⁶⁰⁶

Once again, had Temple trusted the iconography of the nats as recorded in the illustrations he had, he may not have mis-identified the nat as Min Mahagiri. This image has gone on to have its own life, as it was chosen for the cover of the pirate photocopy of the 1991 Kiscadale edition of *The Thirty-Seven Nats* found today in Myanmar bookshops. It also appears to have been the model for Singer’s illustration of Min Mahagiri published in Rodrigue’s 1992 *Nat-Pwe*, and his similar illustration in Khin Maung Than’s 2001 book (Fig. 561). As a variant of Singer’s illustration was reproduced in Pyo Thara’s 2010 book, *Naq A’caun*, (Fig. 562), this relatively new representation of Min Mahagiri with six arms appears likely to be perpetuated.⁶⁰⁷

Two of Yangon’s modern painters, Aung Khaing and Satt Aung T.T., cite Temple’s book as a reference for nat iconography. Aung Khaing looked to Temple and to Po Kya’s book when he painted his series of the nats in 2014 and 2015. Although many of the paintings in this series

⁶⁰⁶ BUR MS 200, 46. The names ‘Taung Magyi’ and ‘Taung Mingyi’ are interchangeable in the literature.

⁶⁰⁷ Pyo Thara does not identify the artist of his illustrations, but does credit Khin Maung Than’s 2001 publication in the bibliography at the end of his book, making this the likely source. Pyo Thara. *Nat A’caun*, 283-4.

only feature an element or two of the iconography from the images published in Temple's book — and in any event are executed in Aung Khaing's own distinctive style — the comparisons shown at Figs. 562 to 565 clearly demonstrate the influence of Temple's *parabaiq* paintings and black and white illustrations.⁶⁰⁸ Others are his own interpretations. One of his renditions of Min Kyawzwa, for example, emphasises the dissolute nature of the nat, who enjoys drinking and cock fighting (Fig. 566), rather than the standard iconography showing him riding a horse, as in Fig. 567. Temple's influence is also seen in two paintings by Satt Aung T.T., Figs. 568 to 571, which clearly reference the *parabaiq* and the black and white drawings from the endpapers of Temple's book.

THE MODERN 'THIRTY-SEVEN NATS'

Today, the lay population know of the more prominent nat Lords from their legends. The 'Thirty-Seven Nats' are well-known as a category, although most of my informants were unaware of the different historic iterations of the pantheon and many referred me to Temple's publication. Although Min Sithu cites the *Inventory* as the reference pantheon for *natkadaw* involved in modern *natpwèh*, their practice appears to have evolved considerably from the time of Mandalay's foundation, when each nat included in Mindon Min's Thirty-Seven Lords had a *natt'ein* appointed to take care of its shrine.⁶⁰⁹ At the time of Brac de la Perrière's initial research a century later in the 1980s, the principal nats she recorded were a mix of nat Lords, four Queens of the cardinal directions, and local guardian nats who do not appear in the *Inventory* or the KDKT's *parabaiq* but are nevertheless considered extremely powerful.⁶¹⁰

When Khin Maung Than visited the famous Taungbyon festival in 1992, he too listed the nats who had *natnàn* present. Once again, none were for the 'Thirty-Seven' and the majority were for

⁶⁰⁸ The entries Aung Khaing wrote for the catalogue accompanying his exhibition provide a description of how each nat should be sculpted, although the sequence follows the order given in Po Kya, whom Aung Khaing cited. My thanks to Aung Khaing for permission to reproduce the photographs of his paintings from the exhibition catalogue, and for his time. I also thank Pyay Way, from Nawaday Tharlar Gallery in Yangon, for arranging for me to interview Aung Khaing and Satt Aung T.T. Aung Khaing, interviewed 20 November 2015. Aung Khaing, *Myanmar Nats on Canvas*, 5.

⁶⁰⁹ Min Sithu, *Naqkòkwehmu Thamain*, 253. This was confirmed by Brac de la Perrière, although she notes that the nats propitiated today do not conform to the *Inventory*. Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière, email message to author, June 1, 2016.

⁶¹⁰ Brac de la Perrière, *Les Rituels*, 197-8.

nats not included in the *Inventory* or the KDKT's *parabaiq*.⁶¹¹ According to a fellow researcher, the 'Thirty-Seven' appeared in "healing rituals and so called 37-*min-pwes* that I joined, not as singular figures but as number, as 'the 37', a number that seemed somewhat potent in itself and a reference to central Burma."⁶¹² Another anthropologist researching nat rituals confirmed this was her experience too — not all the Thirty-Seven were propitiated and often other nats took centre stage. For example, Popa Medaw, Ame Yeyin, Ame Gyan, Ko Myo Shin and Pale Yin, all powerful and well-known local guardian nats in Upper Myanmar, appear in her photograph of a *natnàn* taken in 2015 (Fig. 572).⁶¹³

My own experience during fieldwork was the same. None of the *natnàn*, *natkùn* or small, local *natpwèh* I visited contained images of all the nats from the *Inventory*. All were for the main guardian nat of the locality, although often other prominent nats, such as Min Mahagiri, were accorded a place in the same shrine. These observations all support the identification of the 'Thirty-Seven Nats' as a category or entity paid homage to today by virtue of tradition. It appears likely modern *natpwèh* rituals evolved from Mindon Min's Thirty-Seven Lords to their current form once the original *natt'eìn* lost their royal patronage.

The role of the 'Thirty-Seven nats' has evolved into a more popular understanding, rooted in tradition, that they are the guardians of particular cultural groups. Khin Maung Than notes that Nyaunggyin Oh, Myaukbet Shin Ma and Anauk Mibaya are relied upon by people suffering illness; Thonban Hla is propitiated by women for beauty and passion; and those involved in real estate propitiate Min Mahagiri. Myanmar author Ma Thanegi wrote that the brothers Taung Magyi and Myauk Min Shin Hpyu are, appropriately, believed to be the guardians of martial arts, while Shin Nemi is the guardian of children. The popular *bilùmá* Popa Medaw is the guardian of women and families, and U Min Kyaw is the guardian of drunkards and gamblers.⁶¹⁴

⁶¹¹ Khin Maun Than, *Ayuthihmu Naqkòkwehmu*, 106-8.

⁶¹² Friedlind Riedel, PhD candidate in anthropology, Bauhaus-University Weimar. Personal communication, January 7, 2016.

⁶¹³ Keziah Wallis, Teaching Fellow in Religious Studies and PhD candidate in anthropology, University of Otago. Personal communication, 28 July 2016. Keziah told me "I feel fairly confident in saying that a full pantheon is not the norm. In fact from what I understand getting images of some of the less popular nats can be really hard."

⁶¹⁴ Khin Maun Than. *Yòya Naq Youncihmu*, 5; Ma Thanegi, "Spirit Worship in Myanmar," 2014.

S U M M A R Y

The chronological survey of the nats presented at the beginning of this chapter highlights how poorly the Outside Thirty-Seven Lords have, until now, been understood. I have not been able to find any evidence that local guardian nats were replaced by those of royal blood, nor that they were all accorded fiefs. According to the *Inventory* and the KDKT's *parabaiq*, many did not have independent shrines or festivals, even though “in the reigns of ancient kings” they were one of the 12 guardian nats, and/or were appointed to the Thirty-Seven nat Lords.⁶¹⁵ There is also no evidence that the ‘Thirty-Seven Nats’ were a product of a religious policy of Myanmar’s kings; or that they were considered subversive. Rather, the evidence indicates that Myanmar’s kings paid homage to nats to ensure the smooth functioning of the kingdom, and the carrying out of the king’s wishes, giving the nats a purely pragmatic and administrative function. This appears to be a practice shared by both the Lower Myanmar Mon kingdoms and the Upper Myanmar Burmese kingdoms, with no clear evidence as to whether the practice was started by either or adopted by one from the other.

The presence of nat Lords with royal connections in a discrete pantheon is logical in the context of providing continuity with ancestors, earlier dynasties and kingdoms. Similarly, the connection of several with ‘victory grounds’, or with the king’s military, made them obvious choices for a guardianship role. Their fundamental connection with place has hitherto been overlooked in analyses of this particular pantheon.

The role of the nat Lords as guardians of royal cities is confirmed by the Myawaddy Mingyi’s *Inventory* and the KDKT’s *parabaiq*, as well as their iconography and placement at Inwa, Amarapura and Mandalay. Their role has deep roots in Myanmar culture reaching back to the Bagan era, demonstrated by the inclusion of Aungzwa Magyi and Ngazishin — two nats representative of the king’s armies — in all the iterations through to Mindon Min’s Thirty-Seven Nats and his Thirty-Seven Lords. Their guardianship role is particularly evident in the ceremonies conducted during the foundation of Mandalay, as discussed in the next chapter, “Guardians of the Kingdom”.

⁶¹⁵ The expression ရှေးမင်းတို့လက်ထက် “in the reign of ancient kings” is used throughout the *parabaiq*. SMMK, *Foundation Report*, 242-63.

The impressive six-armed statues presented here warrant more in-depth research, with reference to local history. Were they originally intended as Hindu deities or a depiction of Vishnu, created to guard the environs of the monuments where they are housed; or have they always represented locally famous guardian nats or the two famous nat Lord brothers, Taung Magyi and Myauk Min Shin Hpyu? The two sites where these five massive six-armed statues are found — Kyanzitha's Nagayon temple and the Shinbin Nga Myethna Myatswa temple — are geographically close to each other, although this does not of course preclude any of them from being moved from another, more distant, location. Careful cleaning and removal of the build up of wax from votive candles may bring to light iconography that would identify them more clearly, as would the temporary removal of the textile offerings on the statues at the Shinbin Nga Myethna Myatswa temple.

Notwithstanding the mis-attributions in Temple's book brought to light by my research, his publication has ensured that the iconography of the nat Lords in the early 1800s, as beautifully executed in Temple's book's two sets of endpapers, are preserved in an illustrated form for posterity. Temple chose to reject the black and white illustrations from the albums catalogued in the British Library as BUR MS 208 and 209, both as models for the carvings in his private collection and as illustrations to embellish his book. This accident of history has led to several modern artists following the iconography from the *Inventory*, as illustrated in Temple's endpapers, rather than the more recent iconography recorded in the KDKT's *parabaiq*. Whether the unknown artists who created the two albums of wonderful drawings set aside by Temple were incognisant of the *Inventory*, or whether they were expressing new ideas freed from the constraints of the artistic milieu controlled by the court, will never be known. Until now, their artistic interpretations of these nats have been 'hidden in plain sight' and have gone unseen; as has the iconography recorded by the KDKT. Meanwhile, Temple's collection of statues at the Ashmolean are an important primary source to stand alongside the *Inventory*. A more focused study of this extraordinary body of late Konbaung era woodcarving may well illuminate our knowledge of the working methods and motifs of the time.

Temple's initial decision to rely on the *Mahagita Medanigyan* as an accurate primary source for an 'orthodox' list, supported by his rediscovery of the *Inventory*, led to the commission of his

collection of statues and to the publication of *The Thirty-Seven Nats*, effectively writing Shwe Pyi Gyi, the 'Thirty-Eighth Nat', out of Western historiography. As I have shown, the choices and errors he made continue to reverberate in Myanmar's art today. Not least of these is the identity of Shwe Pyi Gyi, and his role accompanying Ngazishin, one of the more prominent nat Lords and one of the main guardians of Myanmar's royal cities. Temple's misidentification of Taung Magyi as Min Mahagiri, another accident of history, has influenced later portrayals of the country's original and most famous nat Lord of all, a change in traditional iconography that may go unnoticed. However, while Temple's *The Thirty-Seven Nats* is clearly a reference source for Myanmar's modern artists when they wish to portray a nat using traditional iconography, they are also clearly moving away from traditional methods of execution, if not form. How much further away from Temple's influence these artists continue to move remains to be seen.

The demise of the monarchy following the British occupation of Upper Myanmar in 1885 not only heralded the end of court patronage of the arts, but the end of royal propitiation of the nat Lords. What happened to the 37 *natt'ain* appointed by Mindon Min is unknown, but their role appears to have evolved into an entirely new form, which is now the focus of further research. From an art historical point of view, this modern cult is largely responsible for keeping Myanmar's long tradition of creating nat imagery alive.

CHAPTER 8

Guardians of the Kingdom

Kyawzwa was the youngest of four brothers, all of whom were Ministers to King Alaungsithu. While the older brothers were serious and well-behaved, Kyawzwa was a wild young man who married Bomè, the daughter of a toddy-wine maker from Popa village. He then spent his time drinking, gambling, cock-fighting and setting off fireworks. Eventually he died of drunkenness and became the nat Min Kyawzwa, patron nat of gamblers and drinkers.

His natthan goes as follows:

“Here am I come. I, Maung Kyawzwa, the dearly loved husband of Ma Bomè of Popa Village, clad in a spangled red garment. I, who drank deep of strong drink, and loved fireworks and cock-fights. I was the youngest of the four brothers, who long and faithfully served Alaungsithu, King of Bagan. Daily I went from place to place with my fighting cock in my arms and my money in my waistbelt, concealed from Ma Bomè. Many a time did we fight under the shade of the pipul tree. Many a time did I reel along the streets, drunk on Ma Bomè’s liquor. Many a time the pretty little maids picked me up out of the gutter.”⁶¹⁶

⁶¹⁶ After Temple, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, 60.

INTRODUCTION

As argued in the preceding chapter, propitiating spirits of nature and spirits of place occurred both at a local level, and in the wider context of the kingdom under the aegis of the king.

Myanmar's rulers paid homage to local guardian nats, Buddhist and Brahmanic/Hindu *dewa* nats, and the nat Lords from different iterations of the Outside Thirty-Seven Lords, alongside their ancestors, planetary figures and spirits of the natural elements. This occurred in tandem with that other great cultural imperative — Buddhism — expressed in the practice of merit making by all levels of society, but most grandly by Myanmar's rulers through the founding of Buddhist monuments.

Primary sources reveal that Myanmar's Buddhist cosmology, used in conjunction with astrology, was fundamental to the ordering of space within the royal cities and palaces, from Kyanzittha's palace at Bagan in the 11th century, to Shwe Nankyawshin Narapati's palace at Inwa in the early 16th century, to Alaungpaya's at Shwebo in the 18th, through to Mindon Min's at Mandalay in the 19th. Both 'higher' and 'lower' nats had carefully defined roles to play in the creation of these cities and palaces, to ensure the protection and efficient governance of the respective kingdoms.⁶¹⁷

I begin this chapter with an analysis of the inscription recording the consecration of Kyanzittha's palace in 1102. This inscription suggests a Bagan era origin for a pantheon of 37 nats as guardians of a royal palace, and possibly, by extension, the entire kingdom. I then focus on the pantheons of nats called upon by Mindon Min and his ritual specialists to protect the

⁶¹⁷ For Kyanzittha's palace, see Blagden, *Epigraphia Birmanica* Vol. III, Part I, 35-68. The inscription recording Shwe Nankyawshin Narapati's palace is described in *Annual Report (Archaeological Survey of India) 1934-35* (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1935), 48-9. Alaungpaya's foundation of Shwebo is described in Than Tun, *Royal Orders Part III*, 9-10. On the foundation of Mandalay by Mindon Min, see Tainturier, "Foundation of Mandalay", 2010.

king's new royal city and palace at Mandalay in the late 1850s. Images from a *parabaiq* featuring the designs for the many thousands of statues and paintings employed in Mandalay's protection are presented here for the first time. These are beautiful artworks in their own right, but also highlight how seriously the court regarded the protection of the future royal city, and they illustrate the roles the different types of nats played in this regard. I conclude with a study of the imagery found at the site of the first nat shrine — the *natnàn* of Min Mahagiri and his sister on the upper slopes of Mt Popa — and the pillar of wood still enshrined there, to draw out the connection between royalty and a post-colonial era leader of Myanmar.

THE THIRTY-SEVEN NATS AT KYANZITTHA'S PALACE

The Thirty-Seven Buddhist Lords at the Ananda temple, discussed in Chapter 3, had an autochthonous counterpart at Kyanzitha's palace — the nat spirits of the auspicious trees felled for the palace's construction. The Mon language inscription recording the consecration of Kyanzitha's palace in 1102, inscribed on four stone pillars, reveals that a mix of Brahmanic, astrological and Buddhist rituals were observed, including offerings made to the palace's pillars and the *nagà* in the underworld realm. The lengthy description of the rituals performed centres on the pillars of the throne-room and audience hall, in which a golden statue of Buddha, a statue of the Buddhist *arahant* Lord Gavampati, and a copy of the *Tipiṭaka* were placed.⁶¹⁸

The order in which Blagden translated the faces of each pillar was later amended by Luce.⁶¹⁹ Reading the translation in the order Luce determined, a story unfolds of the repeated recitation of Buddhist *paritta* by monks and offerings to Nar, (conjecturally translated by Blagden as Narayana, ie. Vishnu), and ritual bathing and offerings made to the *yas* and *atas* pillars,

⁶¹⁸ Blagden, *Epigraphia Birmanica* Vol III Part I, 37-8.

⁶¹⁹ Luce's reordering of the translation was independently checked and verified by two other members of the Burma Historical Commission. Luce wrote that Blagden was given "inadequate information and inaccurate measurements" when he conducted his translation in England. The correct order to read the faces in Blagden's translation is S, N, R, Q, O, P – B, C, D, A – H, E, F, G – J, K, L, and M, rather than as published. G. H. Luce, "The Career of Htilaing Min (Kyanzitha). The Uniter of Burma, Fl. A.D. 1084-1113," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 1, no. 2 (1966): 64, footnote 1.

translated as the pillars of renown and fame.⁶²⁰ These were conducted by Brahman astrologers described as being “versed in house-building”, indicating their knowledge of architectural *shastra* (ancient manuals of design principles). After the post-holes were dug, 37 dwellings for the pillars were erected on the auspicious day of the full moon. The pertinent section of the inscription reads as follows:

... they made, for the pillars, decorations of plaintains [making] thirty-seven booths, spread thirty-seven mats, [and offered] water [in] a hundred and forty-eight vessels, thirty-seven golden flowers, thirty-seven altar candles, thirty-seven altar oblations, [and] water [in] the thirty-seven conch shells wherein [they] put cleaned rice [and] dubba grass ...⁶²¹

The Mon word Blagden translated as “booths” was noted in a footnote to his translation as having the literal translation of “dwellings”.⁶²² These 37 dwellings, erected and furnished with offerings, were, in all probability, for the nat spirits of the palace's most important pillars. Like the pillars erected at Bayinnaung's Kanbawzathadi Palace at Bago, they may have been tributary offerings from important centres in the kingdom (Fig. 573).⁶²³ If so, by providing 37 spirits of place with a literal dwelling in his palace, Kyanzittha bound them, and crucially, where they came from, both physically and metaphorically to the most important location at the heart of his realm.

Myanmar's kings have always faced the challenge of uniting (a euphemism for keeping control of) the various polities and their riches within the kingdom, and the tributary pillars at the Kambawzathadi palace at Bago bear witness to this being ritualised in a court setting.

⁶²⁰ At the time of his translation, Blagden noted that the distinction between *yas* and *atas* had not been determined, but thought it perhaps referred to ‘back’ and ‘front’. He notes it as a curious coincidence that the words also meant ‘renown’ and ‘fame’, and thought those meanings were inappropriate. Blagden, *Epigraphia Birmanica* Vol III Part 36, footnote 1.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, 48-9.

⁶²² *Ibid.*, 49, footnote 19. The footnote, in full, reads: “Literally “dwellings.” I suppose small decorative sheds are indicated. The word is used here like a sort of numeral coefficient following after *brāt cindran*.” The transliterated Mon version is found at *Ibid.*, 18 line 35.

⁶²³ According to information boards at the Kanbawzathadi Palace site, 136 of the 176 teak posts recovered from the site are inscribed with the names of towns and ministers. This information was recorded during a site visit on September 8, 2015. The post-holes and stone footings for the pillars at the site attributed as Kyanzittha's palace demonstrate the pillars there were taken from mature trees, with a dressed girth of about 1 metre, which we can assume would have been cut from trees deemed particularly important. Peter Grave and Mike Barbetti, “Dating the City Wall, Fortifications and the Palace Site at Pagan,” *Asian Perspectives* 40, no. 1 (2002): 83. Assuming the pillars were of teak — a wood commonly used for its imperviousness to pests and the straightness of its tree trunks — to attain that width they would have been cut from trees over 200 years old. Janice Stargardt in discussion with the author, August 4, 2014.

Spiro suggested the ‘Thirty-Seven Nats’ reflected Kyanzittha’s administrative provinces, writing “Initially, then, the number of nats included among the Thirty-Seven would have corresponded to the number, still unknown, of administrative provinces in the kingdom, plus, of course, Sakka [Thagya Min], the supernatural counterpart of the earthly king.” Shorto also concluded that 37 territorial nats from across the kingdom were inducted into the pillars at Kyanzittha’s palace, as an earthly counterpart to *Tawadeintha* heaven, but as discussed in Chapter 2, this interpretation relies on the addition of the Four Great Kings to make up the numbers.⁶²⁴ If a specifically Theravada Buddhist link with the pillars is to be privileged, it is more likely they stood for the Thirty-Seven Buddhist nats found at the nearby Ananda temple, or the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords from the Shwezigon — both monuments also attributed to Kyanzittha.

However, the *nagà* were propitiated during the king’s palace consecration ceremonies in exactly the same way as the nats – with the provision of a dwelling place and offerings made just before the post-holes for the pillars were dug.⁶²⁵ The importance of the *nagà* is echoed in Kyanzittha’s Shwezigon inscription, where the *nagà* king, Katakamma, causes the kingdom to be in “an enclosure of well-being like rising saplings of trees”, while Thakya Min watches over the kingdom from above and drives away enemies and the Four Great Kings keep watch.⁶²⁶ In the Shwezigon inscription this uniting of heavenly and terrestrial guardians is fundamental to the protection of the realm in order that the king could uphold Buddhism. It is therefore likely the propitiation of the *nagà* during the consecration of the Kyanzittha’s palace was for the same reason — territorial protection — and the pillars may well have stood for the locations of the kingdom contained within the “enclosure of well-being”.

The inscription recording the spirits of the auspicious trees felled for Kyanzittha’s palace being offered a home in return may be the first recorded induction of a pantheon of spirits as the

⁶²⁴ Shorto noted that the “sense” of this inscription is that a god was associated with each pillar. Shorto, *Dewatau Sotapan*, 136 footnote 48. In his article “The 32 “Myos” in the Medieval Mon Kingdom” Shorto asserts “the king [of Thaye Khittea] and his lords were the earthly embodiment of the Thirty-three Gods of the Tavatimsa heaven”, citing the GPC’s comparison of *Thaye Khittea* to *Sudassana*, Thakya Min’s abode in *Tavatimsa*. Shorto, “The 32 Myos,” 590. However, the Chronicle’s reference is not explicit. As translated by Pe Maung Htin and Luce, the passage reads “... Sakra [Thakya Min] founded the golden city of Tharehkittara, noble and glorious as *Sudassana* city, his own abode; marvellously graceful it was, having all the seven things needful for a city ...” GPC, 14. We must remember, too, that the main Chronicles were written many centuries after Kyanzittha’s reign.

⁶²⁵ Blagden, *Epigraphia Birmanica* Vol III Part I, 37-8.

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, 125-8.

guardians of a Myanmar kingdom.⁶²⁷ If so, the question then becomes what locations did they stand for? As contemporary images of guardian nats already existed at the Shwezigon and the Ananda, it is possible having an image representative of a 'lower' nat's territory was current at this time, but as the earliest images of 'lower' nats we have date to perhaps the 17th century this can only be conjectured. If, however, the names (if not the images) of the nats in the Shwezigon's nat pavilion are indeed from the Bagan era, it is likely some of them correspond to Kyanzittha's 37 locations, as their names reveal the important places they were tied to — Aung Pinle and Taungbyon — then the named nats of important locations: Seh Ywa Shin, the Lord of Ten Villages; Nga Ywa Shin, the Lord of Five Villages; Anauk Mibuya, the Northern Queen; Ye Ngan Pain, the Lord of the Sea; and Shan Kosehko, the Shan Lord of 99. Nevertheless, by the time of the next reliable source naming important nats — Bayinnaung's 1573 Royal Order some 250 years later — only seven nats are named as the guardians of the kingdom.

There are still two pillars recognised as important terrestrial nats in Upper Myanmar today. One is known as the Taungthaman Bo Bo Gyi, and stands in Lake Taungthaman next to U Bein's Bridge at Amarapura (Fig. 574). The other pillar, carved into a representation of a *naga*, was recorded by Brown as the Tagaung Bodawgyi in 1917, by the ASI in 1922-23 as Bodawgyi, and by Moore as the *Naga* of Tagaung in 2007 (Figs. 17 and 18).⁶²⁸ Tagaung, the legendary first kingdom of Myanmar, is the most northern of the first millennium walled sites of Upper Myanmar, and was a guard post during Anawrahta's reign. The *natkùn* for the image was built inside the walls of this fortress, and the image itself probably references legends related in the *Tagaung Chronicle*, where a *naga* prince twisted his way into the hollow of the palace post and reigned alongside the queen for seven years. Under a later king, the *Chronicle* relates the magical journey undertaken by a pillar to become the post in a new palace, legitimating the newer king by linking him, via the pillar, with the earlier reign. In another example of the importance of the

⁶²⁷ What may possibly be the second induction occurred in 1510 when Shwe Nankyawshin Narapati (r. 1502-27) built his palace at Inwa. Along with the "tree-spirit", 19 other Brahmanic and planetary gods were venerated. *Annual Report 1934-35*, 48-9.

⁶²⁸ Brown, "Dragon of Tagaung," 741; *Annual Report (Archaeological Survey of India) 1922-23* (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1935), 121; Moore, *Early Landscapes*, 244.

southeast direction discussed on pages 61-2, the *Chronicle* records this pillar would only enter a particular village from the southeast corner.⁶²⁹

MANDALAY AND THE KĀLĀ THUBOUN

On 15 July 1817, Bodawpaya issued what must be the most poignant Royal Order of all. He called on Thakya Min, the Four Great Kings and other guardian nats to note that despite his observance of the correct ways and rules of a king, his offerings to the local guardian nats and the presence in his kingdom of Buddhist relics and establishments, the “*kālā thuboun*”, the English, “appeared like clouds to sun and moon, curtailing the exuberance of the Religion.” The king called upon the local guardian nats to punish them, declaring

they shall be chased away until they get right back to their own island; the King is doing everything in support of the Religion and he had therefore earned the support of the spiritual beings and with their help his soldiers would not have to try hard to expel the heretics from this land of the Religion; they shall be scattered or subdued ...⁶³⁰

Forty years later, following the First and Second Anglo-Burmese Wars that had ceded so much of the kingdom to the British, Mindon Min would again call on a veritable army of guardian nats to protect the new royal city of Mandalay from the *kālā thuboun*.

Mindon Min's circles of protection

An early photograph of Mandalay, taken by a visitor in the early 1920s, shows a small white building placed at one corner of the *Shwe Myódawgyi*, Mindon Min's ‘great golden royal city’, just outside its high surrounding wall (Fig. 575 and detail). This seemingly innocuous structure was built to house one of thousands of guardian figures created by the king's artists to

⁶²⁹ Moore recorded that Tagaung's *naga* shrine was linked to a wooden pillar brought there to build the palace. Doubts about Tagaung being the first of Myanmar's kingdoms, as related in the *Hmannan Yazawin*, are being allayed by the discover of finger-marked bricks and urns. Artefacts found there date the site to the Bagan period, and pots have been unearthed near the Bo Bo Gyi shrine. Moore, *Early Landscapes*, 41 and 246; “Chronicle of the City of Tagaung,” trans. Maung Tin and G. H. Luce, *Journal of the Burma Research Society* XI (1921): 29 and 35.

⁶³⁰ Than Tun, *Royal Orders Part VII*, 108-9.

figuratively secure the site against malevolent forces, and to protect the royal city and palace within the walls.⁶³¹

When plans were being made for the construction of the *Shwe Myó dawgyi*, Mindon Min instructed the officers in charge, under the supervision of the KDKT, to investigate the nats propitiated at the former royal city of Inwa, and at the current royal city, Amarapura, to ensure the correct procedures were followed at Mandalay.⁶³² Different ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ nats from the result of their investigations were then propitiated at every step of the founding of the new city: the clearing of the land; levelling the ground; laying out the foundations and so forth; culminating in a ceremony held on 4 August 1859 to finalise the *Shwe Myó dawgyi*’s protection. As recorded by Francois Tainturier in his doctoral thesis, “The Foundation of Mandalay by King Mindon”, three Royal Orders were issued that list the names of the nats propitiated prior to the exploitation of the local resources, the clearing of the land at the city’s site, and the construction of the *Nànmyó daw* (Royal Palace) at the very centre of the city, as shown on the plan at Fig. 576.

Each different ceremony honoured the nats appropriate to the task ahead. Thirteen nats were named in the first Order, as well as all the “water, land, tree and hill guardian spirits of Mandalay, Kyaw Zin and Aung Pinle”, as this ceremony was concerned with honouring the guardian nats of the localities from where resources for the new city would be taken. The second ceremony, held prior to clearing the land at the site, honoured a mix of ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ nats, as well as “the remaining nat[s] included in the Thirty-Seven Nat guardians of hills, forests, land and water at the site of the royal city.” The third ceremony, held before the construction of the *Nànmyó daw* honoured a different mix of nats again. This time, offerings were made to major Buddhist deities, the Four Great Kings, important autochthonous nats, the *nagà*, and the Thirty-Seven Lords (see Appendix H).⁶³³

⁶³¹ Tainturier, “Foundation of Mandalay,” 91. Tainturier’s thesis explores the symbolic ordering of space both within and without the limits of the royal city of Mandalay. He argues that the city’s historicised narrative with the Buddha as the central figure was paralleled by a shift in emphasis from the city as sacred space, to the city as a place of Buddhist refuge from the British.

⁶³² *Ibid.*, 91.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, 93.

Tainturier argues that the differences between the status and role of the Buddha, and the ‘higher’ and the ‘lower’ nats in protecting the royal city and palace from harm are underscored in spatial terms. These differences are illustrated by Fig. 577, a composite sketch plan (not to scale), of the royal city and palace at the time of the demarcating of the land and the securing of the palace itself — two events separated by nearly an entire year. The plan shows the limits of the royal city as a heavy dashed line, and the limits of the palace as a dotted line. The Great Pavilion at the very centre of the palace held images of the Buddha and eight *arahant*, emphasising the primacy of Buddhism in the ceremonies. Images of the eight planetary figures were also placed within the limits of the *Nānmyó daw*, at the cardinal and intercardinal directions, shown as green squares on the plan. The four light blue squares at the corners of the *Nānmyó daw* show the location of four brick *gu*, built to house the *bilù* who would be the guardians of the palace — four of the powerful *yakkha* named in the *Āṭānāṭiya Sutta*.⁶³⁴ Four other brick *gu*, shown as pink squares on the plan, were built alongside the main gates to the *Shwe Myó dawgyi* to house images of the four *bilù* who were the guardians of the kingdom: Taung Myint, Taung Thaman, Taungyin and Taungbyon, the guardian nats of the kingdom first referred to in 1573.⁶³⁵ Finally, two large pavilions were erected, the first being a *tazaung* for ceremonies held to propitiate the Thirty-Seven Nats and the five *Natgyi*, shown as the red square next to the Great Pavilion. The second pavilion is represented by the blue square next to the eastern gate, where the propitiation ceremonies for the Thirty-Seven Lords were held. All these nats played a vitally important role in the protection of a newly created royal city conceived, as Tainturier argues, as a place of Buddhist refuge from the English, defined as “the *meissa deitthi*, non-Buddhists holding false and heretical views.”⁶³⁶

As the plan demonstrates, there was a hierarchy of protective beings given a role in the guardianship of the kingdom, similar to the guardians of Mt Myinmo. If the plan is imagined as a series of concentric rings, this hierarchy becomes apparent. The Buddha occupies the central position. Surrounding this centre are Mindon Min’s Thirty-Seven Nats: a pantheon of three nats

⁶³⁴ I am indebted to Francois Tainturier and John Okell for pointing me in the right direction in regard to the *yakkha*. Tainturier gives the height of the images as 1 cubit, which equates to one quarter of a *ta*, or 320cm. Tainturier, “Foundation of Mandalay,” 100-5.

⁶³⁵ Than Tun, *Royal Orders Part II*, 7. *Parabaiq*, Victoria and Albert Museum, IM.63-1938; SMMK, *Foundation Report*, 245.

⁶³⁶ Tainturier, “Foundation of Mandalay,” 102-4. Spiro’s informants rendered *meissa* as ‘evil’. Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism*, 41 footnote 1.

progressing to *arahantship*; the two most prominent Brahmanic nats, Byamma and Thakya Min; the Four Great Kings; a range of nature spirits; four of the nats named as guardians of the kingdom in 1573; and other indigenous nats (Appendix H). The next ring — still within the limits of the *Nānmyódaw* — contains the eight planetary figures. The *Nānmyódaw* is then encircled by a further three rings: the innermost containing four *yakkha* named in the *Āṭānāṭiya sutta*; then Mindon Min's Thirty-Seven Lords (see page 11). The final circle is represented by the *Shwe Myódawgyi*'s outer wall. This housed images of guardian figures beneath and within its structure — including 42 other *yakkha* named in the *Āṭānāṭiya sutta*, referred to as *siqthugyi* (Commanders), who were accompanied by 2,088 figures of *siqthe* (soldiers).⁶³⁷

Designs for the protective images

What did the images created to protect the *Shwe Myódawgyi* look like? Clues to the appearance of some of the statues are provided in two *parabaiq* — the first being a plan of the *Nānmyódaw* with illustrations of the four *thenapati* nats (*yakkha* Generals), housed at its corners (Fig. 578 and detail).⁶³⁸ Sitting underneath each *yakkha*'s *gu* is a chest, shown in black with a red outline. These contained *in*, squared charts with figures and characters having protective powers.⁶³⁹ Even the perimeter of the plan itself is ringed with small red circles, the letter *o*, *wa* in the Burmese alphabet, itself considered to have a protective function because it forms a perfect circle. Work on the images of these *thenapati* nats — Pazapati in the northeast corner, Candana in the southeast, Kamathetta in the southwest and Kinnighandu in the northwest — began on 6 January 1858, and the four nats were invited to occupy the images made for them in a ceremony

⁶³⁷ Tainturier, "Foundation of Mandalay," 102-3.

⁶³⁸ MSS IM.60-1938, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1857.

⁶³⁹ Protective *paritta* were also incised on gold plates fixed to the palace gates. Than Tun, *Royal Orders Part IX*, xviii. Taw Sein Ko reported that each gate was "under the protection of a tutelary nat or spirit represented by a stone image." Taw Sein Ko, "The Mandalay Palace," *Annual Report (Archaeological Survey of India) 1902-03* (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1903): 95 and 102. Plans of the palace complex made by the British show many small unnamed structures, some of which are probably the shrines under discussion, but unfortunately they did not elaborate on what would probably have been considered by them to be minor and unimportant buildings. See, for example, the plan made in 1887, in David Macdonald, *A Narrative of the Early Life and Services of Capt. D. Macdonald* (Weymouth: Benson & Barling), date unknown. Image of map accessed online via ARTstor, 7 October 2014.

held on 27 March that year.⁶⁴⁰ As depicted on the plan, each *thenapati* nat is illustrated in royal regalia and seated in the *bilut'ain* posture, and the scale of their images relative to the overall plan itself underscores how important their role was.

When it came to creating their sculptures, the second *parabaiq* provides both an illustrated model, Fig. 579, and written instructions:

ရွှေမြို့တော်ကြီး ၎င်းထောင့် ပြင်အုပ်ကူတည်လုပ်၍။ သေနာပတိ နတ် ၎င်းဦးကို။ ထက်ဝယ်ဘွဲ့။ လက်ယာလက်သန်လျက်စွဲ။ လက်ဝဲလက်ချ။ ဗောင်းသရဘူဆောင်း။ တန်ဆာဆင်ယင်လျက်။ စမ္မံ ပမာဏ ၁ မိုက် ၎င်း လက်သစ် ခုန်။ ကျောက်ဖြူကို ထုလုပ်သွင်းထားရန်ပုံစံ

Shwe Myódawgyi four corners make a brick *gu*. Four *thenapati* nats. Sit cross-legged. Right hand holds a *thanlyeq*. Left hand is down. Wears a *baùn tharap'u*. Adorn with regalia. Base approximately one *maiq* four *leqthiq* [total 22.85cm length]. Make the image from alabaster to the design model.⁶⁴¹

This second *parabaiq* is a design manual for the construction of the Royal City and Palace's guardian nats and shrines, including the eight planetary houses and the figures that would be placed within them. Its preamble orders that the ancient records and instructions be checked to ensure the eight correct woods would be used for each planetary image, that they be made at an auspicious time on an auspicious day, by skilled woodcarvers born on the same day as the king (Monday). The royal painters were commanded to ensure the models had the correct gestures and appearance, and they created a design manual of extraordinary beauty. It includes illustrations for all eight planetary figures to be placed in the shrines shown as the light green squares on the plan at Fig. 577. These eight images were accompanied by other guardian figures, including statues of three of Mindon Min's Thirty-Seven Nats: Byamma in the Sunday house;

⁶⁴⁰ The date for the ritual animation of the *yakkha* images was supplied by Francois Tainturier, personal communication, 16 November 2014. One of Mindon Min's Royal Orders, dated 24 January 1858, was addressed to the attention of "All Good Guardian Gods", recording that the king would send "offerings of food and light with musical entertainments ... to the temporary shrines of all Local Guardian Spirits ..." Than Tun, *Royal Orders Part IX*, xviii. Min Sithu gives a date of 1 January 1858 for the setting up of the brick *gu*. Min Sithu, *Naqkòkwehmu Thamain*, 437-8.

⁶⁴¹ MSS IM.63-1938, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1857. This *parabaiq* contains designs for the planetary and nat images to be made to guard Mindon Min's *Shwe Myódawgyi*. I photographed this *parabaiq* during a visit to the V&A on 14 April, 2014. The chests containing the protective *gat'a* buried underneath are also illustrated in the *parabaiq*, beneath the nat's *gu*, and the accompanying text gives their dimensions and instructs they be made from brown rock. The V&A's online collection notes on a related *parabaiq*, museum number IM.64-1938, include a note that a visiting Myanmar scholar believed it to be an account of the spirits of the dead who were buried alive at the time of construction, thereby becoming nats who would guard the palace walls. He may have reached this conclusion because the Burmese word for 'chest' သေတ္တာ is the same as for 'coffin'. The words 'stone chest' can be seen written in Burmese in white on the black chest illustrated beneath the nat's *gu* in Fig. 578 and detail.

Thakya Min in the Monday house; and Mi Nat, the fire-spirit, in the Tuesday house (Figs. 580 to 582).⁶⁴² Thakya Min, as the heavenly equivalent of the king, was undoubtedly placed in the Monday planetary house to correspond to the king's day of birth.

This second *parabaiq* also contains instructions for the other images and protective elements to be placed at the city's gates, at the corners, and at every second guardhouse along the four walls, confirming the identification of small marble statues recorded in the *Archaeological Survey* for 1916-17. The pair shown at Fig. 583 sit cross-legged on their marble bases, their left hands resting on their knees and their right hands holding a rosary, and they appear to be dressed in monk-like robes. Their appearance and posture agree with the description in the *parabaiq* for nine statues of *yathé* (hermits), or alternatively, *arahant*, placed at the *Shwe Myódawgyi's daq* gates (principal gates representing the four elements; earth, fire water and air).⁶⁴³ The stone chest shown at Fig. 584 contains similar figures. The two pairs shown at Figs. 585 and 586 appear to hold *thanlyeq* to their shoulders, and wear garments and the tiered crown conventionally seen on guardian figures. These figures are undoubtedly just four of the thousands of guardian nat images created and placed at specific locations, or buried at depths prescribed in the *parabaiq's* text.⁶⁴⁴

Two of Mandalay's guardian *bilù*, Taung Myint and Taungbyon, still remain at their posts outside the eastern and northern gates to the city.⁶⁴⁵ The *parabaiq* shows how their sculptures were conceived, and gives instructions they be created from alabaster to the model shown in Fig. 587, seated in the *bilùt'ain* posture and holding a cudgel in their right hand:

ရွှေမြို့တော်ကြီး စါတ် တံခါး ၄ ရပ်ပြင်။ အဝင်လက်ယာဘက်တွင် အုပ်ကူတည်လုပ်၍။
နတ်ဘီလူး ၄ ဦးကို။ လက်ယာဒူးထောင် လက်ဝဲဒူးချ။ လက်ယာလက်ဆောက်ပုတ်စွဲ။

⁶⁴² IM.63-1938. The other houses contained the following images: Sunday, sun and peacock; Monday, moon and hare; Wednesday, Kama Nat; Saturday, Yama Nat; Thursday, Waruna Nat; Rahu, Warudewa Nat; and Friday, Kuwera Nat. These particular nat guardians would have been carefully chosen by the king's astrologists.

⁶⁴³ The images shown here featured in the *ASI's Annual Report* for 1916-17. The *Annual Report* issued in 1936-37 recorded a further four small images of 'hermits' found under the foundations of the *pyathaq* over the southern main gate. It noted a disparity between their height and what was recorded in the *Foundation Report*, however the design *parabaiq* does not specify a height for the images. *Annual Report (Archaeological Survey of India, 1936-37)* (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1937), 33-4. On the association between the *daq* gates and the cardinal directions see Tun Aung Chain, "Prophecy and Planets," 132-5.

⁶⁴⁴ See also Fig. 22.

⁶⁴⁵ I am told there is a third statue still extant at the western gate, but I have not been able to view this. Aye Aye Khine, discussion.

လက်ဝဲလက်ချုံ။ ဗောင်း သရဘုဆောင်း။ တန်ဆာဆင်ယင်လျက်။ စမ္မံပါဓာဏ ၁ တောင် ၁ မိုက် ခုန် ကျောက်ဖြူကို ထုလုပ်သွင်းထားရန်ပုံစံ

At the four *Shwe Myódawgyi daq* gates. Make a brick *gu* at the right side of the entrance. Four nat *bilù*. Right side knee upright, left side knee put down. Right side hand holds a cudgel. Left side hand put down. Wears a *baùn tharap'u*. Adorn with regalia. Base approximately 1 *taun* 1 *maiq* [70cm]. Make the images in alabaster to the design model.⁶⁴⁶

Fig. 588, a photograph taken in the early 1900s, shows one of these four statues, and Fig. 589 what appears to be the same *bilù* seated in his *gu*. When I photographed them in January 2014, the rebuilt eastern and northern gate's *gu* had signs identifying the statues within as Bo Bo Gyi (Fig. 590). At that point in time, the statue of Taungbyon at the northern gate, Fig. 591, had some of his features picked out in paint, making a considerable impact on his appearance, and the statue of Taung Myint at the eastern gate was completely covered in gold coloured paint (Fig. 592). When I returned just over a year later, Taung Myint had been given a dramatic makeover in the Thai style (Fig. 593), but he is now more correctly identified as a *yakkha*.⁶⁴⁷

Byamma and Man Nat (Mara)

As shown in the illustration and recorded in the accompanying text of the design manual *parabaiq*, the image for Byamma, Fig. 580, was to be depicted with four arms, one resting on his thigh and the other three holding a water pot, a golden bowl and a conch. If we imagine this illustration created in the prescribed *thiqkadò* wood (*Toona sureni*), wearing royal regalia and decorated in the style of the Konbaung era, it would have looked similar to another statue of a seated image in royal regalia, now in the British Museum, described as a sculpture of Man Nat (Fig. 597).

The curator's comments on this statue included in the Museum's online collection database include a note from Isaacs and Blurton, noting that the gesture of the figure — the two hands clenched on its knees — mark the subject as non-Buddhist, and suggest the figure is of an Indian deity. They point to the Burmese number 15 on the base of its lotus throne as suggesting the

⁶⁴⁶ *Parabaiq*, V&A Museum IM.63-1938.

⁶⁴⁷ In March 2015, the sign above the entrance to the *gu* said ဝုဗ္ဗသေန ယက္ခ, indicating a 'past/ancient *yakkha* general'.

figure was carved to a template design, and note that Singer had convincingly linked this image with a *parabaiq* in the British Library containing paintings of Indian deities enshrined in the Mandalay palace. Number 15 in this *parabaiq* is apparently named as either “Sitrabali” or “Man”.⁶⁴⁸ I have not been able to locate this *parabaiq*, however, the British Library holds an unillustrated *parabaiq* listing the various names under which the 15 *Natgyi*, the deities propitiated during the reign of Bagyidaw, were known. These 15 *Natgyi*, listed in Appendix G, are deities representing the natural elements alongside several from the Buddhist and Hindu cosmos.⁶⁴⁹

The first folios of this *parabaiq* (the *Natgyi parabaiq*) provide a table listing the main characteristics of all 15 *Natgyi*. Their Burmese names and place in the cosmological hierarchy are given alongside what their image is seated upon, the day on which an offering is made to them, and how many names they are known by. Number 15 on this list is, indeed, Man Nat. He is listed as a *kamma dewa*, and described as seated on a lotus throne, as portrayed in the carving shown in Fig. 597. Positioning an image of Man Nat on a lotus throne underscores his place in the Buddhist cosmos, as he occupies a heaven on a higher level than that of Thakya Min.⁶⁵⁰ His closed fists suggest he once held separately carved attributes — possibly a collection of the weapons he is portrayed with in the wall paintings shown earlier.

Another carving in the British Museum with the same provenance is shown at Fig. 598, and is identified as Siva. He is listed in the *Natgyi parabaiq* as number 14, named in Burmese as Paramithwa, a *mahadewa*, and recorded as riding an ox. The similarity of the carving and decoration styles of both statues suggest they were companion pieces, and given their provenance and descriptions in the *Natgyi parabaiq*, it seems probable these two statues were indeed those paid homage to by Bagyidaw in the early 19th century.

⁶⁴⁸ Curator’s comments, British Museum online collection database. http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=248383&partId=1&searchText=1937,0112.1&page=1 Isaacs and Blurton appear to be referring to an article written by Singer titled “Royal Ancestral Images of Myanmar.” Singer cites the *parabaiq* in question as BUR. 199, but the British Library’s catalogue says this particular *parabaiq* contains seven sections of *Jātaka* commentaries.

⁶⁴⁹ This *parabaiq* is catalogued as BUR MS 2 (formerly Burmese MS 132). It is described briefly in Thaung Blackmore, *Catalogue of Burney Parabaiks in the India Office Library* (London: British Library, 1985), 97. I made a handwritten copy of it in April 2014.

⁶⁵⁰ See Fig. 41, the illustration of the Buddhist cosmology. Man Nat occupies *Nemmanayati*, three levels above *Tawadeintha*, the home of Thakya Min. The *Natgyi parabaiq* records that offerings are made to him on the 15th day, and he is known by 19 different names — all of which are listed in a later folio.

Mindon Min's *Natgyi*

Mindon Min's Thirty-Seven Nats were propitiated in the same pavilion as five *Natgyi*: Thurathati, Sandi, Paramithwa, Mahapeinne and Beithano (Vishnu).⁶⁵¹ Their statues too are now lost, but a small illustration from the Wynford Album, Fig. 594, shows how they may have been portrayed. In fact, the Wynford Album is peppered with folios illustrating nats included in Mindon Min's Thirty-Seven Nats and the *Natgyi*, several of which were published in Temple's book.⁶⁵² The artists who created these images — some 20 to 30 years before work on Mandalay began — do not seem to have been working strictly to a canon, as some nats are pictured slightly differently and hold a variety of attributes. Mahapeinne, for example, has two arms in one illustration and four in another.⁶⁵³ Nevertheless, a comparison of the Wynford Album illustration at Fig. 594 with two from the design manual *parabaiq* at Figs. 595 and 596 show how stylistically standardised these figures were during the first half of the 19th century: all the nats are posed in *bilut'ain* on the back of their animal vehicles and wear the Konbaung era *malika k'aboun* costume.

KINGS, LORDS AND PRESIDENTS

ပုပ္ဖားတောင်တက်တွင်။ မောင်တော်နတ်ကွန်မှာ။ တံဆောင်လည်ပေါ်။ အနောက်မျက်နှာပြု။
ကျမ်း ၃ မျက်နှာ။ လှေကား ၃ စင်း။ ရွှေဇဝါ ရေး။ စကားတုံကိုသစ်အရပ် ၃တောင်။ လုံး ပါတ်
၃တောင်။

At Popa mountain. *Natkùn* for Royal Brother. *Tazaung*. Facing West. One shrine facing west. Three walls. Three steps. *Shwezawa*. Drawn on *sagà* log height three *taun* [1.37m]. Circumference three *taun*.⁶⁵⁴

Mt Popa, the home of U Tint De as Min Mahagiri, Lord of the Great Mountain, is now home to three images of this important nat. His *natnàn* is set on the slope of Mt Popa, not far from Popa village, by the side of the stream known as the Hnamedawgyi Htwet (Great Royal Brother and Sister Spring). Inside, three tall standing images of Min Mahagiri are displayed on a large

⁶⁵¹ Tainturier, "Foundation of Mandalay," 327-33. The corresponding names in Pāli are Sarasvati, Devi, Siva, Ganesa and Visnu. Po Kya recorded five different lists of *Natgyi* propitiated in different reigns. Po Kya. *Thoùns'eh-k'niq Min*, 17-9.

⁶⁵² Temple, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, 13, 19, 31, 33, 37, 63 and 67.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*, 19 and 63.

⁶⁵⁴ BUR MS 200, 40.

waisted shrine (Fig. 599). Leaning against the rear wall to the viewer's right of this tableau is a weathered piece of timber topped with a red and gold umbrella. This is said to be a remnant of the *sagà* log from which the original images of Min Mahagiri and his sister were crafted in the fourth century (Fig. 600). The existence of this log was recorded in the late 19th century by Taw Sein Ko, who wrote that it had been divided into two pieces, each four and a half feet long, with human features delineated on it in gold leaf — a description that accords with the extract from the *Inventory* cited above.⁶⁵⁵

When I first visited the *natnàn* in 2014, I was told by the shrine attendant that Min Mahagiri's original statue stands to the far right of the group shown in Fig. 599; the statue on the far left was donated by Kyanzittha; and the statue privileged with centre stage, made of plaster rather than wood, was donated by Prime Minister U Nu in 1961.⁶⁵⁶ While the provenance of the first two is unlikely, U Nu's statue is well-known. Whatever their original appearance, all three statues have been redecorated with modern paint, and share the now conventionalised trappings of Min Mahagiri: they are dressed in the tall Minister's turban (part of the statue in the case of the statue on the far left); and all now hold a fan to ward off the flames of the nat's funeral pyre.⁶⁵⁷

Whereas the statues at the left and right stare straight ahead in the usual manner, U Nu's statue has its head tilted slightly downward, and the gaze is oriented to meet the eyes of a devotee sitting below paying homage, a pose characteristic of Buddha images (Fig. 601). Although U Nu, the charismatic first Prime Minister of Burma, was a devout Buddhist, he had a firm belief in the nats, and it cannot be an accident that his statue of Min Mahagiri should look so much like the man himself (Fig. 602).⁶⁵⁸ It seems the Prime Minister of the country wished to be identified with his counterpart 'prime' Minister — the most important terrestrial nat, not only in the country, but in millions of homes — and art provided a means of achieving this aim.

⁶⁵⁵ Taw Sein Ko cited in Temple, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, 42.

⁶⁵⁶ Shrine attendant, in discussion with the author, February 7, 2014. Spiro recorded that U Nu donated two statues to the Mt Popa *natnàn* in 1961. Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism*, 60-1.

⁶⁵⁷ The textile Minister's turban placed on top of the other two statues, and the textile wrapping around their heads prevented a closer view of the other two images.

⁶⁵⁸ I was accompanied to the Mt Popa *natnàn* by U Min Swe, at the time the Deputy-Director of the Bagan Archaeological Museum. He too thought the statue looked very much like a portrait of its important donor. U Nu himself gave an interesting and colourful discussion of the nats in Nu, "Nats," *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* Vol. 4, no. 1 (1988): 1-12.

Min Mahagiri's sister is known as Daw Myat Hla on Mt Popa, and her *natnàn* is now placed on a site lower down the mountain than her brother's, a location recorded in the *Inventory*. The entrance sign above her shrine, Fig. 603, shows her family, including Shwe Nabe, Min Mahagiri's *nāgàma* wife, and their six-armed sons, dressed in traditional 19th century court clothing. Daw Myat Hla's statue, also donated by U Nu, sits in the centre of the shrine and the statue at the right of the photograph shown at Fig. 604, swathed in purple cloth, was identified on the day of my visit as Thonban Hla, one of her sisters. Fig. 605 is another photograph of this head, published in 1992 by Rodrigue, who identified it as Min Mahagiri, but given the presence of the gracefully tipped *siboun* headdress worn by royal women, this is more likely to be the gold head Bekker saw in 1988, when it was identified as Daw Myat Hla. Bekker saw the *shwezawa* drawing recorded in the *Inventory* on the log beneath the purple cloth, recording that "the oldest appearing image, the sister, shows only gold outlines on a lacquered pillar. Although a gold head has been placed atop the black lantern post, the post itself represents a golden face on a charred log."⁶⁵⁹

From Rodrigue's photograph, shown at Fig. 605, it appears the charred log seen by Bekker was covered in gold leaf between 1988, when Bekker saw it, and 1992, when it was photographed by Rodrigue. When I photographed it in 2014, it was swathed in purple cloth and I was not able to see beneath (Fig. 606). Daw Myat Hla's golden head, placed on top of the log, has acquired painted green eyeshadow and eyeliner. The difference between my photograph and Rodrigue's further demonstrates how the addition of modern paint is changing the expression on the faces of these images, indicating the way they are viewed by their contemporary shrine attendants, and as a consequence the people visiting the shrines, has evolved to reflect modern notions of power and beauty.

Although the identification of these images has been somewhat confused, what is notable about this set of statues is that they were identified as commissioned by the highest ranking elites in the land at the time, and are placed in the country's most historic *natnàn*. The *Inventory* records they were paid homage to by Alaungpaya (r. 1752-60), and that over the years different *natt'eìn* ensured the appropriate rituals honouring them were followed. Bodawpaya offered gilded heads

⁶⁵⁹ Bekker, "Transformation of the Nats," 42.

of both Min Mahagiri and Daw Myat Hla in 1785, which were replaced in 1812 by the larger and “more finished” heads seen in the shrine in the late 1880s.⁶⁶⁰ However, the royal support of the original *natnàn*, a practice with a legendary past reaching back to the eighth century, was curtailed by the British invasion. In the context of the rebirth of an independent Myanmar, U Nu’s donation of new statues of Min Mahagiri and Daw Myat Hla reforged the link between the leader of the country and two of its foremost guardians.

S U M M A R Y

The sprawling, monument-studded plain at Bagan has been described by several scholars as a literal and figurative field of merit.⁶⁶¹ With over 3,000 Buddhist monuments still extant, it can be easy to lose sight of the veritable army of deities called upon to provide protection of these meritorious foundations — a protection stretching far beyond mere bricks and mortar.

Given its great antiquity, the protective imagery that survives at Bagan probably represents a mere fraction of what was initially put in place. At the beginning of the 12th century, Kyanzittha was invited into a building protected by Buddhist, Brahmanic, and local ritual, a palace built and consecrated with due regard to auspicious times and materials chosen with care by priests well versed in astrology. His kingdom lay within a conceptual space protected by Thakya Min above and the *nagà* king below, watched over by the Four Great Kings. If he wished, he could leave the confines of the royal city through the Tharaba Gate, past (according to legend) images of Min Mahagiri and his sister, to pay homage to the Buddha at his great works of merit: the Ananda, partly encircled by the *Nat Siqthugyi* from the *Ātānāṭiya sutta* and the nats guarding Mt

⁶⁶⁰ BUR MS 200, 40-3. The heads were originally kept in the safekeeping of a local official, and produced during the nats’ annual *natpwèh*. They were moved to the Bagan treasury during the British occupation, then to the Bernard Free Library in Yangon. Temple, *Thirty-Seven Nats*, 43. At some point during the British occupation the people from Popa township petitioned the British Assistant Commissioner, Captain Tinley, for their return to the local Commissioner at Kyaukpadaung, so the annual festival could recommence, but evidently this was not granted. G. F. N. Tinley, “History of Golden Heads.” Cambridge University Library, collection of James Scott, classmark GBR/0012/MS Scott (James), date unknown. The holdings of the Bernard Free Library formed the beginning of the collection of Myanmar’s National Library in 1952. The whereabouts of the golden heads is now unknown.

⁶⁶¹ This description has most recently been used by Bob Hudson and Stadtner. Bob Hudson, “Restoration and Reconstruction of Monuments at Bagan (Pagan), Myanmar (Burma), 1995-2008,” *World Archaeology* 40, no. 4 (2008): 555; Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan: Buddhist Plain of Merit*, 2005.

Myinmo; or the Shwezigon, protected by its own dedicated pantheon of Buddhist, Brahmanic and indigenous nats.

The Royal Orders discussed in the previous chapter, and Kyanzittha's palace inscription, bear witness to the use of Buddhist, Brahmanic, astrological and other supernatural means of protection — including of course, the nats — being used by Myanmar's kings to protect their royal cities and the kingdom. This culminated in the veritable army of nats called into service to ensure Mandalay's protection. These nats were the result of careful inquiry by Mindon Min's ritual specialists into royal precedent, and the nats propitiated during the city's foundation represent an astonishing range of deities. Mindon Min's Thirty-Seven Nats comprised Buddhist nats, the spirits of natural elements, the four nat *bilù* first mentioned in the 16th century, and indigenous nats recognised by the hereditary attendants at the Shwezigon. His Thirty-Seven Lords were also based on precedent, continuing the tradition of including guardians of royal cities reaching back to the early 1600s — or even, as I have suggested, to the Bagan era. Brahmanic protection was provided by the five *Natgyi*, and cosmological protection by the eight planetary figures. The four *thenapati* nats stood in their places at the corners of the palace compound, and nat *bilù* guarded the entrances to the royal city itself. Sadly, despite the efforts of Mindon Min, his advisers and his artists, in 1885 the king had been dead for seven years, and Mandalay was indeed over-run by the heretical British *kālā thuboun*.

Nowhere else in Myanmar is there such an outstanding example of the longstanding and very fundamental relationship between the nats and place. The sheer scale of Mandalay Palace, with its thousands of guardian images, sits at the apex of a tradition reaching back centuries, a tradition that survives in more modest locations all over Myanmar today.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusion

Ko Myo Shin was the Prince of a small kingdom on the banks of the Ayeyarwaddy River. He and his brother-in-law, U Min Kyaw, went off to war against the Shan, and brought back two prisoners, the son and daughter of the Sawbwa of Pyin Oo Lwin, whom the Prince had murdered.

U Min Kyaw decided to marry the Prince's sister, for she was beautiful and he thought he could gain access to the throne through her, but she sought refuge in the home of a rich merchant. When the Prince discovered her missing, he set off to Pyin Oo Lwin to gather more troops. U Min Kyaw then encouraged the son and daughter of the Sawbwa to return to their former home, and kill the Prince. He gave them two magical swords and they set off on their task. However, once in the presence of the Prince they did not have the courage to decapitate him. Seeing their dilemma, the Prince took hold of the swords to chop his own head off — but it rolled off his head of its own accord and he became a nat. When he inquired into what had happened to his sister, the Princess, he was told she had married her protector, the rich merchant. So the nat Prince claimed her butterfly spirit and she too became a nat.

Meanwhile, U Min Kyaw seized the throne. As he was worried about being killed himself in revenge, he appointed the nat Prince as “Ko Myo Shin”, the guardian of the Nine Towns. Alas for U Min Kyaw, Ko Myo Shin did indeed take his revenge by chopping down a tree onto U Min Kyaw's head. Thus U Min Kyaw also became the nat guardian of Pakhan village, known as Pakhan U Min Kyaw.

Today, out of respect, people living under the guardianship of Ko Myo Shin will not travel in groups of nine. If they must do so, a rock is given a place as the tenth person.⁶⁶²

⁶⁶² After Yves Rodrigue, *Nat-Pwe*, 42-3.

SPIRITS OF PLACE

In February 2012, I was taking photographs at a shrine for the local guardian nats known as the Royal Brother Ko Myo Shin and the Royal Sister Pale Yin on the outskirts of Bagan, when one of the ubiquitous white vans seen all over Myanmar approached over a small rise. I stood back well out of the way, but it came to a complete stop — right in the middle of the road opposite the nats' shrine — where it remained stationary for around five minutes. The monks inside were transporting new Buddha images (one particularly large one tied to the top of the van) to their new homes, and I took the opportunity to take a few photos of a Buddha statue in an incongruous setting. Then it occurred to me why the truck had stopped — the images of the Buddha were being presented to the local nats in the same manner as young boys on their way to the monastery for the first time are presented — to mark the transition between the earthly realm, where the nats hold sway, to the sacred realm of the monastery.

This struck me as extraordinary, as everything I had read about the nats prior to undertaking my research for this thesis told me they were subordinate to the Buddha — yet here the local nats were being acknowledged as lords of the domain through which tangible forms of the Buddha were passing. It was the sense of the primacy of a spirit of place in this encounter that struck me the most, and as I began to unravel the history of the three pantheons of nat Lords it was this link with place, whether physical or conceptual, that kept coming to the fore. I came to understand that the nats cannot be divorced from their own 'victory grounds', even if the people who once inhabited their domains are no longer tied there by virtue of social or cultural status. Throughout the journey undertaken in the course of researching this thesis, I have come to understand nat imagery as not only diverse, often beautiful and occasionally enigmatic, but as integral to the physical and conceptual place each image inhabits. This is fundamental to an understanding of the nats beyond the concept of simply 'a guardian figure'.

My research has established that Myanmar's artists have always expressed this connection with place in their representations of the nats. Images of nats were placed in specific architectural settings, and artists employed recognisable motifs, to indicate the nat's position in the cosmological hierarchy, alongside elements of the nat's biography and a contemporary portrayal of power. This integration of power into Myanmar's visual culture has been a constant presence

in the country's built and natural landscape from the first millennium. The presentation of power has undergone the most marked stylistic evolution, particularly in the century following the demise of the monarchy and the ending of sumptuary laws that would have prevented, for example, the placement of a local guardian nat image on a replica of the royal throne. Audience expectation in a rapidly modernising country has also played a strong role in this respect. Today, in many cases, the nats are presented as elite members of their community, accorded clothing, attributes and backdrops that emphasise their status and power.

The primary sources analysed in my thesis attest to ongoing interaction between Myanmar's kings and all the different types of nats over centuries. This interaction is clearly characterised as the king co-opting the power of the nats, both in the protection of the lands under his rule, and in fulfilling his royal commands. The notion of the 'Thirty-Seven Nats' as a 'royal' or 'national' pantheon, their power controlled by the king through the granting of fiefs, cannot be sustained. Rather, the evidence points to the seven nats named in Bayinnaung's Royal Order of September 1573 as the historic guardians of the kingdom. As I have argued, the nat Lords in the different iterations of the pantheon of the Outside Thirty-Seven Lords were the guardians of the royal city, right up to the end of the monarchy — ancestral and supernatural counterparts to the royal regiments of elephant-men, horsemen and foot soldiers in the service of the king.

Most importantly for Western scholars, the research presented in my thesis has clarified the roles and significance of the different typologies of nat. It has unravelled misconceptions and ambiguity surrounding the 'Thirty-Seven Nats', and highlighted the limitations of the resources currently available. It has also identified significant errors in the standard text, Temple's *Thirty-Seven Nats*. My research will not only ensure a more thorough understanding of the different types of nat, it will enable the correct terminology for the three pantheons to be used in future Western texts. This will, I hope, include replacing the word 'ogre' with the more correct term, *bilù*.

My thesis is the first art historical analysis of nat imagery conducted. The research undertaken establishes a trajectory of change in the appearance of the nats from the Bagan era to the present day. Notwithstanding the persistence of certain motifs throughout centuries — for example, the

use of the *bilut'ain* posture and elements of royal and military regalia in imagery of *bilu* — I have been able to establish the first stylistic chronology for nat imagery and have identified the major agencies for change. These include the introduction of Thai artists to the Myanmar court; the demise of the monarchy; the *Inventory* conducted by the Myawaddy Mingyi and the record of its iconography preserved in visual form in Temple's publication; the choices and errors Temple made and their continuing impact; and the influence of the charismatic monks U Khanti and U Parama Wunna Theikdi. The advent of new technologies and a modern, aspirational culture has also played a part in transforming the outward appearance of the nats, although their spiritual essence remains. Imagery of the nats therefore reflects political, social and cultural change, as well as the dynamic nature of spiritual practice within Myanmar.

This is, of course, merely a beginning, and there is certainly scope for more in-depth research of many of the images presented here. Closer inspection of the Inside Thirty-Seven Lords at the Shwezigon may reveal iconography not visible from ground level, and the local history of the six-armed images presented in Chapter 7 is yet to be recorded. Similarly, how the form and appearance of the nats differ from region to region within Myanmar is yet to be studied. Research into these images will provide an opportunity for greater understanding of spiritual practice in Myanmar, and the influence of cross-cultural interaction throughout the region.

Additionally, several intriguing questions have been raised that warrant future investigation. Whether the pillars (and their nats) at Kyanzittha's palace stood for locations within the kingdom at that time is unlikely to be conclusively verified, although this was certainly the practice at Bago four centuries later. Given the importance attached to 'victory grounds', the continuation of ancient traditions surrounding the foundation of royal cities and palaces, and the use of nat shrines as boundary markers, it seems probable that powerful nats from important locations within the kingdom were, indeed, venerated at the very centre of Kyanzittha's kingdom. Investigation of the locations engraved into the base of the extant pillars at Kambawzathadi Palace may reveal the names of the guardian nats listed as the kingdom's guardians in Bayinnaung's Royal Order of 1573. An understanding of the fundamental position of the nats as spirits of specific places will open up avenues for other disciplines such as anthropology and history.

For centuries prior to the arrival of the British and colonial occupation, the lives of people in Myanmar were mediated by the King, his representatives, the nats, astrology, and the role Buddhist practice and other cultural and social norms played in day-to-day life. While the political control of Myanmar and its people has undergone radical change since the demise of the monarchy, Buddhist practice, alongside the belief in astrology and the nats, has endured. Of the three, imagery of the Buddha and the nats, particularly local guardian nats, are a constant presence in the Myanmar landscape. This thesis will assist future scholars in understanding the underlying meanings of these fascinating images and their role in Myanmar culture.

Imagery of the nats provides a medium for interaction with the supernatural and earthly realms, connecting believers to unseen forces that have the power to affect daily life for good or ill. The nats and the Buddha have formed part of the country's visual culture since the first millennium, and as the need to deal with daily uncertainties, and to accrue merit for the next life is ongoing, it seems likely the production of both has a secure future. In creating images of the nats, Myanmar's artists have indeed created a unique body of work, across centuries, expressing a fundamental aspect of their social, spiritual and visual culture.

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ခင်မောင်သန်း။ ရုံးရာ နတ်ယုံကြည်မှု နှင့် ဓလေ့ထုံးစံများ ။ ရန်ကုန် ၊ သောကြာစာပေ ၊ ၂၀၀၁။
Khin Maung Than. *Yòya Naq Youncihmu hnín Dalét'òunsanmyà*. Yangon, Thàwca Sape, 2001.

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၂၀၀၆။
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မြ ၊ အပယ်ရတနာ လိုဏဂူဖုရားအကြောင်း နှင့် ၎င်းဂူဖုရားအတွင်းဖက်ရှိ မဟာယာဉ်ဂိုဏ်း
ပန်းချီဆေးရေးရုပ်များအကြောင်း ၊ ပုင်မြို့။
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မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ ၊ မြစ်ခွဲကိုးစင်းစာပေ ၊ ၂၀၁၁ ။
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ရန်ကုန်မြို့ ၊ ဦးအောင်ကြီး ရွှေပုရပိုက်စာပေ ၊ ၂၀၁၃ ။
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