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Preface

Glimpses of Ancient and Medieval Personages is a collection of my articles in various newspapers, magazines, journals that were published in Malaysia, Australia, Italy, Myanmar and South Korea between the years 1993 and 2024.

Some of them are very brief befitting the term 'glimpses'. A few of them are short book reviews or book notes concerning the sayings of three ancient personages: the comment on *Tao Tee Ching*, (Lao Tzu) and review of the book *The Trial of Socrates* by the late journalist I.F. Stone and the commentary on the Roman stoic philosopher (and Emperor) Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*. Hence, they are brief glimpses only.

Two of the articles with foot notes deal with aspects of the work of two medieval personages who flourished contemporaneously: the 13th century Sufi poet Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273) and the 13th century Christian theologian St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). They are covered in two separate articles. The article about a single poem of Rumi is juxtaposed with another poem written by the Anglican poet George Herbert (1593-1633). Likewise, the separate article on an aspect of the philosophy/theology of Aquinas is juxtaposed with an aspect of the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677). Needless to say the personages that were Rumi, Herbert,

Aquinas and Spinoza flourished in different centuries. But the poet Rumi and the theologian/jurist Aquinas were born several years apart (1207 for Rumi, 1225 for Aquinas) in the 13th century and they died a mere 3 months apart: Rumi on 17 December 1273 and Aquinas on 7 March 1274. Almost certainly or at least it is strongly presumable that they did not know about each other's existence and each of them apparently is not familiar with the other's work. Hence from the perspective or hindsight of the early 21st century I have the chance to briefly juxtaposed these two and other personages in my articles on Rumi and Herbert, Aquinas and Spinoza reproduced here.

The 'glimpses' that I have made in this collection are deemed mainly as 'ancient'. I roughly follow the guidelines that up to say around 13th century Common Era (CE) it may be presumable as 'ancient' though arguably the era that Rumi and Aquinas flourished can be considered as 'medieval'. Hence the title *Glimpses of Ancient and Medieval Personages*.

In the collection of my articles I have tried to list ('glimpse') and describe the personages in what I considered to be in chronological order: *Tao Te Ching* (Lao Tzu), Plato/Socrates, Plato/Buddhist monk Nagasena who flourished about two centuries after Plato), Marcus Aurelius, Vasubandhu, Augustine (and Aquinas), Rumi (and George Herbert), Aquinas and Spinoza and also Aquinas with 20th century 'father of psychoanalysis' Sigmund Freud.

When my book *Glimpses of Myanmar Personages II* was available for sale in 2023 a friend in Mandalay told me one 'Mr Know All' whose name I do not know urged him not to buy my book since according to him the 27 personages and their work profiled in my book can be 'seen' or read on the world wide web. I would like to briefly disabuse the 'conceit' of that unknown person.

My book *Glimpses of Myanmar Personages II* is not (repeat **not**) a copy and paste from the information available on the internet. For example, I am not aware of (I do not claim there is none) there is an article in the internet juxtaposing and comparing the 18th century Burmese monk and scholar Minbu U Awbartha's translation of the *Naymi Jataka* with the 13th century Italian poet Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*. I did just that in one of the chapters in *Glimpses of Myanmar Personages II*. Also, my comparison of two novels of the late Burmese novelists Maung Tha Ya and Mya Than Tint (in translation) 'Wearing a velvet slipper and covered by a golden parasol' (Maung Tha Ya) and 'Crossing a Mountain of Swords and a Sea of Fires' (Mya Than Tint), to the best of my knowledge is not being discussed by anyone else in the English language which constitute another Chapter in my book.

Coming back to this collection of my articles my brief juxtaposition with one statement in the *Tao Tee Ching* and one statement apparently made by Socrates in the first Chapter of the book cannot be found on the internet.

Also, in this collection I briefly compare the after-life concepts depicted in Plato's *Phaedo* with the after-life concept discoursed by Buddhist monk Nagasena with King Menander (Milinda) in the treatises *Questions of Milinda*. This comparison is made by me not taken from any internet source.

Likewise, I am not aware of any other article on the internet (apart from my article published around 2013 on the 50th anniversary of US president John F. Kennedy's assassination) which analysed the November 1963 assassination of John F. Kennedy and March 1981 assassination attempt against President Ronald Reagan from what I considered to be the Augustinian concept of 'predestination' and Spinozist concept 'pre-determination'. That article in one of my

Chapters on Augustine is my own if not original then a novel application of the metaphysical concepts of two philosophers from the 17th century and 5th century Common Era.

I would like to express my gratitude to Ko Zu Zu Maw for his patience and cooperation in the preparation and production of the book as well as the staff of Ludu Press for their work during the production process.

Myint Zan
August 2024
Yangon

Addendum

After writing the Preface in July 2024 I published an article in the *Seoul Times* titled 'Canonical Buddhism as Atheism: A Few Comparative Glimpses'. I have inserted this additional article. The article deals with the subject of atheism in canonical Buddhism. One of the pioneers of 'Buddhist atheism' was the ancient Indian Buddhist philosopher Vasubandhu (4th to 5th century Common Era). I read about Vasubandhu's 'dis-proofs' (or denial) of a Creator in English translation (in summary) in the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. Vasubandhu preceded St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) by about 800 years and while Aquinas (as discussed in other Chapters) devised the proofs of the existence of a Creator, Vasubandhu 800 years before Aquinas has argued about its non-existence. In order to make some comparisons about Vasubandhu's

atheism linked to the topic of 'Buddhism or Buddhist philosophy of atheism' I have included this article which the readers may read in conjunction with Christian philosophers Augustine, Aquinas and Christian (Anglican) poet George Herbert and aspects of their views which are also discussed in various Chapters in the book.

Myint Zan
November 2024
Yangon