

SHWEDAGON

Golden Pagoda of Myanmar

Elizabeth Moore, Hansjörg Mayer and U Win Pe

For many centuries the golden *stupa* of the Shwedagon, the pagoda enshrining the sacred hairs of the Buddha, has dominated the landscape of Yangon. Since the nineteenth century, it has been the spiritual symbol of the entire Burmese nation.

Few other countries have a shrine such as this, ancient yet so much a part of today, and guardian for the future. It is an unforgettable vision to see the pagoda across the Royal Lakes at sunset or as a golden shimmer against the black night sky. Everyone who has been to Myanmar has a memory of their first visit to the Shwedagon. For all who are born in Myanmar, the Shwedagon is part of their life.

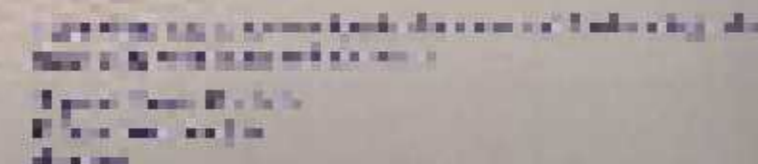
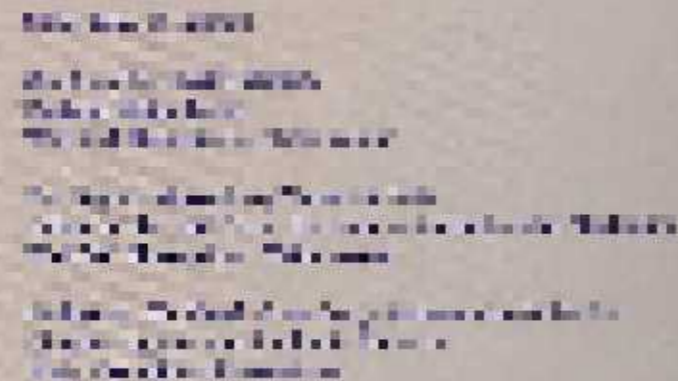
Shwedagon: Golden Pagoda of Myanmar gives the reader a multi-faceted view of this magnificent Buddhist shrine. The texts, by archaeologist and art historian Elizabeth Moore of the School of Oriental and African Studies in London and Burmese scholar U Win Pe, discuss the history and evolution of the *stupa*, and are illustrated by many old pictures and plans. The atmosphere and vibrancy of a visit to the Shwedagon is admirably captured in a series of photographs by Hansjörg Mayer.

Elizabeth Moore is Senior Lecturer and Head of the Department of Art and Archaeology at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. She received her doctorate from the Institute of Archaeology, University College London. Her research focuses on Myanmar, Thailand and Cambodia. The work in Myanmar has a special significance as her father was born in Yangon, and her grandfather, an American Baptist missionary, taught at Judson College, and was President of the College in 1920. Her recent publications include *Ancient Capitals of Thailand* and *Palaces of the Gods*.

Hansjörg Mayer is a publisher of numerous books by artists, as well as books on the ethnography, jewelry and arts and crafts of Central and Southeast Asia. He has travelled widely in Southeast Asia but has been particularly struck by the great diversity of artistic expression and feeling embodied in the Shwedagon.

U Win Pe is the author of *Shwedagon* (1972) and is keen to impart the values of Myanmar Buddhism to a wider audience.

Nay Htun is the UN Assistant Secretary-General and UNDP Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific.



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PREFACE

The idea for this book came from a single visit to the Shwedagon, photographs taken on one day, images of the shrine captured in a few hours. The pictures are glimpses, impressions, often of unexpected corners of the Shwedagon. There are richly coloured images of the Buddha and a myriad of other figures. There are flowers, leaves, coconuts, bananas, and other offerings. There are people praying and walking, passing time at the Shwedagon.

No other country has a shrine such as this, ancient, so much a part of today, and guardian for the future. If one thinks of landmarks in cities around the world, none is as lofty and as religious as the Shwedagon. Within Myanmar (known formerly as Burma), one may see the spire of the 11th century Ananda at Pagan, but not from a distance. Mandalay's 19th century palace has its spires and there is Mandalay Hill, but neither has a pinnacle seen from afar.

The Shwedagon has a different character and personality every hour of the day and week of the year. It is an unforgettable vision to see the pagoda across the Royal Lakes at sunset or as a golden shimmer against the black night sky. In the early morning, it is the yellow of the sun burning through the mists. By noon, during the dry season, its glow is too bright to look upon. During the downpours of the monsoon months, it shines in the dullness as sheets of water beat across its surface.

Everyone who has visited Myanmar has a memory of their first visit to the Shwedagon, and for all born in Myanmar, the Shwedagon is part of their life. The pagoda is a meeting place, a shrine, alive with spirits of the past and present. Foreigners admire its beauty, the enveloping atmosphere of worship. Those who go often feel the pull of the Shwedagon: to mount the stairs and pace the platform, feel the smooth stone under one's feet, hear the bells, smell the burning wax and incense, and discover yet another facet of the pagoda. Multiply this combination of feelings many times over, and one begins to understand the way in which the Shwedagon belongs to the people of Myanmar.

Elizabeth Moore