



Sacred Sites of Burma

Myths and Folklore in an Evolving Spiritual Realm

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- An essential read for anyone interested in the development of Buddhism in its many aspects and facets, be they its art, archaeology, history or belief

The sacred sites of Burma are amongst the most beautiful and spectacular in all of Asia. However, the fame and sacredness of these holy places rests almost solely on the myths and legends that surround their founding and the origins of their relics. The Buddha himself presented strands of his hair to two travelling merchants in Bodh Gaya, India. The pair returned to Burma where these 'living hairs' are venerated as the country's most sacred relics, now enshrined in the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon. It appears that this myth arose amongst the Mon but today it is known throughout the land. Similar myths and legends abound in Burma, always in connection with a sacred site, whether it be the cast bronze Mahamuni Buddha in Mandalay, the Buddha footprints found at Magwe or curious geological phenomena such as the Golden Rock at Kyaik-hti-yo. These Buddhist tales can arise and evolve with astounding speed and creativity drawing on a variety of sources ranging from local folklore to Sri Lankan chronicles. The author uncovers the evidence for and traces the development of these intricate myths across a wide spectrum of Burmese sacred sites ranging from the Mon State in lower Burma to those dotted around the city of Yangon, to Pagan and Mandalay in upper Burma as well as considering the areas of Shan influence around Inle lake. Furthermore, the author illustrates how sacred sites can emerge with remarkable frequency in our own time with only those that possess myths catching the imagination of the Buddhist faithful having any chance of long term survival. This book therefore is an essential read for anyone interested in the development of Buddhism in its many aspects and facets, be they its art, archaeology, history or belief.