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The Journal of Burma Studies

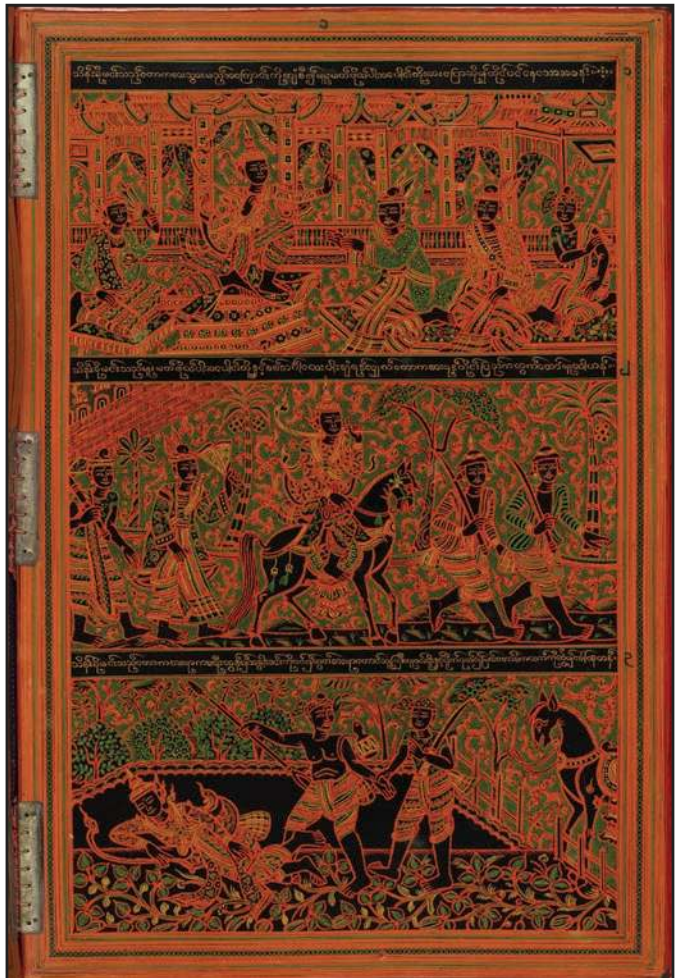
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Cover: Illustration of the opening page of a rare Burmese manuscript from the workshop of Hsaya Saing of the Hmangyo Quarter, Pagan, incised lacquer (*yun*) on a specially prepared substrate of cloth, dimensions 20 cm × 30 cm, Pagan 1906–07. Courtesy of the Spencer Collection of Rare Books, the New York Public Library Astor, Lennox and Tilden Foundations.

Cover design: Sophia Varcados, Northern Illinois University

Instead of the more usual paper and paint, this manuscript based on a highly revered Burmese text the *Glass Palace Chronicle*, makes use of a traditional incised lacquer technique in a palette of five colors to illustrate a history of the golden age of Pagan through the actions of its kings. The illustrations from the workshop of Hsaya Saing, a well-known colonial period lacquer master, follow the traditional ribbon arrangement characteristic of Burmese wall painting, subdivided into three registers vertically arranged to accommodate a narrow rectangular page. Each scene is numbered and identified by an overhead caption in Burmese. Action generally proceeds from left to right and protagonists are arrayed in Konbaung costume rather than in Pagan period dress. In keeping with lacquer conventions, scenes are strongly two-dimensional with filler patterns of equal importance to the figural elements.

Given the subject matter, it is not surprising that over one-third of the depictions in the manuscript are of court scenes where, the king (often in formal regalia) and surrounded by courtiers, is shown to be actively engaged in issuing orders and making decisions.

In the uppermost scene (a) a crowned King Theinhko (r. c. CE 934–956) with bow in hand expresses a wish to go hunting. Such a decision-making scene is often followed by a “processional” where the protagonists, usually mounted on horses or elephants, make haste in single file to carry out a court directive. Here in the second scene (b) King Theinhko, accompanied by a small retinue, sets out to go hunting. Feeling thirsty en route, the king in the third illustration (c) steals a cucumber and is murdered by the owner of the field, setting in motion a round of usurpations that added much to the grist of Pagan’s dynastic history.