



As an avid collector, enthusiast, and independent scholar, Ake (Thweep Rittinaphakorn) is widely regarded for his knowledge and interest in Burma. His research on Burmese textiles, decorative arts and photography delves deep into anthropological and socio-economic perspectives to reveal fascinating insights on the dynamics of such subjects during colonial and post-colonial times. His research on the development of Shan elite costumes and photography during the late 19th to mid 20th centuries was presented at the annual conference of the Association of Asian Studies (AAS) in 2014 and 2016, while his ongoing study of Burmese tapestry woven textiles *luntaya acheik* was presented at the 13th International Burma Studies Conference in August 2018. His articles on Burmese clothings and photography in Burma have been published in *Arts of Asia* magazine.

UNSEEN BURMA

Early Photography 1862-1962

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UNSEEN BURMA

Early Photography 1862-1962

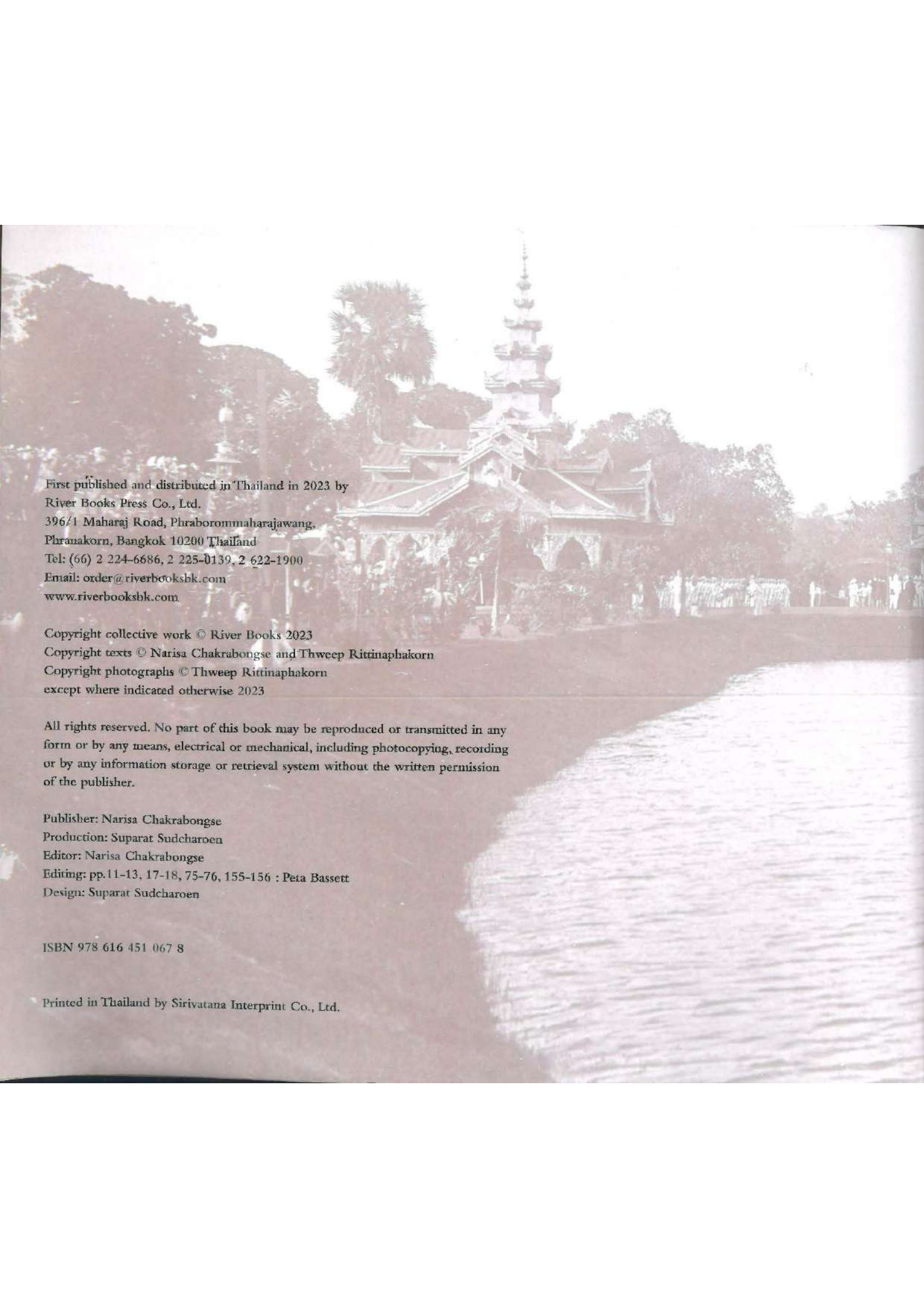
THWEEP RITTINAPHAKORN





To Myanmar and her people

To my parents who did not live to see their son's first book



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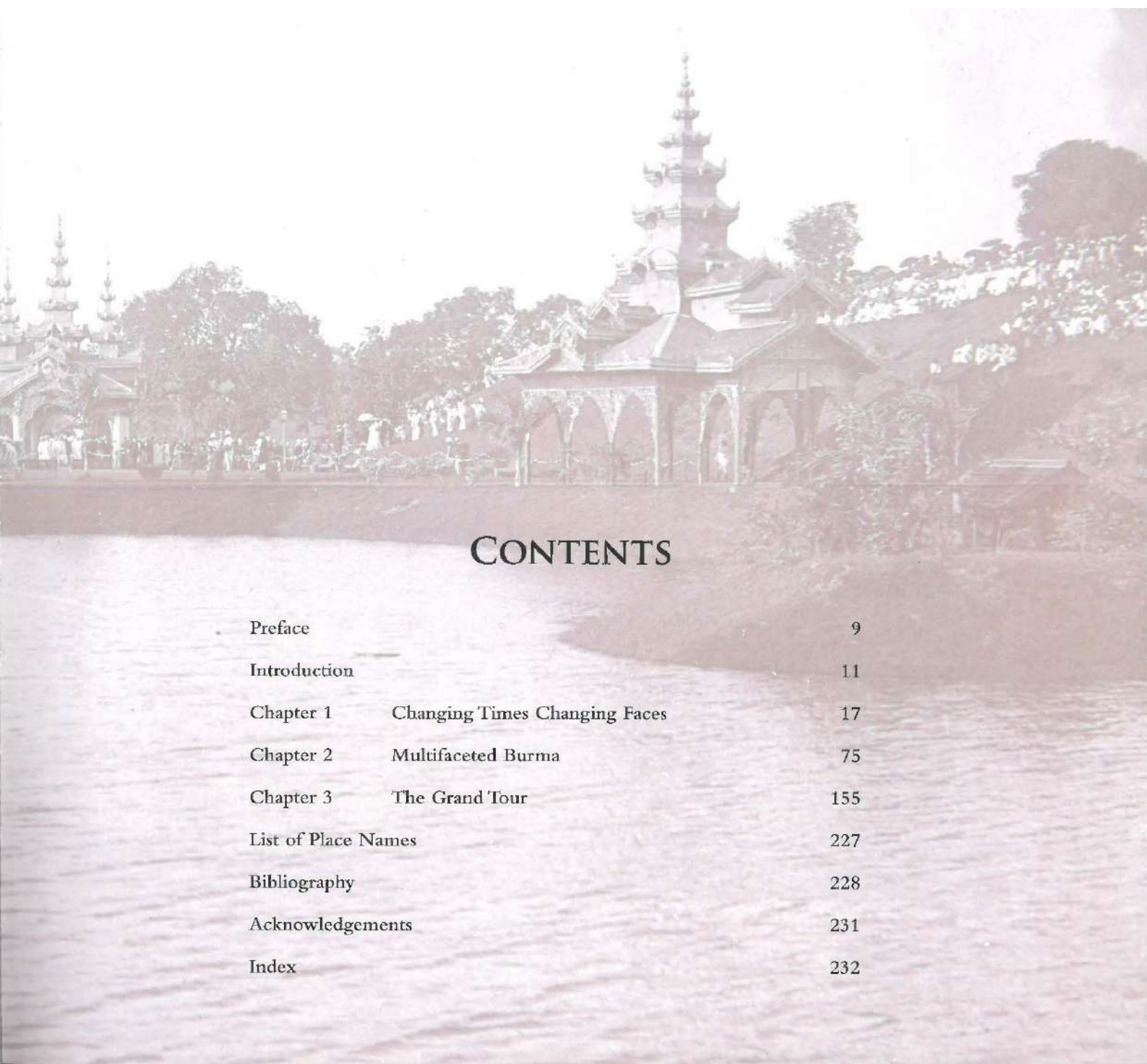
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Burmese Women & child.



Travelling Kitchen.



Pwe Dancing Girl.



Hand Carts



Travelling Kitchen.



Aluminium & Tin Bazaar.



Bhisti.
Water Carrier.



Coolie



Bhisti

A page from a photo album of a foreign traveler in the 1930s offers myriad vignettes illustrating different lives in colonial Burma. Candid shots in situ like these, provide glimpses of towns, locals and their ways of lives in natural setting, different from those taken in the studios by professional photographers with manipulated setup and poses.

PREFACE

To me, Myanmar is a special place that I hold dear in my heart. Although I was not born there nor ever lived there, the affinity is bewilderingly strong. I remember the first time I ran my hands ran through a vintage Burmese *hantaya acheik* silk tube skirt a mysterious sensation filled my mind. Later, when I started traveling to Myanmar on a regular basis in 2010, a peculiar feeling would overtake me every time the plane touched down on the runway in Yangon or Mandalay. The aerial view of rice fields, clusters of villages and buildings interspaced with the gleaming golden pagodas under the sunlight created a warm feeling in my heart. A passion for this land, its culture and history was accompanied by an untamable curiosity. I spent days reading and sifting through any information I could find. Old photographs were the windows that could transport me back in time to provide an instant glimpse of what the old Myanmar was like.

The political upheavals and the seemingly never-ending conflicts in Myanmar have left me with a deep melancholy and sympathy for all the people there. The conversations I have had with Myanmar friends who left the country after the recent coup in 2021 gave me a feeling of déjà vu, as it recalled the situation I read about in many memoirs of Burmese who fled the country after the military coup in 1962. Except this time, it is eyewitness testimony directly shared with me from those whose lives have been shattered by the situation. Although the Burmese people are renowned for being compassionate and resilient, half a century of suppression, a brief period of hope and then turmoil yet again, has left them full of despair.

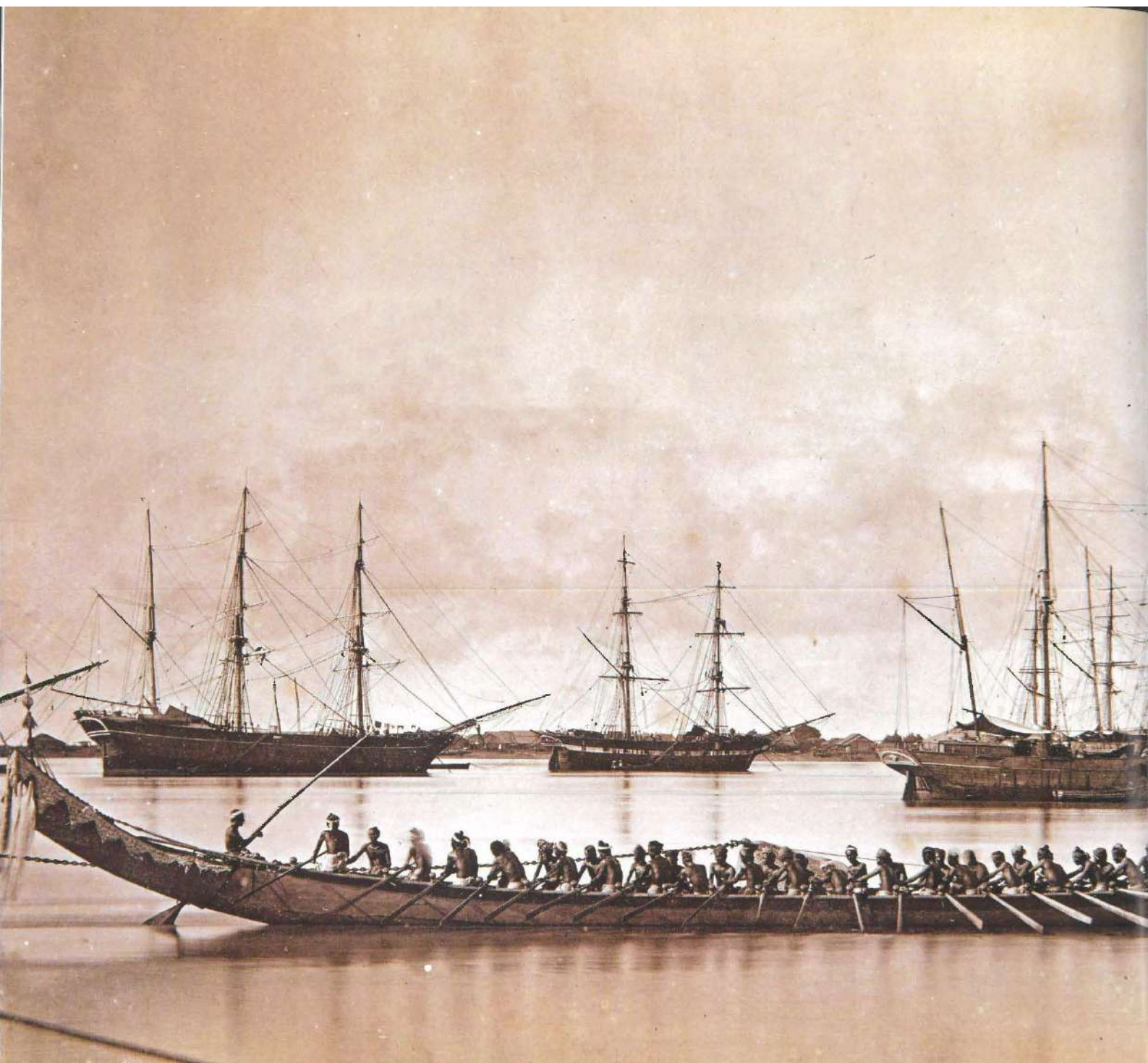
This book, *Unseen Burma – Early Photography 1862-1962*, is my tribute to this wonderful country and her people. Old photographs spanning one hundred years provide proof of its past glories. In this digital age, countless photos are taken daily, yet how many will be treasured in the next century. Faces of people who are long gone, traditions and lifestyles that are forgotten in the modern world, and landscapes that are now altered, these photographs are a treasure trove that I would like to share.

While writing and researching this book, I felt very inspired, and often, in my imagination, was transported back in time to when the photos were taken. I could not help but wonder what life was like back then and I realised that each photo surely has its own story to tell. The understanding of the social context, the interactions between the subjects, the clothing worn, or the objects present in the photograph all help us to decode the image. Certain things are obvious, yet some need careful interpretation and imaginations. In my research, I relied on colonial English sources, local publications during the Independence time, as well as contemporary academic works from experts.

I mainly use the terms 'Burma' and 'Burmese' as they reflect the period when the photos were taken.

My publisher and I were in accord on the need for detailed captions for each photo. Long captions help bring these old photos alive to tell their own story and allow present-day readers to immerse themselves in bygone days. The period covered is like a time capsule which was sealed off in 1962. There then followed a half century of isolation, which reopened for merely a decade, only to be closed off again with an uncertain future. I hope that this collection of photos will help to preserve the history of Myanmar and her valuable culture for future generations.

Bangkok, November 2022



INTRODUCTION

Never before have so many photos been taken so easily and shared so widely. Yet how many digital images remain unseen? Modern digital photography and connectivity encourages a proliferation that is difficult to appreciate frame by frame. Social media feeds are our modern albums and we rely on algorithms to surprise us with photo throwbacks of the past.

It wasn't always this way. Once upon a time each exposure was carefully considered. They were finite in number and expensive to produce, with a few skilled practitioners controlling the medium. Despite no guarantee of success the resulting prints stood a chance of making it into valued photo albums.

Black and white photos of bygone days anywhere, but particularly in Burma, offer a stark contrast to modern digital photography. They speak of the often-cumbersome technology of the day, photographers' skills and the myriad challenges they faced. Samuel Bourne, who dispatched photographers to Burma on assignment, described his 'absurdly heavy camera top' amongst the mountain of equipment needed for an expedition in neighbouring India during the 1860s.¹ The tropical heat and humidity was also problematic. Captain Linnaeus Tripe described using wax paper negatives on an 1855 expedition in Upper Burma as they were lighter and easier to develop than glass plates. The wax, however, melted and ruined many of the negatives leading him to reject 2,832 out of 6,517 resulting prints from that trip.²

A leaky boat could also wreak havoc. 'I regretted to find that my photographic projects would, to a great degree, be frustrated, as several of my boxes with prepared plates were half full of water, and some of the chemicals, too, entirely destroyed,' recorded Dr Clement Williams regarding his travels *'Through Burmah to Western China: Being Notes of a Journey in 1863 to Establish the Practicability of a Trade-route Between the Irrawaddy and the Yang-Tse-Kiang'*.

Beyond the marvel of the medium, skill and tenacity of early photographers, surviving prints from mid-nineteenth century Burma onwards offer a story of sheer survival. They've endured a tropical climate, journeys around the world, political upheaval and generational dispersal only to resurface in collections years later. Irrespective of the subject matter, the mere existence of such images is of value itself.

This collection grew from a personal fascination with Burma, its culture and history. Despite being raised in neighbouring Thailand in the 1970s, my knowledge of the country was almost non-existent. Its prevailing image was of a poor, underdeveloped Southeast Asian nation with internal

political problems and unrest, the result of the military takeover in 1962 and subsequent isolation. Few people were afforded glimpses of the natural beauty and cultural wealth within its borders.

The contemporary image of Myanmar, as the nation is known today, is sadly still one of political repression and the high hopes that came with Aung San Suu Kyi's rise to power have been dashed. It is difficult to imagine a time when Rangoon was a must-see on the international tourism map in the early to mid-twentieth century. Or when the country's educated elite were travelling abroad for education and work as far back as 1871, the year that Kinwun Mingyi led Burma's first diplomatic mission to Europe.

As an academic, the study of textiles was my entry point into learning more about this fascinating country. Old photographs revealed how fabrics were used or worn and in what context. The images I came across fueled my fascination and two decades on, my scope has definitely expanded beyond textiles to a broader discovery of bygone days in Burma.

This collection bears witness to the century prior to 1962 when the country was sealed off by the military. It traces a period of great change beginning in 1862 when part of the country was under British colonial rule through different stages of political development to independence in 1948. The country prospered and, ultimately, stepped out onto the global stage when U Thant, a Burmese diplomat, became the third secretary general of the United Nations in 1961. In one hundred years, Burmese citizens lived through royalty, colonisation, independence and then military takeover.

Dual powers ruled Burma in 1862, the year this photographic collection begins. King Mindon reigned in Upper Burma, also known as the Kingdom of Ava, while the British controlled Lower Burma, a portion of which had been in their control since 1826. After the 3rd and final Anglo-Burmese war in 1885 the British annexed the entire country and the last Burmese king, Thibaw, was exiled for the rest of his life to Ratanagiri, a small, remote coastal town in India and British colonial rule lasted for more than a century.

Western contact with Burma began long before the British began to survey the country in the 18th century. Drawings and lithographs from early Western travelers gave visual impressions of the country prior to the advent

¹ Fabb - P. 6-7

² <https://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/2015/06/captain-linnaeus-tripe-photographer-of-india-and-burma.html>

of photography, while their journals and memoirs provided vivid accounts of the land and its people. Nicolo di Conti, a Venetian explorer and merchant, visiting in 1435 told of an exotic land where "the kings kept huge numbers of elephants, the fashion of people incising inks into the skin (tattooing), snakes that were as big as a man, a strange creature, a combination of a pig, an oxen, and a unicorn (a rhinoceros ?)". Or an account by Hieronimo de Santo Stefano who visited "a great city called Pegu" in 1496 made mention of "a great lord, who possesses more than ten thousand elephants."³

When 18th century British East India Company officers began to explore and survey the land of rubies, teak and temples, photography had yet to be invented, but their personal diaries and official documents give details of what they encountered. Resource-rich Burma had long held a mysterious allure for traders and foreign powers alike. It offered the promise of vast natural resources, a land connection to China and a history of proud kings and warriors. It ultimately became one of the British Empire's prized possessions for its geopolitical and trade advantages.

The invention of photography occurred during colonial times and spread across the globe, particularly during the century that this collection spans. I do not wish to romanticize the era but rather to present a visual record of that time which changed according to the photographers and their context. Colonial life is depicted along with traditional Burmese life seen through the eyes of foreigners. Later images are by Burmese photographers who captured their world as the middle class grew and cameras became more affordable.

The first photo in Burma is believed to have been taken in 1852 by an amateur photographer and military surgeon John McCosh. A few years later in 1855, the aforementioned Captain Linnaeus Tripe took photographs of Upper Burma during the diplomatic mission of Sir Arthur Phayre to King Mindon in Amarapura. However, the development of photography that followed was initially commercial and centered around British-controlled Lower Burma where portraiture was in demand for *carte de visite* (visiting cards) amongst the foreign and business communities.

Photography came later to Upper Burma which remained independent under Burmese royal rule until annexation by the British in 1885. Strict border controls were in place limiting the access of foreign photographers and early photography was largely carried out by amateurs who were typically there on other official or trade assignments. No commercial photographic studios were in operation in Upper Burma while the Burmese monarchy was still in place.

From 1861 to 1878, Dr. Clement Williams, previously mentioned here for his 1863 journey in northern Burma, documented the people, monuments and scenes of Mandalay and surrounds. He was a British Army surgeon from the 68th Regiment serving at Thayetnyo and his successful cataract operations attracted the attention of King Mindon, as did his language skills

and interest in the local culture. The king appointed him the British Resident in Mandalay in 1862 which gave him great access to photograph the kingdom and its subjects.⁴

The British used photography to document their colony, the land and its people. The photographers were often also specialists in other fields. German-born engineer, architect and archeologist Frederick Oscar Oertel photographed traditional architecture during his 1892 visit, while Leslie Milne undertook ethnographic studies of the Shan people beginning in the early 1900s. British Army officers had clear strategic objectives in mind as they documented areas along the China border from remote outposts in neighbouring Kachin and Shan states, beginning after the British annexation of Upper Burma in 1885 and continuing on into the 20th century.

By the 1880s, photographic studios were opening in Rangoon where British photographer J. Jackson and German Philip Klier were in partnership. Others from around the British empire also spotted the business potential and moved to Burma, such as the famed Sarkies Brothers who acquired The Strand hotel in Rangoon and opened in 1901, adding it to their expanding Asian hotel empire.

Meanwhile there was an influx of photographic activities and businesses in Upper Burma following its annexation by the British in 1885. Professionals like Felice Beato, as well as amateur photographers, rushed to capture images of the former royal capital of Mandalay and the surroundings. Beato was one of the most prolific and entrepreneurial colonial photographers in Asia, also producing souvenirs and curios for foreign visitors.

The rise of tourism at the turn of the 20th century created commercial opportunities for photography beyond studio portrait services and sent images of Burma far and wide. Regular steamship services docked in Rangoon, bringing with them a steady flow of tourists. Souvenir albums, greeting cards and postcards began to appear and Indian proprietor D.A. Ahuja, who opened his Rangoon operations in 1885, was to find particular success with the latter. He bought the license to Beato's work in 1909, which included the work of photographers Watts & Skeen that Beato had earlier acquired. Inhouse photography complimented Ahuja's extensive archive and a wide range of tinted postcards produced in Germany.

In the early 1900s Burmese-owned studios began to emerge. They were founded by photographers who had worked for pioneering studios like Klier, Beato and Ahuja. The transfer of technical knowledge from foreign to Burmese photographers spread the trade to smaller cities around the country and made it more affordable for the local market. Ahuja also published a photography manual in Burmese, no doubt contributing to the wide dissemination of knowledge.

In 1915, U Ohn Maung, a former assistant to D.A. Ahuja, struck out on his own with the London Art Studio while 'National U Pu' studio, owned by

photographer U Pu, was the first Burmese studio in Moulmein.³ Interestingly, the resulting photographs remained stylistically similar to those of foreign-owned studios. The sole distinguishing feature is often the embossed name in a corner of the image. Burmese photographers continued to use Western-style backdrops and props, possibly due to customer demand and the prevailing aesthetics of the day.

A number of Japanese-owned studios also operated in Burma in the early 20th century, including Fuji Studio and Tokiwa Studio in Mandalay, Nikko Studio in Toungoo and H.F. Rikko in Moulmein. This was possibly part of the Japanese effort to expand its influence across Asia. The advent of compact film cameras in the late 1800s allowed photography to expand globally. The true impact was to be felt in the late 1920s and 1930s in Burma when, despite the economic hardships of the Great Depression, there was a rise in popularity of portable personal cameras. Businesses grew through supplying equipment and developing photos for well-to-do locals, expatriates and foreign travelers.

Personal photography was still a costly pursuit but it became more accessible to middle and upper class Burmese. This led to decreased demand for professional photography so studios diversified into the sale of curios, antiques, postcards and souvenir books. They also began to offer print developing services to meet growing consumer demand. At the same time, trade with Japan was expanding and many Japanese goods were imported into Burma, including photographic paper.

Towards WWII and continuing on into the post-independence era from 1948 until military takeover in 1962, photography became even more accessible to the mainstream Burmese. There were also local photographers in most towns offering both studio portrait services for the post-independence government identification card.

The 1950s saw a further boost for photography with the founding of the Rangoon Photographic Society (later renamed the Burma Photographic Society) in 1950 to share information and improve technical skills.⁴ At the same time some local studios became full-service businesses offering photography, development as well as enlarging and tinting. They also imported photographic equipment which led to an increased availability. This all coincided with a growing press and expanded opportunities for photography.

Post-independence both the government and private sector increasingly published photographic material. The former to promote the country's history, culture and aspirations while business used the medium for advertising.

A slowdown followed General Ne Win's successful coup in 1962 and his complete control of the country. Countless private businesses and properties were nationalised, freedom of rights and speech was restricted and foreigners along with some upper-class Burmese left the increasingly isolated country. Photography faced censorship but local studios did operate in a low-key manner.

The country's repeated political upheaval as well as the passage of time has enhanced my appreciation of old photographs. A certain amount of super-sleuthing is involved in interpreting the images as they frequently lack written descriptions and even the names of the photographers are unknown. I have tried to give as much information as possible about the photographs shown here, including the techniques used and the subjects. Where no photographer's name is given, it indicates that he or she is unidentified.

When I first started collecting I was attracted to iconic shots with beautiful compositions by renowned photographers like Beato and Klier. Later the work of amateurs increasingly caught my eye. With the rise of the personal camera their work was not only more plentiful but also more personal, candid and often depicted locals, their ways of life and surroundings free of artifice. You can deduce quite a lot about both the subjects and the photographer, especially if an entire album is acquired.

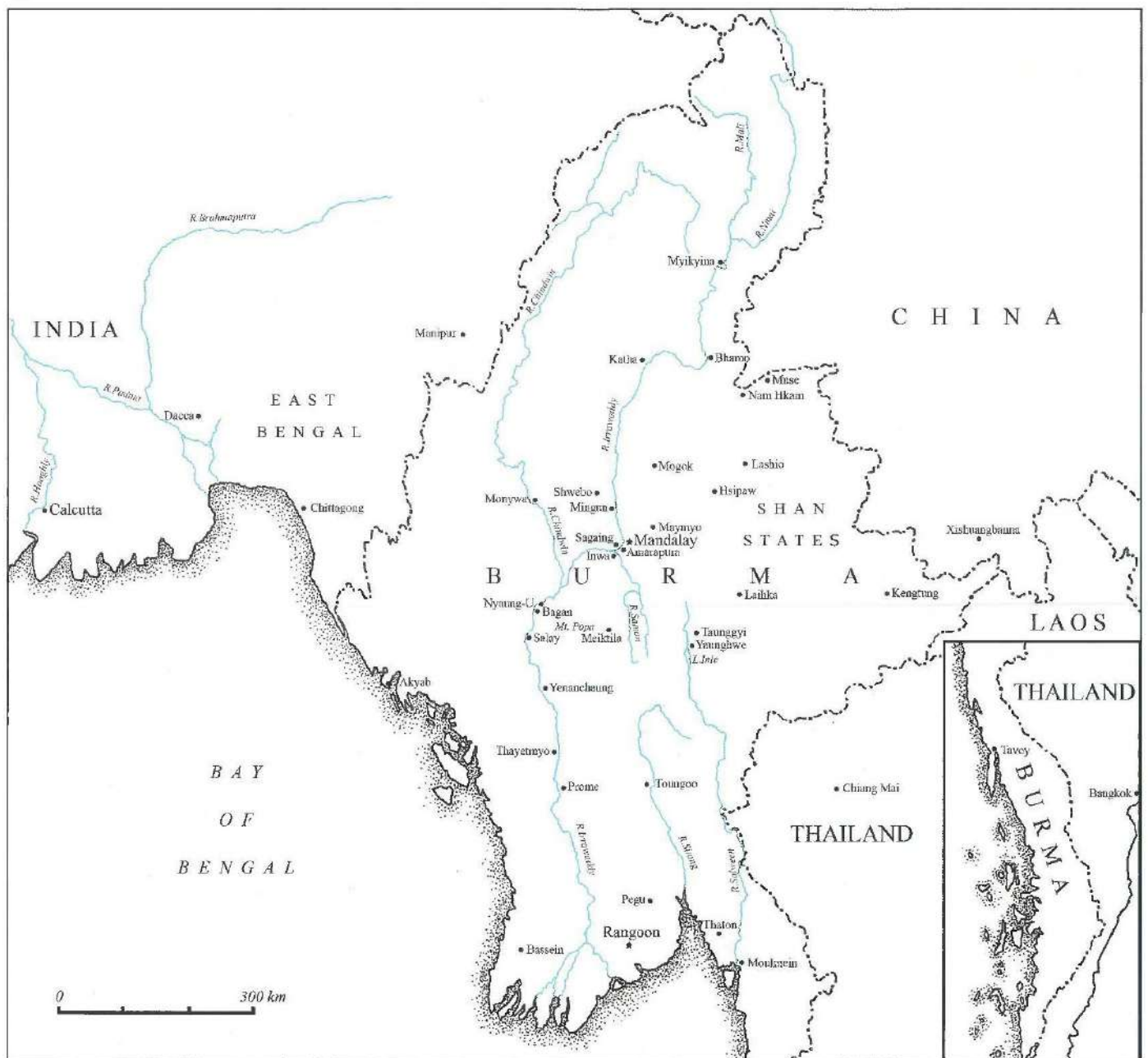
I am also drawn to portraits of people in situ. I love to look at how they dressed, their grooming and attire, the way they lived and objects they chose to surround themselves with. While my personal preference is for this type of anonymous lifestyle photography, I continue to seek images of landscapes and monuments to ensure a range of images.

Removed by time and distance from the photographers, we're left with just the images. Each is a time capsule. They offer clues to the era and customs of the day; the social standing of the sitter, clothes and hairstyles that were in vogue, as well as popular leisure pursuits. Smaller, secondary details are also fascinating. For example, a vase and drapery in the background of a studio can indicate contemporary interior trends and help to date the image.

A collection of photographs that spans a century also reveals evolutions in technology, fashion and even the relationship between the photographer and model. Studio portraits of villagers in traditional garb in the late 1800s show minimal expression. The viewer can only wonder what the models were thinking. Were they willing participants? Did they understand what the images were for? Was the photographer able to communicate with them? Were they in awe or afraid of the camera, possibly fearing it contained spirits?

After almost five decades of isolation, modernisation has been slow in Burma, particularly by comparison with neighbouring Thailand. The February 2021 military coup has once again stalled the country with severe repression. The photographs within these pages document the century of immense change that preceded 1962 and remind modern viewers of Burma's rich past. I am motivated to present this collection to ensure this record lives on. Outside impressions of the country were limited from the 70's through until the 90's, at least from my viewpoint across the border in Thailand. I hope that today's communication-savvy youth can continue to document their realities and keep the rest of the world informed.

3 Myo Min - P.13 4 McCrae - P.96 5 Birk - P.22 6 Birk - P.24





*Burma casts a spell over those who know her and compels them to love her,
and that spell will remain on me so long as I live.*

Beatrix Medford, 1936

Photographs mounted on cabinet cards with holiday greeting messages like this were popular items sold for the festive season by photographic studios in Burma at the turn of the twentieth century. Iconic shots (this one by Felice Beato) capturing slices of local lives and landscapes offered glimpses of this faraway land to entrance those receiving them on the other side of the world.



CHAPTER 1

CHANGING TIMES CHANGING FACES

Imagine experiencing photography for the very first time; posing for the camera and the wonder of holding a thin sheet of paper with your image on it. The ubiquity of digital images today makes it difficult to truly understand the awe and mystique surrounding photography in 1862. Yet there is still a curiosity for the modern viewer of the portraits shown here. How did these visual records of bygone days survive and who created them? Portraiture began long before photography. Paintings, prints and sculptures, along with other visual arts give modern viewers glimpses of past peoples, their lives, power and wealth or lack thereof. When photography was first invented in the mid 1800s, the relative immediacy and ease of transmission compared to other media of the time made it a truly powerful tool. However, early control of the image was still the preserve of the wealthy, much like art forms that came before it. This was certainly the case in Burma.

The photographs of King Thibaw and his court are, undoubtedly, about image and posterity and today offer a valuable visual record of the royal court, one that was inaccessible to commoners and foreigners of the day.

It's curious that despite the strict dynastic codes of the court, the monarch appears to have embraced this new technology. Was it to record his wealth and power? One can only imagine his motivations. It's not even clear who took the photographs or how they gained access to this cloistered world. Glass negatives were discovered by British troops when they captured the Mandalay court in 1885.¹ As French citizens were known to have served at court and were apparently shown favours by the king in a ploy to counter the British threat, it's plausible that the photographers were French.

Other portraits in the book show Burmese noblemen in all their finery projecting power, pride and even independence, especially in meetings with foreign dignitaries. Meanwhile portraits taken of Burmese abroad display the subjects' remarkable achievements; an 1860s carte-de-visite of Maung Shaw Lu, the first Burmese student to study at a university in the United States and ambassadors on diplomatic missions to Europe in the 1870s.

The century of images included within these pages begins in 1862 and features both subjects who commissioned their own portraits to project a certain image as well as others who may never have seen the final result or even understood in what they were participating.

This collection of portraits reveals a rich cast of characters within Burmese society: royalty, an aristocratic class, court entertainers like dancers

and court jesters, military officers and soldiers and tribal minorities. New 'actors' filled these roles as the decades progressed. Burmese rulers who held the highest ranking in the social strata were replaced by the few Shan royals who managed to retain their sovereignty under British rule. The power that officials held in dynastic times was assumed by politicians during the late colonial era and through the independence era while the modern equivalent of the court entertainer was the Burmese actress who made it to Hollywood.

Early colonial portraiture in Burma recorded the country's rich ethnic diversity and forms a valuable, cultural record. It shows the people and their context which, as a textile academic, was my initial reason for collecting these photographs. The images enabled me to understand different garments and who wore them. The photographers who undertook such ethnographic studies were often in the employ of the colonial authorities. Others were commissioned to document the landscape and built environment in Burma at the time. The transmission of these exotic early photographic images abroad, undoubtedly, fueled many orientalist fantasies that can be observed in the European art and literature of the era.

At the same time there was a reverse cultural influence with foreign studio photographers using backdrops of European forests, green pastures, arches and columns along with Western furniture. Models can be seen in distinctly Western poses, whether seated on a chair with their face in profile or reclining elegantly on their side.

Many early models may never have even seen the photographs they posed for. The colonial power dynamic between photographers and ethnic minority subjects in the late 1800s and early 1900s was bound to be different to that of Burmese photographers and their increasing local patronage when they began to establish their own studios around 1915. They did, however, continue to apply Western aesthetics in the choice of poses, props and backgrounds.

A progression of portraiture can be traced from an ethnographic and exoticist lens in the late 1800s and early 1900s into 'self portraiture' in the early decades of the 20th century. Burmese photographers shared a common language with their subjects and an expanding clientele thanks to the growing middle class in Burma. The relationship between the service provider and customer was surely more even and overall accessibility to

¹ Sadan - P.288



photography increased within Burma through to independence in 1948 and beyond until 1962. This mirrored what was happening around the world thanks to the democratisation of photography by Kodak.

George Eastman, founder of Kodak, transformed photography by creating transparent film rolls in the early 1880s. He followed this with the invention of a camera that enabled anyone to be a photographer as the company's first advertising slogan in 1888 stated, "You press the button and we do the rest."² Amateurs were liberated from messy and expensive technical constraints and could make images beyond the studio. More informal photography began to appear around the world and people took snapshots of their own lives and surroundings. Established codes of the medium changed. Many amateurs may never even have known them and freely experimented as did their subjects. The later portraits in this collection certainly reflect this relaxation and a growing informality.

A series of photographs that spans decades allows one to observe technological changes as well as the aesthetic preferences that waxed and waned; studio props and painted backdrops, fashion, hairstyles, poses and facial expressions. The stiff Victorian gazes which met the camera in the late

1800s changed to more relaxed and confident expressions in later images, reflecting the mood and relative freedom of the time.

With any photograph it's interesting to note the image within the image that the photographer or subject or both were trying to project. Some subjects have incorporated Western elements into their sartorial choices, yet the overall form of the garments remains traditional. Men sport cropped Western hairstyles, leather belts and shoes while wearing a longyi, length of fabric sewn into a tube. Meanwhile it was popular for women to use imported fabrics to create *htamein*, or female longyis.

Surely this hybrid look signified the maintaining of a cultural identity in the face of British colonial rule, a form of passive resistance. With the rise of nationalism after World War 1 it would have been a clear statement for those who were politically active and part of an effort by pro-nationalists to encourage the use of locally produced cotton rather than imported fabrics. Fashion was a way for people to express their modernity while still being proud of their identity.

A studio portrait from 1927 shows an unknown Burmese man in a Western-style setting, as used by foreign photographers but continued by locally owned studios. The model is seated in a stiff-backed, brocade-covered chair with a painted backdrop of classical columns. His attire is traditional and includes a male hip wrapper called *taungshey pahso*, a *taik pong* jacket, and a *kaungbaung* headcloth. The leather closed shoes are Western yet don't look out of place with the ensemble. Traditional attire was also encouraged as daily wear for men and women by successive post-Independence governments and was worn on the world stage by dignitaries and actors alike.

Some garments were controversial. Blouses made from translucent imported fabric were highly fashionable at the beginning of the 20th century but became increasingly controversial in the following decades and caused an uproar amongst conservative political activists and the Buddhist clergy. Even though modest lace corsets or *za bawli* were worn underneath, the sheer fabric was deemed too revealing and vulgar, not in keeping with traditional values.

Women had the last say, however. A photograph in this collection shows actor Win Min Than wearing a sheer muslin blouse over a *za bawli* when she starred opposite Gregory Peck in the 1954 film 'The Purple Plain'. The style has also endured in 21st century Myanmar.

Traditional attire in general continues to be worn everyday in much of Myanmar. The Burmese identity has stood firm and links the proud nobles in photographs from the 1860s, 20th century and street fashion today.

The joy of collecting is being able to have such an overview as well as appreciate images individually. The people within these photographs may be long gone, but their lasting legacy is to communicate from a bygone era, something that they themselves would surely have never been able to imagine at the dawn of the photographic age.

² Fineman - https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/kodk/hd_kodk.htm

The subject of court photography in Burma, despite having received a great deal of interest from academics as well as collectors and connoisseurs interested in the country, remains shrouded in mystery. The names of the photographers who served in the Mandalay palace remain unidentified. Colonel Willoughby Wallace Hooper (1837–1912), a provost Marshal of the Burma Expeditionary Force that went to Mandalay in November 1885 suggested the French, many of whom served at court towards the end of the last reign.³ However, more evidence is needed to prove this hypothesis. The discovery of a group of glass negatives and some equipment are surely evidence of photographic activity inside the court. Since then, quite a few shots of the royal couple have started to emerge allowing the public to have a glimpse of how the Burmese king and queen really looked. Early copies of photos were sold to professional photographers who readily modified and utilized them for commercial purposes.

1.1 Burma Last Royal Couple, Enthroned Circa 1880s / 10 x 14 cm / Mattie Calogreedy (??)⁴

King Thibaw and Queen Suphialat are resplendent in state regalia robes. The King's robe is called '*Du Yin Daw Gyi*' and the queen's '*Mahulata*'. Each robe weighs several kilograms and consists of various detachable parts, made up of stiffened leather lined with velvet, embellished with profuse embroidery of gold threads, sequins, and encrusted gems. The robes were taken to England at one point after the British annexed Burma but were returned after Independence as a gesture of goodwill.

The couple sit on the lion throne flanked by white umbrellas, the important regalia, reserved only for the ruling monarch. The alternating small statues of page boys (small naked boys holding their hands high up in a praying position) and lions are visible at the bottom of the photo. On the left side of the king, there is a golden betel nut box in the shape of a *hinhtha*, a mythical bird.

The photo may have been taken during one of the state occasions when the royal couple granted a grand audience. One such occasion was at the end of Buddhist lent when all the princes, tributary rulers, ministers, and officers gathered to pay respects, beg for pardon, and renew their vows of allegiance.

The provenance of this particular photograph is intriguing. It was given by King Thibaw to F.H. Edgelow, a young British barrister who served as a go-between for the pension negotiations between the king and the British Government. This means the photograph traveled with the king from Mandalay to Ratnagiri where he lived in exile.



3 P. 228 - Sadan, Mandy (2014). The Historical Visual Economy of Photography in Burma. *Bijdragen Tot De Taal-, Land-En Volkenkunde*, 70 (2014), 281–312.

4 A similar photo (in standing post) was found in the album of Sir Richard Carnac Temple in the British Library's collection, where Mattie Calogreedy, the Eurasian maid of honor to the queen, was attributed as being the photographer.