

Buddhist Visual Cultures, Rhetoric, and Narrative in Late Burmese Wall Paintings

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Introduction

Step into a Burmese temple from the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries and you are surrounded by a riot of color and imagery. The interior walls and ceilings are completely covered with paintings. You see bright reds and greens if you are in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and reds and a brilliant turquoise from the late eighteenth and into the early nineteenth century. The imagery ranges from guardian figures, protective diagrams, and scenes of hell to textile patterns and representations of Buddhist biography. Large-scale deities and ogres, numerous registers filled with figures, landscape scenery, and buildings, and floral-geometric patterning occupy the space around a Buddha image or images that face east or are set around a central pillar.

Over the course of more than 150 years, hundreds of temples were embellished with wall paintings evincing remarkable similarities in subject matter and organization (fig. 0.1). These sprang up across the central region of Burma during the late Nyaungyan and early Konbaung dynasties (c. 1675–1825). Mural painting sites were primarily produced within the core zone of the country around the confluence of the Irrawaddy, Mu, and Chindwin rivers and along the central reaches of the Irrawaddy. This is a dry region, caught in a “rain shadow” formed by the mountain ranges that fringe the country, and usually receiving less than 650 millimeters of precipitation per year.¹ The plain of the Irrawaddy River is mostly flat with low lying hills, and there are numerous dry, sandy water channels, remainders of seasonal rivers and flash floods produced during the rainy season. The landscape has a reddish, dusty appearance with scrubby bushes and trees, as well as palm and coconut trees. The dryness of this central region has enabled the preservation of wall paintings over the past nine centuries.²

The murals survive in clusters of small-scale temples, stupas, and excavated cave-temples.³ Most wall painting sites are located in or near monastic compounds, villages,

1. Richard M. Cooler, “Sacred Buildings for an Arid Climate: Architectural Evidence for Low Rainfall in Ancient Pagan,” *Journal of Burma Studies* 1 (1997): 21. Cooler argues that current rainfall levels probably also applied in the past, the evidence being the lack of water-channeling structures on buildings.
2. The wetter regions of the country have no extant examples of this tradition. Whether murals were produced there, or whether they have been obliterated because of other forces, remains unclear.
3. Pagan-period buildings at Pagan have been the subject of considerable research, but there are few analyses of nineteenth-century structures. The minor temples with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century wall paintings have also not been studied extensively, nor have Pagan-period buildings located outside Pagan. For further information on architecture in Burma, see Paul Strachan, *Pagan: Art and Architecture of Old Burma* (Whiting Bay, Arran: Kiscadale Publications, 1989) and Pierre Pichard, *Inventory of Monuments*



Figure 0.1 General view of the Ywagyigone group of temples, near Pakokku, eighteenth century.

and other inhabited areas, although some, such as the Powindaung caves, were remote religious spots. Compared with the thousands of architectural remains, complete or nearly complete examples of wall paintings are relatively limited in number, and most sites have only fragmentary remnants or none at all.

The stupas and temples in which the wall paintings are housed are mostly brick constructions covered with stucco on the exterior and plaster on the interior, all of which can be whitewashed. Despite their situation in the dry zone of central Burma, many sites are subject to rising damp, which has resulted in damage to the plaster on which the murals are painted. Trees and other plants that grow on or next to the buildings have damaged the brickwork and allowed moisture to enter, causing the plaster to detach from the walls and crumble or resulting in salt blooms that obscure the imagery. Harm to the paintings has come from other sources too. The excrement of bats and lizards both covers and corrodes the paint. Lizard eggs are attached to walls with a sticky substance; the claws of the animals scratch the plaster and paint surfaces; and wasps remove plaster to construct their nests. In many temples, the subject matter of the murals has become difficult to discern, but remarkably, despite these conditions, I have been able to visit and photograph more than 160 sites with identifiable subject

at *Pagan*, vols. 1–8 (Gartmore, Stirling, Scotland: Kiscadale, 1992–2001). For later monuments, see Aung Thaw, *Historical Sites in Burma* (Rangoon: Sarpay Beikman Press, 1972), 125–50. Sylvia Fraser-Lu, *Burmese Crafts: Past and Present* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994), 63–65 and 71–74.



Figure 0.2 General view of temples at Pagan, primarily eleventh to thirteenth century.

matter that span the seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries, with the majority dating to the eighteenth century.

The production of wall paintings in Burma has a long history. The first murals that are still in evidence date to the Pagan period (c. 1044–1287). The vast majority are found at the ancient city of Pagan, but remnants also exist in temples scattered around the Burmese central zone (fig. 0.2). The subject matter is broad, incorporating Buddhist biography amid other material drawn from various Buddhist traditions. The Buddhist councils were sometimes included, as were representations of Asoka, the Buddha's preeminent disciples, and cosmology. There has also been speculation about the presence of Tantric Buddhism at Pagan, as, for instance, there are extant depictions of the Buddha lying on the cosmological ocean.⁴ However, the most popular subjects, as indicated by the frequency of their representation, were images of the Buddhas of the Past, the life of Gotama Buddha, and the *jātaka* stories, the tales of the Buddha's previous lives. Each of these emerged as visual imagery during the reigns of the first few Burman kings at Pagan, and each was depicted in wall paintings, as well as sculpture, often in stock visual formats.⁵ The previous Buddhas were depicted iconically within an individual square or rectangular space. Occasionally, beneath these images was a sequence of life events showing the departure from the palace, the haircutting, and the enlightenment (fig. 0.3). Scenes from Gotama Buddha's biography were often drawn from a narrowly defined body of material, with the eight great events of the Buddha's life dominating the representations of that story, although the renunciation, the seven

4. Charles Duroiselle, "The Ari of Burma and Tantric Buddhism," *Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report 1915–1916*, 79–93. Claudine Bautze-Picron, *Timeless Vistas of the Cosmos: The Buddhist Murals of Pagan* (Bangkok: Orchid Press, 2003), 22–27.

5. See Charlotte Galloway, "Buddhist Narrative Imagery during the Eleventh Century at Pagan, Burma: Reviewing Origins and Purpose," in *Rethinking Visual Narratives from Asia: Intercultural and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Alexandra Green (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013), 159–74. Claudine Bautze-Picron, "Painted and Architectural Ornamentation of the Temples of Pagan: More than Mere Iconography and Decoration," in *Art of Merit: Studies in Buddhist Art and its Conservation*, ed. David Park, Kuenga Wangmo, and Sharon Cather (London: Archetype Publications, 2013), 66.

stations occupied immediately after the enlightenment, and the distribution of the relics are also in evidence (fig. 0.4). The *jātakas* were primarily depicted as a cluster of single-scened squares, and Robert Brown has argued that the early Burmese representations of the *jātakas* as a group of 550 tales reveal a focus on the totality of the Buddha's teachings (fig. 0.5).⁶ Clearly, narrative was an important element in constructing an appropriate temple space during this early phase of Burman artistic production, and it was a tendency that intensified over the course of the following centuries.

Few murals remain from the fourteenth- to the mid-seventeenth-century period, probably in part due to over-painting. However, paintings in an unnamed temple at Kyaiklat Kyaung in Sagaing may be dated to the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries based on the square-shaped orthography of the captions and an iconographical analysis of the imagery.⁷ The site includes a number of features that connect it with Pagan paintings, including patterns of tiny painted Buddhas on the ceiling and guardian figures modelled on earlier representations of *bodhisattas* flanking the entrance (fig. 0.6).⁸ Illustrations further included the twenty-eight Buddhas of the Past, the life of Gotama Buddha, at least three of the ten great *jātaka* tales, the Mahāsutasoma Jātaka (no. 537), which tells of a king who became a cannibal and how he was reformed, and other, unidentified or tentatively identified stories, probably also *jātakas*.⁹ Many of the narratives at Kyaiklat Kyaung are shown in an extended strip format, and while the *jātakas* occupy a considerable portion of the walls, they are reduced in number from the complete, or nearly complete, representations of the 550 stories found during the Pagan period (fig. 0.7). This foreshadows the eighteenth-century murals that comprise a standardized body of stories depicted in chronological strips. In showing elements from early and late temples, the paintings at the Kyaiklat monastery provide valuable evidence of an intermediate phase in the development of this art form.

We can see wall paintings commonly in evidence again from the late seventeenth century. The earliest remaining sites from the Nyaungyan period (c. 1597–1752) are the Hmansi Paya (seventeenth century) and Taungbi Ok-kyauing (1706) at Pagan, Tilawkaguru Cave-temple on Sagaing Hill (mid to late seventeenth century),¹⁰ Thirimingala Paya at Nyaung Hla (1693), Ko Htun Pye Paya in Yasagyo (1703), and Ko

6. Robert L. Brown, "Narrative as Icon: The Jātaka Stories in Ancient Indian and Southeast Asian Architecture," in *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia*, ed. Juliane Schober (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 86–92.
7. Round script was promoted from the seventeenth century. See Victor Lieberman, "Was the Seventeenth Century a Watershed in Burmese History?" in *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Period: Trade, Power, and Belief*, ed. Anthony Reid (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 243.
8. Bautze-Picron, *Timeless Vistas of the Cosmos*, 93–103. These figures may have lost their Mahayanist connotations and become more generic guardian figures, as argued by Bautze-Picron.
9. Noel Singer, "Decaying Murals in the Sagaing Hills of Burma (Myanmar)," *Arts of Asia* 30, no. 6 (Nov./Dec., 2000): 138–39.
10. Alexey Kirichenko has suggested (personal communication, 2006) that there is evidence that Tilawkaguru monastery on Sagaing Hill was constructed in the 1620s or 1630s, so it is possible that the Tilawkaguru paintings were produced around this time, rather than the 1670s or early 1700s, as other evidence indicates (see Than Tun, ed. *Royal Orders of Burma, AD 1598–1885*, vol. 3 [Kyoto: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1986–1990], 11, 114). However, there is nothing to suggest that the murals were produced concurrently with the establishment of the monastery, and the wall paintings connect stylistically and in subject matter with other painting sites known to have been produced in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Nan Pyatthat Paya at Anein (1707), while some of the latest of these small-scale productions, located in the Pakokku area, date to the 1820s. Production burgeoned in the eighteenth century, when most sites were produced, and tapered off in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The dominant motifs in these temples are narrative representations of the twenty-eight Buddhas of the Past, the life of Gotama Buddha, and the ten great *jātaka* stories; illustrations of the Buddha's footprint, the Bodhi tree under which the Buddha sat to attain enlightenment, monks, *devas* (deities), *nāgas* (mythical serpents), *bilu* (ogres), protective diagrams, and floral-geometric patterns also constitute a significant portion of temple adornment. Specific types of imagery were placed in the entrances, on ceilings and interior walls, and behind the Buddha image or images, and were arranged thematically and hierarchically. Designs based on Indian trade textile and manuscript patterns fill the interstitial spaces around the narratives and blanket the ceilings, surrounding and contextualizing the Buddhist biographical narratives, as well as acting as a frame that transforms the paintings visually into a cloth hanging embellishing the temple interior. This material comprises a corpus that was used and reused with minor variations in Burmese temples from the late seventeenth through the early nineteenth century and forms the subject of this volume.

Religious Contexts

In the Burma of the late Nyaungyan and early Konbaung dynasties, the religious structure of the wall paintings had many strands, of which belief in the institution of kingship and the merit path of religious practice comprise the two major ones. These are, however, intertwined, as the Burmese king was considered to be a *bodhisatta*, a being focused on the path to enlightenment in the Theravada tradition. He was therefore also the layperson with the greatest store of merit in the kingdom, responsible for sharing his merit with and enhancing merit-making among his subjects. The king ruled in a city that was a reproduction of specific cosmological features, and the position of the monarch was correlated with that of the god Sakka (Indra) who rules in Tāvatiṃsa Heaven.¹¹ As a *dharmmarāja*, a righteous ruler, the king not only maintained political control, but also ensured moral order by engaging in such activities as bringing Buddhist relics to the kingdom, ensuring the purity of the Sangha (the monkhood), and transmitting Buddhist teachings (the Dhamma), often a justification for military exploits. Finally, the king could be considered a *cakkavatti* (universal monarch) who controls and prepares the island of Jambudīpa, where humans dwell and Buddhas arise, for Metteyya, the future Buddha.¹² All those born during Metteyya's dispensation and

11. For a full discussion of such cosmological features in a specific context, see François Tainturier, "The Foundation of Mandalay by King Mindon" (PhD dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2010).

12. Michael Aung-Thwin, *Pagan: The Origins of Modern Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1985), 47–68. William J. Koenig, "The Burmese Polity, 1752–1819: Politics, Administration, and Social Organization in the Early Konbaung Period," *Papers on South and Southeast Asia*, no. 34 (Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan, 1990), 41–45. Jacques Leider takes issue with what he perceives to be Aung-Thwin's essentialization of Burmese kingship, and discusses the relationship between kingship and Buddhism during the reign of King Alaungmintaya

who hear him preach will become enlightened, escaping *samsāra*, the cycle of birth and rebirth. Because of the king's religious roles, "church" and state were inseparably intertwined, and this is a feature visibly evident in the wall paintings through the numerous palace scenes and settings, as well as representations of military imagery, processions, and celebrations. In the provincial context where the wall paintings were produced, such pictures emphasized the material benefits of good *kamma* and high social status.

The wall paintings presented to the contemporary viewer particular religious activities. Buddhist lay practice includes three types of behavior that generate merit for the practitioner—charitable giving, following the Buddhist precepts and maintaining ethical conduct, and meditation. These lead to three forms of bliss, notably as a human in a pleasurable incarnation, a *deva* in a heaven, and the attainment of *nibbāna*.¹³ This religious methodology is dominated by the notion of exchange or benefit (Pali: *ānisaṃsa*), whereby in return for taking refuge in the Three Jewels (the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha) and making donations, people's wishes are fulfilled.¹⁴ Material support of the Sangha and the *sāsana* (the Buddha's dispensation) is therefore made in order to attain better future rebirths, including one during the dispensation of Metteyya, when many beings will attain enlightenment, and eventually *nibbāna*.

Actions that generate merit range from veneration of the Buddha and listening to his teachings to practicing the precepts, honoring *uposatha* days (days of religious observance), meditating, and making such donations as money, daily necessities, flowers, manuscripts, temples, and so forth. Power accrues to a person through these activities, a number of which involve self-discipline, and this power, depending on how it is used, can confer great importance on the person in the local social context.¹⁵ In Burma, the importance of giving was and is evinced by the popularity of the Vessantara Jātaka, the last of the ten great *jātaka* stories and the tale associated with the virtue of generosity. Its increasingly exclusive presence as a representative of the *jātaka* stories in the wall paintings of the nineteenth century, and the frequency of its depiction in other media, such as manuscripts, wood carvings, and *kalagas*,¹⁶ embroidered and applied textile hangings, further instantiates its significance. This in turn reveals the primary relevance of the virtue (*pāramī*) of generosity within Burmese society and highlights it as a major vehicle for lay participation in religious activities. One of the most significant gifts that could be offered was the construction of a temple, demonstrating generosity by honoring the Buddha and providing a venue for others to do so. The wall paintings and the temples in which they were housed represented a major form of giving because of the expense involved, and they therefore increased the donors' merit significantly, as well as added to their social standing. The act of establishing the building and its

(r. 1752–60). Jacques Leider, "A Kingship by Merit and Cosmic Investiture: An Investigation into King Alaungmintaya's Self-Representation," *Journal of Burma Studies* 15, no. 2 (2011): 165–87.

13. The first two arrive via birth in one of the higher realms of existence.

14. Peter Skilling, "Worship and Devotional Life: Buddhist Devotional Life in Southeast Asia," in *Encyclopedia of Religions*, 2nd ed., vol. 14, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Thomson/Gale, 2005), 9832–33.

15. See Nicola Tannenbaum, *Who Can Compete Against the World? Power-Protection and Buddhism in Shan Worldview*, Monograph and Occasional Papers Series, No. 51 (Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Asian Studies, 1995) for an extended discussion of power and protection among the Shan.

16. These hangings are also known as *shwe chi do*.

contents indicated the good *kamma*, social status, and political strength of the donors, factors that also enabled the construction initially.

Wishes and aspirations (Pali: *paṇidhāna*) usually accompany donations, and were often recorded in inscriptions, as can be seen at a few temple sites with extant dedications.¹⁷ For example, an inscription found at the Thirimingala temple, Nyaung Hla village, dated to 1693, proclaims that the donor, with good intentions, generously made the images and statues of the Buddha, drawing and painting the *jātaka* stories and ornamenting the walls for the purpose of beautification. In view of his meritorious actions, the donor made numerous requests, including that he obtain wisdom and become an *arahant* in front of Metteyya and that he be able to follow the paths leading to the renunciation of desire in order to obtain *nibbāna*. Additionally, he desired never to be reborn in the four nether existences (in hell, or as an animal, ghost, or demon); that if he were reborn as a human, it would be on a pleasurable plane of existence; and that if he were reborn as a *deva*, he hoped to be like Indra (Sakka). When an embryo, he and his mother were to be free from danger; his parents should enjoy peace and pleasure; he would have the seven characteristics of a virtuous person: wealth, the four good marks, the four marks of well-being, the three characteristics of good deeds, and the three good Dhammas: *dāna* (charity), *sīla* (precepts and ethics), and *bhāvanā* (meditation), among other features. The donor also expressed a wish for fame and knowledge, that he would associate with good people, respect living beings, the Dhamma, monks, morals, and precepts, speak only good words, and have the ability to make incomparable donations. After sharing his merit with others, he solicited praise for his donation and appointed the earth goddess as his witness. Other inscriptions describe similar desires by other donors.¹⁸

The practice of making donations to the Buddha was clarified early in the Buddhist tradition as exemplified by the first lay converts—Tapussa and Bhallika—who were given the Buddha's hair relics to enshrine and honor. In contrast, the *Pañcavaggi*, the five monks who cared for the Buddha during his period of austerities and became his first disciples, received the Buddha's first sermon in the deer park of Sarnath. This established the roles of the lay populace and the monkhood within two primary areas of religious action at the beginning of the Buddha's dispensation.¹⁹ When teaching the lay population, the Buddha emphasized giving and moral observance as leading to a heavenly rebirth,²⁰ and in the *Questions of King Milinda*, a commonly found text in Burma, it is explained that veneration of the Buddha's relics is for lay people only, not for monks.²¹ This is not to say that a layperson does not also meditate or practice *sīlas*,

17. Donative inscriptions were usually placed in entrances and therefore have deteriorated faster than the imagery inside the temples.

18. See, for example, U Tin Lwin, "Ananda Brick Monastery Inscriptions of Pagan," *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 59, no. 1 (1976): 101–19.

19. Juliane Schober, "Paths to Enlightenment: Theravada Buddhism in Upper Burma" (PhD dissertation, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 1989), 66.

20. Peter Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* (repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 47.

21. I. B. Horner, trans., *Milinda's Questions*, vol. 1 (London: Luzac and Co. Ltd., 1963), 249–54. This is the section on the veneration of the relics.

or that monks cannot generate merit through generosity or venerate relics and images.²² In actual practice they can and do, but the establishment of basic paths of religious action led to the development of giving as a dominant form of religious practice in Burma. Individuals' positions in society were considered to be indicative of past and present behavior, as well as their potential to improve their status in the future.²³ While the merit path to enlightenment was and is followed by many practitioners, it was not the only method of advancing spiritually; Buddhism has other moral, philosophical, and ritual dimensions. As donations, however, the wall paintings were expressions of the concept of giving in Burmese society,²⁴ and hence, this is the focus presented in this volume.

The donation of a painted temple represents a variety of offerings. First, there are the physical offerings themselves of the temple, the Buddha image(s), and the murals. The wall painting imagery simulates the format of manuscripts, which were common donations, and luxury trade textiles from India, adding these elements in an illustrated form to the list of offerings. The layout of the narratives in strips that encircle the main Buddha image mimics recitations of the stories and suggests visually that the Buddha was offering his knowledge and wisdom to devotees, as well as being offered a wrapping of his own life story. In the process of creating a religious matrix, the wall paintings display the status, wealth, and comforts of exceptional future lives through repetitive images of palaces and luxurious living conditions, presenting to the devotee an inducement to participate in the merit path of Buddhist religious practice. Without fundamental religious concepts as a foundation, these material scenes would not have achieved the significance they have. The reverse is also true. The visions of worldly benefits encouraged viewers to participate in the religious system, where potential future pleasure, given the correct behavior, would culminate in the ultimate goal, *nibbāna*.

Catherine Bell defines ritual as the medium used to invoke the relationships between "human beings in the here and now and non-immediate sources of power, authority, and value," with efficacy of the rituals situated in people's understanding of their identity within larger social frameworks.²⁵ The "self-conscious doing of symbolic actions" connects ritual and performance as the audience is cognitively and emotionally

22. For a discussion in the Pali context, see Gregory Schopen, "The Ritual Obligations and Donor Roles of Monks in the Pali Vinaya," *Bones, Stones and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 72–85.

23. See Melford E. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and its Burmese Vicissitudes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 66–139, for a discussion of "kammatic Buddhism." Melford E. Spiro, "Buddhism and Economic Action in Burma," *American Anthropologist* 68 (1966): 1163–73. Schober, "Paths to Enlightenment" is a good resource on the practice of Buddhism in Burma. For an example of how this works in a specific instance, see Juliane Schober, "Religious Merit and Social Status among Burmese Buddhist Lay Associations," in *Merit and Blessing in Mainland Southeast Asia in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Cornelia Ann Kammerer and Nicola Tannenbaum (New Haven: Yale Southeast Asia Studies, 1996), 197–211.

24. See Peter Skilling, "Rhetoric of Reward, Ideologies of Inducement: Why Produce Buddhist 'Art'?" in *Art of Merit: Studies in Buddhist Art and Its Conservation*, ed. David Park, Kuenga Wangmo, and Sharon Cather (London: Archetype Publications, 2013), 33. Here, Skilling discusses South and Southeast Asian materials devoted to the ideology of reward.

25. Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), xi.

drawn into having an experience.²⁶ The donation of the wall paintings, the representation of ritual actions in the murals, the creation of a specific form of space in which to house a Buddha image, and the activities that practitioners engaged in within the temple space were all forms of ritual that were part of and created Burmese worlds. It is in the synthesis of structure, content, and methods of depiction that the engagement of the murals with the practitioner is visible, for it was here that the murals mediated the relationships between the architecture and the sculpted images of the Buddha and forged an environment for the devotee to interact with the Buddha and become part of his community. As David Freedberg writes, people do not engage with objects merely out of habit, rather the activities in which people engage indicate the relationship between devotee and image, a connection based on the “attribution of powers which transcend the merely material aspect of the object.”²⁷ By representing Buddhist biography, the murals bridged the gap between the Buddha’s presence and absence; narrative, through the provision of a history set in contemporary contexts, made this agency possible.²⁸

Methodological Paths

Which approaches provide insights into the functioning of the multiple identities and roles of the wall paintings in contemporary Burmese society?²⁹ What do the Burmese wall paintings tell us about what they mean, how they communicate and to whom, and what their role is in the production of social and religious or ritual practices? The possible responses to these questions are encoded within the wall paintings themselves—the arrangement, the stories chosen, and the manner of representation.³⁰ The structure contributed to the functioning of the imagery by indicating and perpetuating social and religious action in contemporary contexts.³¹ The Burmese wall paintings created social capital and generated merit for donors, and in so doing, they also

26. Ibid., 160.

27. David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 91.

28. For discussions of the Buddha’s presence and absence and identity formation, see Sandra Cate, *Making Merit, Making Art: A Thai Temple in Wimbledon* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2003), 13–14. Naomi Appleton, *Jataka Stories in Theravada Buddhism: Narrating the Bodhisatta Path* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 129–32. Jacob N. Kinnard, *Imaging Wisdom: Seeing and Knowing in the Art of Indian Buddhism* (Richmond: Curzon, 1999), 11.

29. W. J. T. Mitchell writes that pictures covet “an idea of visibility adequate to their ontology . . . [they want] to be seen as complex individuals occupying multiple subject positions and identities.” W. J. T. Mitchell, “What Do Pictures ‘Really’ Want?” *October* 77 (1996): 82.

30. Alfred Gell saw images as cognitive processes, as objects through which the movement of thought could be seen—both into the past as memory and as reaching towards the future in aspiration. His volume on art and agency was an elucidation of how these processes operated. Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 258. See also Alfred Gell, “The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology,” in *Anthropology, Art, and Aesthetics*, ed. J. Coote and A. Shelton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992): 40–63. Gell writes in the article, “The enchantment of technology is the power that technical processes have of casting a spell over us so that we see the real world in enchanted form. Art, as a separate kind of technical activity, only carries further, through a kind of involution, the enchantment which is immanent in all kinds of technical activity” (44).

31. Norman Bryson, “Art in Context,” in *Studies in Historical Change*, ed. Ralph Cohen (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 25. Bryson argues that context is generated by the artwork itself.

communicated concepts, provided an experience of the Buddha's presence, were encoded with ideas, values, and feelings that devotees could perceive, and exerted influence as visual forms of persuasion and instruction.³² The patterns of this specific form of materialization codified methods of praise and ritual forms,³³ as well as linked contemporaneous literary and visual developments.

Narratology

Much of the subject matter in the wall paintings consists of Buddhist biography, and this form of religious expression for the Burmese was located in narrative imagery and the narrative process, resulting in the representation of stories as a method of beautification and in a layout that "tells" the stories. The biographical shape of the subject matter is in keeping with Burmese art historical trends, as narratives have formed a major part of the visual repertoire since the eleventh century, a dominance that lasted into the late nineteenth century and a feature that is still being used.³⁴ The continuous inclusion of scenes relating to the lives of Gotama Buddha over the course of more than 800 years and the intensification of visual narration during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries demonstrates the centrality of Buddhist biography to the Burmese. This is consistent with the Theravada Buddhist tradition found elsewhere in Asia, where narratives associated with religious figures have been commonly represented in art and form part of ritual practice. Sacred objects associated with the Buddha's life stories remind viewers of his great achievement,³⁵ and, despite his absence in the world, create a sense of presence.³⁶ Because the majority of the Burmese wall painting imagery portrayed Buddhist biography, narratology is a logical starting point for an analysis of the murals.

At its most basic, narrative is the telling of a sequence of events by a narrator to an addressee. The teller constructs and interprets the narrative, and mediates the relationship between the story and the receiver, who interprets it,³⁷ with the process of interpretation contributing to the construction of the narrative. Narrative has been thought of in terms of "this *then* that" happens, with the *then* having particular importance because it transforms events into a meaningful sequence. The focus is upon cause and effect. Yet, further methodological studies have determined that narratives need not be constructed

32. See David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 55–74, for a discussion of how images function religiously. See also Freedberg, *The Power of Images*.

33. Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images 400–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3–4. Carruthers argues that pattern making is an art of memory and cogitation.

34. On Mount Popa, for instance, a number of shrines contain biographical narratives from the mid-twentieth century.

35. Juliane Schober, "Sacred Biography," in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. Robert Buswell (New York: Macmillan, 2003), 46.

36. See Daniel Boucher, "The *Pratītyasamutpādagathā* and Its Role in the Medieval Cult of the Relics," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 14 (1992): 1–27, for a discussion of the Buddha's presence and absence in the context of clay seals, miniature stupas, and images with the *ye dharmā* verse.

37. Michael J. Toolan, *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1988), 3–5.

in this way to communicate a story. Of particular importance in this reassessment is Paul Ricoeur's analysis of plot, an element that he considers to have a teleological role in narratives.³⁸ He argues that in traditional and popular narratives, where many listeners or viewers are familiar with the basic tale, the story is less important than the listeners or viewers grasping the ending from the sequence of the parts.³⁹ With plot defined as the overall coherence of a narrative, significance emerges in the deliberate selection and omission of events and the sequence or, for visual narratives, the arrangement of the narrative itself.⁴⁰ For instance in an Indian context, John D. Smith in his work on *Pabūjī* stories found that narrative divisions point to particular analyses of the story and underline central themes.⁴¹ He argues that,

every element of the story is defined in terms of the crux to which it leads. This is how the performers perceive the narrative, and it is thus how they perform it too. The process of putting themes and formulae together to produce the right story is a process of realising the latent structure of that story in words . . . For . . . [the teller], the meaning of the epic, its structure and the way in which he 'knows' it are all one and the same thing.⁴²

This is fundamental in exploring the Burmese wall paintings with their codified narratives and arrangements. The disposition of the murals, in combination with the selected stories, scenes, and other material, produced layers of meaning within a complex body of images. The vertical, horizontal, and center-periphery arrangements and relationships of the Burmese wall paintings were forms of structural emplotment that did not rely on straightforward cause-and-effect narrations of the stories. Instead, they reinforced specific ideas by providing a rationale that made the represented activities intelligible; this, in turn, encouraged practitioners to engage in such activities.⁴³ The disposition of the murals was thus both a projection of specific ideologies and the formation and maintenance of them, features created not only by the cause-and-effect narrative

38. Paul Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," in *On Narrative*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 170–76.

39. *Ibid.*, 175. Jeremy Tambling, *Narrative and Ideology* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991), 54. A. L. Becker looks at plot from a different angle, but reaches similar conclusions. Drawing upon the scholarship of V. Propp and K. Burke, he defines plot as a "set of constraints on the selection and sequencing of dramatic episodes or motifs." A. L. Becker, "Text-Building, Epistemology, and Aesthetics in Javanese Shadow Theatre," in *The Imagination of Reality: Essays in Southeast Asian Coherence Systems*, ed. A. L. Becker and Aram A. Yengoyan (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1979), 216–17.

40. For a further discussion of plot, see Robert Scholes, James Phelan, and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 207–39. M. C. Lemon, *The Discipline of History and the History of Thought* (London: Routledge, 1995), 44–45. Wallace Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 81. See also Tambling, *Narrative and Ideology*, 75. For an art historical example, see Cynthia Hahn, "Picturing the Text: Narrative in the Life of the Saints," *Art History* 13, no. 1 (March 1990): 1–33. There has been considerable discussion over what constitutes a visual narrative in Asia, ranging from Susan Huntington's and Vidya Dehejia's writings on aniconism to those of numerous others, such as Janice Leoshko, Robert Brown, Julia Murray, Wu Hung, Ashley Thompson, and Julie Gifford.

41. John D. Smith, "Where the Plot Thickens: Epic Moments in Pabūjī," *South Asian Studies* 2 (1986): 53, 59.

42. *Ibid.*, 63.

43. Lemon, *The Discipline of History and the History of Thought*, 72. Narrative structure is a method of classifying and apprehending events and plays a role in people's perception and construction of the world. See Freedberg's comment that repetition can, but does not necessarily, provoke action. Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 10.

sections, but also by the relationships between the various parts of the imagery: murals, sculpture, and architecture.

In narrative scholarship, a great deal has been made of relationships between time and space in visual stories.⁴⁴ How are scenes or episodes organized, and how did the artists structure each story? Because decisions about how to represent time and space (the composition of story episodes within the visual field) must be made during production, the relationships between time and space are both a result of social practices and a method of presenting social concepts.⁴⁵ This in turn evinces the network of connections in which a work of art exists and manifests the intentions of production, as well as potential forms of reception by practitioners. It can further be argued that the repetitive use of specific forms for certain stories enhances recognition of the narratives because they are part of a typological group, and organizational features become indicative of such narratives through associations with the story types.⁴⁶

Some scholars have also questioned the use of narratology in the analysis of Asian art, arguing that the space-time relationships (modes) alone cannot explain the complexity and diversity of narrative materials,⁴⁷ or that narratives are primarily present as icons, despite depicting stories.⁴⁸ In the case of the former, it is now thought that modes comprise one of the many tools that can be used for unpacking visual narratives.⁴⁹ The

44. Vidya Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art: Visual Narratives of India* (New Delhi: Munshiran Manoharlal Publishers, 1997).

45. See Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1995), 26–48, esp. 27, for the concept of structure as both medium and result in society.

46. Claudine Bautze-Picon, “The Biography of the Buddha in Indian Art: How and When?” in *Biography as a Religious and Cultural Text*, ed. Andreas Schüle (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2002), 197–239. Richard Brilliant, *Visual Narratives: Storytelling in Etruscan and Roman Art* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 96. Irene J. Winter, “After the Battle Is Over: The Stele of the Vultures and the Beginning of Historical Narrative in the Art of the Ancient Near East,” in *Pictorial Narrative in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. Herbert L. Kessler and Marianna Shreve Simpson (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1985), 25. Both write that the concepts being expressed are partly transmitted through their association with a particular type of image. See also F. K. Lehman, “Symbols and the Computation of Meaning,” in *Anthropology for the Future*, Research Report no. 4 (Urbana, IL: Department of Anthropology, University of Illinois, 1978), 188. He argues that symbols are more effective in the aggregate than in isolation. I combine these ideas here, arguing that particular modes are associated with specific story types in Burmese wall paintings.

47. Julia K. Murray, “What Is ‘Chinese Narrative Illustration?’” *The Art Bulletin* 80, no. 4 (Dec. 1998): 602–15. See also Quitman Eugene Phillips, “The Price Shuten Dōji Screens: A Study of Visual Narrative,” *Ars Orientalis* 26 (1996): 1–21. Alexandra Green, “Narrative Modes in Late Seventeenth- to Early Nineteenth-Century Burmese Wall Paintings,” in *Burma: Art and Archaeology*, ed. Alexandra Green and T. Richard Blurton (London: British Museum Press, 2002), 67–76. The discussion has not been limited to Asian art. See Werner Wolf, “Narrative and Narrativity: A Narratological Reconceptualization and Its Applicability to the Visual Arts,” *Word and Image* 19, no. 3 (2003): 180–97.

48. See Brown, “Narrative as Icon,” 64–109.

49. Werner Wolf, “Pictorial Narrativity,” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan (London: Routledge, 2005), 431–35. Recently, Julie Gifford has published on the reliefs of Borobudur, arguing that narrative art requires the representation of time, action, and the establishment of the viewer as a witness, rather than as a participant (Julie A. Gifford, *Buddhist Practice and Visual Culture: The Visual Rhetoric of Borobudur* [London: Routledge, 2011], 52). She draws upon Wu Hung’s definitions of an icon as an image that is not self-contained with its significance dependent on the presence of a worshipper and a narrative painting as showing self-contained interactions among the actors represented. In the latter, the viewer is merely a witness (*ibid.*, 50). Wu Hung, “What Is *Bianxiang*? On the Relationship between Dunhuang Art and Dunhuang Literature,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 52, no. 1 [1992]: 130). She further focuses upon one temporal structure presented by Ricoeur—that of a clear temporal sequence, the “this, then that happened” formula. Much of her analyses emerge from

latter point derives from the division, by art historians, of imagery into iconic and narrative categories, a concept linked with the idea that religious images have two different functions: devotion and instruction.⁵⁰ For instance, in Robert Brown's discussion of the ceramic plaques depicting scenes from the *jātaka* stories mounted on the exterior of the Ananda temple at Pagan, he comments that the images are there to indicate the Buddha through his life and history and to make his presence felt, rather than to function as narratives telling a story. He argues that most of the Pagan imagery is iconic rather than narrative and that the Burmese artists were concerned with creating a complete visual form of the Buddhist doctrine.⁵¹ Yet, stories are an integral part of an image functioning as an icon, and therefore icons and narratives cannot be viewed as exclusive categories.⁵² During the Pagan period, the *jātaka* stories were primarily depicted as single-scenes within a square frame, but by the seventeenth century, the same stories were being represented in a strip format with a primarily linear narrative progression. The imagery in this later period moved beyond prompting the viewer to recall the story (as single-scened images can do) and actively narrated the tales, although other parts, such as the rainy season retreats and the scenes of the Buddhas of the Past, remained monoscenic. The fact that much of the Buddha's biography in the late Burmese murals was portrayed as episodes arranged in horizontal strips with a clear cause and effect format, and that there was a clear vertical progression as well, indicates that the telling of the stories was considered significant and to ignore this aspect of the material is to deny the importance of this specific decision by the Burmese. Although the narrative aspects, including disposition, of the Pagan period wall paintings have not yet been analyzed in detail, the complexity of the arrangements of the subject matter suggests that they cannot be merely classified as icons.⁵³ What is visible in the early wall paintings is not iconic versus narrative or narrative as icon, but rather the concepts of narrative and icon functioning together—each reinforcing the other to present the Buddha as worthy of and available to worship.⁵⁴

the layout of the Borobudur reliefs, yet visual stories and images should not be constrained by such a narrow definition of narrativity, especially since their very visuality expands the ways in which they can "tell" a story and create meaning. A narrow definition of narrative creates a stand-alone picture, one that denies the role of viewers in their interactions with the art, as well as the agency of pictures themselves. Many studies discuss the importance of the temporal element in narrative; in visual narratives, however, I would argue that the implication of time can also narrativize the imagery (Alexandra Green, "Introduction: Expansive Approaches to Visual Narrative Analysis," in *Rethinking Visual Narratives from Asia: Intercultural and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Alexandra Green [Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013], 1–11).

50. Ira Westergård, "Which Narrative? The Case of the Narrative Subject in Fifteenth-Century Altarpieces," *Collegium: Studies Across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences* 1 (2006): 64.
51. Brown, "Narrative as Icon," 65, 91.
52. As Whitney Davis states, "[j]ust because the pictures are 'static' says nothing one way or another about the available modes of fabulation, storying, and textualization that might narrativize them." Whitney Davis, "Narrativity and the Narmer Palette," in *Narrative and Event in Ancient Art*, ed. Peter J. Holliday (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 53.
53. See Bautze-Picron, *Timeless Vistas of the Cosmos* for information on the complexity of the Pagan-period wall paintings.
54. Janice Leoshko, "About Looking at Buddha Images in Eastern India," *Archives of Asian Art* 52 (2000/01): 75. In an Indian context, Leoshko establishes a similar way of viewing iconic images that are also narrative.

As the narratological field has developed, it has increasingly been seen as a tool kit from which to select methods of analysis to suit the material at hand. Instead of attempting to produce a hard and fast definition of narrative, scholars stress its inherently “fuzzy” nature.⁵⁵ Viewing icons and narratives as part of a continuum provides a greater analytical flexibility, and this is encapsulated in the concept of the fuzzy set, whereby narrative is not defined in a fixed way, but rather is assessed through a variety of potentially relevant criteria.⁵⁶ Narratology is an analysis of the way that material is presented to the viewer, and since the creation of an object requires the maker to choose (whether consciously or not) a specific form and manner of production, it can elucidate what the murals represented and signified to the local, contemporary society, how they were used, and what behaviors they modeled.⁵⁷ While the Burmese wall paintings were built to serve the purposes of individuals and families, they were produced within larger institutional frameworks.⁵⁸ The murals met and utilized institutional goals through the disposition of the temples’ contents, as well as encouraged and participated in particular activities of contemporary society via the replication of narratives, specific arrangements, and the inclusion of images of luxury goods, exhortatory material, and protective devices.

Audience and Usage

Narrative selection and organization do not necessarily lead the viewer unfamiliar with the soteriological message toward the main point. The imagery provides the content and the context of the plot,⁵⁹ but prior knowledge and comprehension of the narratives and the religious and social purposes of the murals are essential to grasping the concepts associated with them at the time of production.⁶⁰ Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson in their article on semiotics and art history warn against the easy generalization of societal viewing expertise, stating that codes of understanding are required and that possession of these codes for viewing can be unevenly distributed or operated.⁶¹ In the case of seventeenth- to early nineteenth-century Burma, assessing access to codes and social viewing expertise is difficult. Viewers would have included the local community, both lay and religious, although the extent of visitation is unknown. The Buddha and deities must not be excluded from being thought of as part of the audience, as the imagery was

55. Marie-Laure Ryan, “Narrative,” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan (London: Routledge, 2005), 344–48. Wendy Steiner, “Pictorial Narrativity,” in *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 145–77. Wolf, “Narrative and Narrativity,” 192–93.

56. Ryan, “Narrative,” 344–48. See also Green, “Introduction,” 1–11.

57. See David Morgan, “Materiality, Social Analysis, and the Study of Religions,” in *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*, ed. David Morgan (London: Routledge, 2010), 70–73, for a summary of how material culture can be an approach to the study of religion.

58. Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer on the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 40–45.

59. Becker, “Text-Building, Epistemology, and Aesthetics in Javanese Shadow Theatre,” 227.

60. This does not necessarily relate to subsequent time periods as the worldview of viewers changes and they approach the imagery with new presuppositions. The role of the viewer is essential in constructing a narrative. This is a point to which I will return.

61. Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, “Semiotics and Art History,” *Art Bulletin* 73, no. 2 (1991): 186.

painted on temple walls to honor the Buddha and congratulations (*thadu*) were elicited from all beings in the realms of existence at the conclusion of donative inscriptions.

The majority of the wall paintings' subject matter would probably have been accessible to Burmese society due to literary developments, particularly the public narration of religious stories (*hawsa*), the push towards translating religious texts into the vernacular that strengthened in the seventeenth century, and embellishments popular in literature. The production of plays based on religious stories, the recitation of the tales publicly, their importance in monastic education,⁶² and the illustration of the stories in the murals suggest that Burmese society generally was well acquainted with the Buddha's biography.⁶³

Stories have been a significant teaching tool, as exemplified by the Buddha's use of stories, particularly the *jātaka* tales, to transmit religious concepts and explain ethical teachings. Buddhist biography was regularly taught at monastic schools, preached in public, and cited as precedents and exemplars. For instance, *jātakas* narrated in sermons or other public venues offered commentary on contemporary issues via entertainment.⁶⁴ Juliane Schober writes that the *jātakas*—

offer abundant material for religious education. Central motifs in the biographies of the Buddha elucidate moral principles, values, and ethics, and certain well-known *jātaka* tales serve a didactic purpose in teaching younger generations about the tradition. *Jātakas* are salient across Buddhist communities and the themes they recount readily resonate with other aspects of religious knowledge and practice. As such, recounting certain *jātaka* stories in public sermons or even representing them in paintings can serve as commentary on current social and political issues.⁶⁵

Narratives provided a foundation to promote specific social ideas.

The *jātakas* played a particularly important role in providing exemplary models for Burmese social and political behavior and interactions. For example, during the consolidation of the Konbaung dynasty in the mid-eighteenth century, King Alaungpaya sent a message to the king of Hanthawaddy on 28 September, 1756, stating "Firstly, he should know that he is fighting a losing battle. Secondly, he failed to take the cue of [the] Bhūridatta Jātaka."⁶⁶ On the nineteenth of October of the same year, another royal order noted that,

Reverend Araññavāsī and Gāmaṇvāsī Monks of Burmese, Mon and Shan nationalities bless both the kings of upper and lower Burma. It is believed that these kings are Bodhisattvas and accordingly they are devoted to do good for all creatures. But sometimes forgetfulness could even stop these men from being kind and helpful. In such a case, these monks take the liberty of referring them to the Jātaka stories of

62. See Venerable Khammai Dhammasami, "Between Idealism and Pragmatism: A Study of Monastic Education in Burma and Thailand from the Seventeenth Century to the Present" (PhD dissertation, University of Oxford, 2004), 41–46, for a discussion of the texts found on monastic syllabi.

63. See chapter 4 for a further discussion of this subject.

64. Schober, "Sacred Biography," 46.

65. Ibid.

66. Than Tun, ed., *Royal Orders of Burma*, vol. 3, 33.

Dīghavu (Dīghitikosala-Jātaka, no. 371),
 Mahāsīlava (Mahāsīlava-Jātaka, no. 51),
 and Saṁvara (Saṁvara-Jātaka, no. 462)
 in which they will find some examples of how hostilities among
 nations could be averted by peaceful means.⁶⁷

These examples suggest the significant role that *jātakas* and stories in general played in Burmese life, including as exemplars of legal principles.⁶⁸ Here the tales were used not only to emphasize the correct control of the self, but also to indicate that religious ideas, punishment, the law, warfare, and peace agreements could all be determined by relying upon past precedent, of which the *jātaka* stories formed an important part. In such instances, the fact that diverse issues could be resolved through the citation of exemplars shows how well known the stories were to at least the upper echelons of Burmese society. These various types of usage—as political exemplars and public sermons and teachings—within contemporary society reveals a Burmese “textual community,” as defined by Anne Blackburn, where social and religious cohesion was provided in part by the use of a body of specific texts that had widespread application in the region.⁶⁹

The repetition and maintenance of biographical and decorative imagery over more than a century and across the Burmese central zone suggests that the wall paintings were accessible to the local communities that were engaged in sponsoring mural production. For instance, the use of textile patterns indicates that viewers had familiarity with Indian imports, or at least their association with wealth and luxury, otherwise the prestige factor of “draping” the temples with copies of textile patterns would have been lost locally (though not necessarily the aesthetic response). While this presupposes that the wall paintings were meant to be comprehended by the community, communal knowledge of a prestigious donation was essential in providing the social recognition and high status expected to accompany such generosity, as is well attested. This was a mutually reinforcing process by which the gift emphasized specific practices and material presences; the painted imagery encouraged particular forms of religious practice; and the significance of the gift made the ideas a forceful presence within the community. Whether the teachings, the citation of *jātaka* exemplars, use of textiles as status markers, and so forth translated into a comprehension of specific imagery by the majority of the viewers remains a matter of speculation. However, the standardization of a narrow repertoire of elements across time and space in individual and family donations probably both facilitated comprehension of the imagery and indicated the widespread nature of the knowledge represented.

Recognition of the imagery enlarges the possibilities that devotees would be receptive to the ideas created by the imagery. As mentioned, the reuse of material suggests a community familiar with the texts, stories, and ideas encapsulated in the wall paintings, and the actions indicated in the murals further reveal how people engaged with

67. Ibid., 34.

68. There are many other examples. See also Than Tun, “The Royal Order (Wednesday 28 January 1795) of King Badon,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 26 (1983): 153–201.

69. Anne M. Blackburn, “The Text and the World,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 163–66.

the material that was considered to be meritorious, protective, and exemplifying. Because the stories were regularly associated with repeated spatial patterns, the two elements—content and structure—become mutually supportive, helping to construct and reproduce each other and therefore shaping forms of veneration. The structure of the Burmese wall paintings—modes and organization—and the iconography together can offer insights into how the imagery was accessed, received, and, possibly, interpreted by its audiences.

An issue related to audience is usage. The interiors of the buildings containing murals are relatively small—most are approximately three square meters—revealing their function as a space to house a Buddha image and for personal devotions. It is inside these structures that prayers and requests, contemplation of the Buddha and the recollection of his teachings, the offering of ephemeral gifts, and other individual religious activities happen. They are not congregational spaces, which are found in the open wooden buildings (Burmese: *tazaung*) situated within monastery compounds where sermons, recitations of the *jātakas*, and other group religious activities, such as making offerings to monks, occurred.⁷⁰ While there is little information about how these small temples were used initially, the fact that many are now derelict or in ruins, while large and famous edifices continue to be employed and renewed, suggests that families and specific local communities were the main donors and users. As these families and communities died out, relocated, constructed other temples, or stopped focusing on specific regions for donative activity,⁷¹ the sites would be left without support. An example is Maung Po Ywe's temple, commissioned in Minbu in 1851, that was recorded as no longer in use by 1901, only fifty years after its construction.⁷² The lack of preservation of mural sites in part resulted from the fact that merit was generated at the moment of donation, and, unless maintenance was explicitly included in the gift, the donor was not responsible for it.⁷³ Many objects were (and are) made simply to be given to the Sangha and were not actually utilized, or were used very little. The lack of long-term maintenance of the temples with murals indicates a similar approach. For practitioners, constructing and embellishing temples for donation maintained the *sāsana* (the Buddha's dispensation) and generated merit. The importance of the temple lay in its funding and donation, as well as its subject matter, rather than in its subsequent employment. The social emphasis was upon the act of donation, rather than the production of the art form, and consequently, although depicting commonly taught and widely available narratives and concepts, audience comprehension of the wall paintings and the usage of the temple may have been of less consequence than the appropriateness of the gift.

70. A number of temple sites still have such *tazaung* in front of the main entrance. There are no wall paintings in the wooden structures, but in the twentieth century, posters of such stories as the *jātakas*, the life of the Buddha, and the eight victories were sometimes framed and hung up around the eaves of the *tazaung*.

71. For instance, this seems to have occurred after the provincial network of monasteries became less important in the early nineteenth century.

72. *List of Objects of Antiquarian and Archaeological Interest in Upper Burma* (Rangoon: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1901), 12.

73. Wu Hung, "What Is *Bianxiang*?" 137. Wu Hung argues that the important aspect of wall paintings at Dunhuang was the production of the images, rather than subsequent viewing of them.

Unified Spaces

It is a major tenet of this volume that the temples and their contents operate as a whole, with the architecture and murals enfolding the sculpted images in a space designed for personal interactions with the Buddha. The mural contents and layouts at late nineteenth- and twentieth-century sites throw the ideas of earlier examples into sharp relief. The twentieth-century examples differ radically from those produced during the Pagan, Nyaungyan, and early Konbaung dynasties in the reduction of narrative content and the diminution in the amount of space given to the wall paintings at temple and stupa sites. The concept of architecture, sculpture, and painting as intimately combined to create a specific space vanished, and along with it the structuring and connecting role of the painted imagery. While depicting many of the stories and images represented in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century temples, the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century wall and panel paintings are a revolutionary change from the earlier ones in that they do not enclose the viewer within a space defined by painted imagery, nor do the paintings connect the sculptured image with the architecture by a narrative that signals the conclusory point of Buddhist practice, *nibbāna*. As representations of the Buddha's biography, including relics and pilgrimage sites, these late painted images add to the sanctity of the space, but are merely one aspect among many. They lead towards the central shrine if placed in corridors, indicating their continuing ritual connotations or at least presenting an acknowledgement of the earlier mural traditions; if they stand alone, they make particular points, such as demonstrating the Buddha's supremacy or acting as protection in the case of the eight victories. However, in general, these later wall paintings are used judiciously here and there at a site, rather than enveloping the devotee; in other words, they do not create a specific place, but augment the space in which they are located. It is here that the difference between the earlier and later murals lies, and it is here that the major function of the Nyaungyan and Konbaung wall paintings can be seen.

Because they covered the interior walls in their entirety and presented a largely set body of material, the Nyaungyan and Konbaung murals were conceived of as integral to the temple space housing the sculpted Buddha image (fig. 0.8). The use of Buddhist biography, particularly the focus on the *pāramīs*, the path to enlightenment, and the Buddhas of the Past as indicators of enlightenment, the lineage of awakened beings, and the purveyors of prophecies of future Buddhahood, linked the sculpted Buddha to the wall paintings through history. These connections, because of their use of the entire architectural space, related the image to the architecture via the physical cycles of narrative that encircled the interior, the representation of the Bodhi tree, and the canopy forms on the ceilings.

John Holt has written about Sri Lankan murals as maintaining a specific representational formula, which he considered to be a "visual liturgy," defining it as "the articulation of a consciously contrived and coordinated set of symbolic tropes designed to encapsulate and engender meaningful religious experiences and knowledge in an



Figure 0.8 The main image with a painted surround seated against the west wall of a temple with three entrances, temple in the Monywa complex, Salingyi, eighteenth century.

engaging and formal ritual (including meditation) setting.”⁷⁴ The key words here being “contrived” and “coordinated” in that it is through deliberate ordering that the “meaningful religious experiences and knowledge” are produced, in much the same way that a set series of ritual activities occurs in non-visual liturgies. The Burmese wall paintings have similar functions as demonstrated by the repetition, range, and disposition of the subject matter. The painted imagery was particularly selected and organized to present coordinated themes and a cohesive program within temple spaces, and it was replicated in temples for more than one hundred years. The disposition of the subject matter posited specific hierarchies and relationships within Burmese Buddhism and by extrapolation in Burmese society, with the imagery progressing from sentient being to enlightened one. Imagery, such as the *Buddhapada* or guardian figures, framed the interior space and thereby contained the field of merit, as well as the Buddha’s power, within the temple.⁷⁵ The standardization of the wall paintings’ subject matter and arrangement can be viewed as part of the ritual of housing Buddha images with the

74. John C. Holt, *The Religious World of Kīrti Śrī: Buddhism, Art, and Politics in Late Medieval Sri Lanka* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 52.

75. F. K. Lehman, “Monasteries, Palaces and Ambiguities: Burmese Sacred and Secular Space,” *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 21, no. 1 (1987): 183.

established body of material acting as a formula or liturgy for paying homage.⁷⁶ Within the painted material are examples of ritual action and indices of ritual behavior for devotees to emulate that also demonstrate the eclectic nature of contemporary Burmese Buddhism. Through the choice of subject matter, the murals depict memories of the Buddha, and the setting is designed for engaging with the Buddha and his community through personal rituals, including donation, chanting, meditation, and protection. The inclusion of the twenty-eight Buddhas of the Past, the ten great *jātaka* stories, the seven stations, the eight victories, many of which can also be used as *parittas*, as well as protective diagrams and a recitation of the life of Gotama Buddha that focuses upon the process of becoming enlightened, demonstrates how cosmic truth and personal protection could be combined. The Burmese murals were thus a prescription for donative obeisance to the Buddha within a temple setting, presenting a visual liturgy to viewers and demonstrating the correct subject matter needed to house and honor a Buddha image and benefit the donors.

The wall paintings engaged with religious and popular literary developments of the time, as evident in the mural details and structure. There are connections between the details of the murals and the embellishments found in poetry and prose, which are also visible in the relationships between the captions and the imagery. The emergence of theatrical productions during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries affected narrative formats that promoted an extended visual narrative line in the paintings. Yet, there is another, structural way of looking at the murals that relates to the *Tipiṭaka*. As Steven Collins has commented, the *Sutta* and *Vinaya Piṭakas* are presented in a narrative format, while the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* concerns itself with lists. It could be argued that the wall paintings embody the full *Tipiṭaka* by combining numeric lists, thereby mimicking the lists of the *Abhidhamma*, with imagery in narrative form, also connecting it to the stories of the *Sutta* and *Vinaya Piṭakas*. In this way, the wall paintings merge two structural forms into a new “text,” encapsulating the Buddha’s teachings and his biography and establishing it as appropriate for creating a space to house a Buddha image.

Late Burmese wall paintings additionally provide a rich view of contemporary life, illustrating such things as architectural forms, clothing, and hairstyles, in addition to dominant religious and political concepts. They also incorporated ideas, representations of people, decorative styles, textile motifs, manuscript formats, stories, and motifs brought from the regions surrounding the country, the use of which not only indicates the extensiveness of the interactions between Burma and its neighbors, the prevalence of such things in contemporary Burmese society, and Burma’s cosmopolitan nature, but also shows the willing utilization of novel ideas within the country itself. Some of the material was popularized because of its association with wealth and status, other aspects because of their religious associations, and some because of efforts to emulate what was adopted by the Burmese court. Yet despite the variety, the stories and their arrangement in the wall paintings continuously maintain specific religious concepts—the law of cause and effect and the role of merit in personal lives and social hierarchies,

76. Skilling, “Worship and Devotional Life,” 9827. Liturgy is a powerful method of teaching with the recitation of formulas part of the learning and inculcation process.

the Buddha's biography as indicative of his great abilities, the cycles of rebirth, and so forth. The imagery selected for representation in the murals reinforced notions of the power and abilities that accompany great merit and good *kamma*. Repetitively and extensively showing the perfection of the virtues, renunciation, and enlightenment, the paintings also provided imagery of the benefits of meritorious behavior through scenes of luxury, encouraging viewers to comprehend and therefore participate in socially accepted religious practice and belief. Religious and social themes intertwined through the correlation of giving and the path to Buddhahood. The murals therefore successfully amalgamated the local and the Burmanized, the religious and the secular through a stable religious and narrative structure that did not change substantively during the efflorescence of late Burmese mural painting.

The Nyaungyan and Konbaung dynasty mural sites present a worldview that was articulated visually as a complete entity within small-scale temples in the Burmese heartland. The interior architectural form offered to practitioners an intimate space for housing a Buddha image and engaging in personal devotions to the Buddha, and the wall paintings situated devotees within the Buddha's community, as well as enfolded them within the Buddha's field of merit indicated through the murals' subject matter. In depicting Buddhist biography and protective devices that draw upon Gotama's power, the paintings in turn connected with the main sculpted image that provided a focal point for devotions and a logical end-point to the narratives. The wall paintings were material expressions of dominant and ideal Burmese religious concepts and social practices of the time that in the process of production and consumption created, mediated, and shaped prevalent ideological concerns.⁷⁷ More particularly, they were repertoires of rhetoric, exhorting specific forms of action in which can be seen a "habitus" of the Burmese, visible in the narrative structure, story and scene selection, and other imagery of the wall paintings.⁷⁸ The repetitive scenes of homage and offerings indicated the actions of the temple's donors and provided an example for others to follow, while imagery of palaces and other scenes of wealth and high social status, as well as the dedicatory inscriptions, revealed the benefits of participating in a Buddhist system focused on future rewards and confirmed the purpose of the paintings as assisting the donors towards achieving better lives materially and morally. These meanings were embellished by the emphasis upon kingship and worldly success indicated by the use of sumptuous, luxury textile patterns and scenes of wealth, power, and pleasure. Embedded within the images of Buddhist biography and protective diagrams were cosmic truths about the Buddha and the path to omniscience. The wall paintings functioned both heuristically and soteriologically—teaching about the religion and how it worked within the contemporary Burmese context and providing religious goals. As a donation, as depictions of sacred biography, and as indications of ritual practice, the

77. Elizabeth Arweck and William Keenan, "Introduction: Material Varieties of Religious Expression," in *Materializing Religion: Expression, Performance and Ritual*, ed. Elizabeth Arweck and William Keenan (Surrey: Ashgate, 2006), 2–3. Matthew Liebmann, "The Innovative Materiality of Revitalization Movements: Lessons from the Pueblo Revolt of 1680," *American Anthropologist* 110, no. 3 (2008): 361.

78. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72–95. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1990), 52–65.

murals transformed the interior spaces of the temples into powerful fields of merit. The Burmese temples with their murals provided a number of benefits to participants—merit from *dāna*, the teachings of the Buddha encapsulated in his biography, the opportunity to participate in the Buddha's community, and visions of future benefits.

The combination of architecture, paintings, and sculpture created a field of merit and a complete space in which devotees could interact with the Buddha through his biography and his community, transforming their current and future lives. To enter temples of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries was to enter a cohesively articulated and represented Burmese Buddhist world to which the devotee belonged by performing ritual activities within it. The iconographic program and disposition of the imagery together produced a space that was religiously and socially effective, ensuring the maintenance of a visual formula for more than a century.

1

A Formula to Honor the Buddha¹

Mural paintings adorn hundreds of buildings dating to the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries at Pagan, Salay, Pakhangyi, and other early sites. Only a handful of structures built between the fourteenth and the mid-seventeenth centuries house murals, however, probably due to over-painting and possibly a lack of resources resulting from the endemic warfare and shifting capital cities of the time. The tradition of embellishing the interiors of temples with murals revived in the mid- to late seventeenth century and flourished during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This can be connected to an increasing administrative consolidation of the country, expanding trade and religious networks, an emphasis on Buddhist orthodoxy, increasing wealth in the hinterlands, and changes to the way that merit was generated. Wall painting production declined again after the first quarter of the nineteenth century.²

The murals evince exceptional consistency in subject matter, representation of imagery, and arrangement within an architectural space across the central zone from the late seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries. The extensiveness of painting production during this time period throws the similarities of the murals into sharp relief. The wall paintings of each temple contain variations in style, modes of representation, and design, yet all sites draw upon established organizational structures and subject matter so that the differences merely reveal continuities diachronically and synchronically. In

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1. Sections of this chapter and chapter 3 were originally published in the article “Religious Networking and Upstream Buddhist Wall Paintings in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Burma,” in *Secondary Cities and Urban Networking in the Indian Ocean Realm, c. 1400–1800*, ed. Kenneth R. Hall (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008), 233–58. Lexington Books has kindly permitted the reuse of the material.
 2. The wall paintings in this study are drawn from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for several reasons. Extant Pagan period (1044–1287) murals are highly concentrated at Pagan and a few surrounding towns, such as Sale and Pakhangyi. There are numerous buildings from the Pagan period scattered around the central zone, which probably once contained wall paintings. Few murals of the fourteenth- to seventeenth-century period remain, and most likely shifting political centers and multiple capitals, as well as significant warfare, contributed to this dearth of material. The merit-making activity of white-washing temples to make them appear clean and new has also taken its toll on artistic material through the centuries. Similarly, extant murals from the nineteenth century are very limited, and, interestingly, they are quite disparate in style; the reasons for this are unexplored and go beyond the scope of this volume. The cohesive nature of the late seventeenth- to early nineteenth-century material coupled with a large number of existing sites, however, provides the scholar with a significant body of material to explore. It should be noted that few sites from this latter period are located within the capital cities; most of them are in secondary centers within the central dry zone of Burma.

looking at this body of material, I draw upon Ann Swidler's approach to repertoire theory, which assesses patterns of action rather than beliefs or values.³ A select group of images and stories, a repertoire, or cultural tool-kit as described by Swidler, was used in "varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems."⁴ This in turn meshes with David Morgan's analysis of religious material culture as demonstrating human activity, as well as the approach of Elizabeth Arweck and William Keenan in their edited volume, in which they seek to understand how religious material culture functions socially.⁵ The Burmese wall paintings created a formula that became accepted as the appropriate way in which to decorate a temple during the course of the eighteenth century.⁶ The formula comprises three main themes: merit and its acquisition, protection and sources of power, and enlightenment. In these themes can be seen recommendations for specific actions, as well as the ways in which specific forms of action are made to seem an obvious response to contemporary conditions, particularly in the areas of communal identity formation, appropriate relationships with the supramundane, and personal and familial protection, both current and future.⁷ The wall paintings provided a repertoire of appropriate actions within the Burmese sphere, including psychological assistance through the representation of protective motifs, ensuring an appropriate relationship with the Buddhas through the narration of Buddhist biography, and developing and supporting community through the common ritual activity of generating merit. The importance of these actions in Burmese society is evinced by the fact that the subject matter and organization of the murals became sufficiently authoritative to persist for more than a century.⁸

The use of a formulaic manner of presentation and the development of a repertoire for representation made the paintings and the narratives recognizable and established a body and typology of imagery that was used for approximately 150 years, authenticating the subject matter by conforming to a particular type. The murals both established traditions and reinforced them through the standardization of subject matter and arrangement, and the fact that they were used across a wide area in the Burmese central region and were maintained over time indicates that the concepts used in their production had a level of authority that encouraged the preservation of their structure and subject matter. In other words, the imagery became a religious weight to be maintained

3. Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986): 273–86. McDaniel applies this in his analysis of modern Buddhism in Thailand. Justin McDaniel, *The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 104–5 and 225–30.

4. Swidler, "Culture in Action," 273.

5. Elizabeth Arweck and William Keenan, "Introduction: Material Varieties of Religious Expression," in *Materializing Religion: Expression, Performance and Ritual*, ed. Elizabeth Arweck and William Keenan (Surrey: Ashgate, 2006), 1–20. David Morgan, "Introduction: The Matter of Belief," in *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*, ed. David Morgan (London: Routledge, 2010), 1–17.

6. The use of formulaic material is observable in other Asian contexts, including manuscripts. For an example see, D. P. Ghosh, "Eastern School of Mediaeval Indian Painting (Thirteenth-Eighteenth Century A.D.)," in *Chhavi: Golden Jubilee Volume* (Varanasi: Bharat Kala Bhavan, 1971), 91.

7. See Michael Satlow, "Tradition: The Power of Constraint," in *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, ed. Robert A. Orsi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 144 on how tradition supports these areas.

8. *Ibid.*, 148.

and reproduced, and hence, resilient over time.⁹ As a repetitive function in a religious context, the program of the wall paintings can be viewed as a form of ritual with its authority deriving from its formality and standardization.¹⁰ Just as dedicatory inscriptions followed prescribed formats, the visual material in the temples established an effective and appropriate repertoire of material and arrangements to honor the Buddha, protect and demarcate the interior space of temples, and enfold the Buddha image at the heart of the structure within its own life story.

The Burmese mural repertoire comprised a tight body of material from which the individual elements of the wall paintings were taken. For instance, within the biographical material, all or some of the ten great *jātakas* might be chosen. The Buddhas of the Past may or may not be shown with devotees or the future Gotama. Will the entrance ceiling display a *Buddhapada* or a lotus pool? And so forth. Each of these elements relates in a particular way to other parts of the murals, physically, narratively, and conceptually. The repertoire comprises a number of different pictorial formats, including cause-and-effect narration, icons, abstract devices, and patterns, which are not necessarily discrete areas of representation; many overlap. These formats advanced the concepts of merit, protection, and enlightenment in part through placement in the temple, the internal arrangement within a given narrative, or by their very presence. The wall paintings thereby perpetuated a distinct body of ideas, maintained an authoritative tradition, and presented strategies for action that devotees could use.

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which the wall paintings were standardized and thereby developed into a repertoire, particularly focusing on the main narrative features. By standardization, I do not mean that each temple is identical to the next, but rather that each site draws upon a stock body of material, a repertoire, and arranges it in strongly similar ways; in other words, patterns repeat, even if exact details do not.¹¹ I also define the four main painting styles, look at the factors that may have contributed to the development and maintenance of a visual repertoire, and examine contextual elements that led to an efflorescence of paintings from the seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries.¹²

9. For a summary of this theoretical approach, see Satlow, "Tradition." Tradition can be identified as a resource that religious actors draw upon, the authority of which exercises a constraining force on change. On the ideological power of repetition, see Maurice Bloch, "Symbols, Dance, and Features of Articulation: Is Religion an Extreme Form of Traditional Authority?" *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 15, no. 1 (1974): 78–79.
10. Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 169. Bell writes that "[t]he degree to which activities are ritualized . . . is the degree to which participants suggest that the authoritative values and forces shaping the occasion lie beyond the immediate control or inventiveness of those involved." The more formal the representation, the more authoritative it is.
11. See Sarah Shaw, "And That Was I: How the Buddha Himself Creates a Path between Biography and Autobiography," in *Lives Lived, Lives Imagined: Biography in the Buddhist Traditions*, ed. Linda Covill, Ulrike Roesler, and Sarah Shaw (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2010), 36.
12. The "long century" from the late 1600s to the early 1800s has been neglected in Southeast Asian studies. The efflorescence of Burmese wall paintings occurs precisely during this period of time, and therefore opens up questions about the social, political, and religious stimuli in the production of this art form. David K. Wyatt, "The Eighteenth Century in Southeast Asia," in *On the Eighteenth Century as a Category of Asian History: Van Leur in Retrospect*, ed. Leonard Blussé and Femme Gaastra (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 39–55.

Conclusion

Burmese wall painting sites from the late seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries housed a specific body of material that was sufficiently relevant to Burmese Buddhist concepts, beliefs, and practices that it was maintained in a standardized format over the course of a “long” century. In these temples, biography, textile patterns, cosmology, and protective and ritual imagery located the murals within contemporary culture where repetition provided religious, social, and political authentication for the Burmese Buddhist community. This type of display created an appropriate space in which to house and honor a Buddha image or images, memorialized the Buddha, and codified a visual liturgy,¹ and by providing evidence of ritual behavior and demonstrating ritual practices, the images within a specific space gave practitioners a focus for their activities and devotions, while exhorting them to participate in normative religious behavior. By presenting recurrent subject matter in standardized arrangements, the murals expressed and encouraged persistent types of religious practices and social interactions. The complex of architecture, sculpture, and painting thus became a vehicle for biographical, moral, behavioral, and social instruction.

As discussed, the extensive subject matter, ranging from guardian figures and scenes of homage to protective diagrams and Buddhist biography, defined the space in which it was housed by marking boundaries and created a space that was a field of merit protected by magic diagrams and ritual chants. The imagery itself performed a number of functions. The captions and the details connected the murals to literary and dramatic developments, as well as the emergence of the vernacular in Burmese religious spheres. The details further exemplified contemporary Burmese society, especially the material quality of life among those of high status, and demonstrated how the results of good *kamma* were to be envisioned. The Buddha’s presence was generated by the ritual reproduction of biography in contemporary guises. The standardized arrangement

1. In writing about Sri Lankan murals produced during the reign of King Kīrti Śrī in the eighteenth century, John Holt describes the paintings as a visual liturgy, a metaphoric, votive formula, stating that, “[t]he selection of themes expressed in these paintings formed a kind of canon of its own, or a visual orthodoxy. By virtue of their very arrangement in temples, they comprised a visual liturgy for a classical Theravāda Buddhist world view.” John C. Holt, *The Religious World of Kīrti Śrī: Buddhism, Art, and Politics in Late Medieval Sri Lanka* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 94. The standardization of imagery and subject matter in Burmese wall paintings parallels trends in Sri Lankan and Thai murals from the same time.

of the wall paintings within the internal spaces of the temples, however, transformed the illustrated subject matter and details into imagery with additional significations beyond the ones associated with the biographical narratives, trade textile cloths, protective figures and diagrams, and the Buddha image itself. The murals and the temples in which they were housed created a specific framework within which to interact with the Buddha, a context for practitioners to function religiously and socially. The representation of Buddhist biography through extended formats in an intimate space emphasized the process of telling, as if the practitioner were present at a ritual or were part of the community listening to the Buddha preach, and mimicked the cycles of *saṃsāra* around the temples' walls through the use of a strip format that wrapped around the walls. Within the temples, practitioners were protected and enfolded within a memorialized biography and a community that conflated past and present. The disposition of the wall paintings within the architectural space and around the main sculpted Buddha image created an area that defined the Buddha's field of merit as a series of frames and social and spiritual hierarchies, establishing a Buddha field, explaining the Buddha's supremacy, and reifying particular types of merit-making practices. Buddha images signify the Buddha in several ways—as a focus for meditation, an iconic manifestation of the Buddha's physical form, and a recipient of veneration and devotion—and the painted life stories around these figures made sense of them in Nyaungyan and Konbaung cultural milieux.² The many facets of the Burmese Buddhist world—knowledge, homage, protection, luxury, and social interactions—were encapsulated in the relationships between the architecture, sculpture, and painting.

This volume has assessed the worlds—of commemoration, ritual, social standing, religious fields, literary and dramatic developments—that the wall paintings interacted with and participated in the creation of, giving primacy to the visual object within its physical and social context. The tradition of using imagery to create specific forms of space, of course, has a long history in human society, and has been particularly pertinent in the Buddhist world, but this has not always been addressed when examining visual narratives, with many early studies exploring the ways in which visual material replicated the narrativity of written examples. Inherent in discussions of visual narratives is the assumption that they have to function like texts and that divergences from textual structures are problems.³ Even when examining how images narrate, texts are still privileged through narrow definitions of narrative structure that focus upon the text or imagery itself.⁴ The biases that these early analyses created and perpetuated—that the

2. See Juliane Schober, "Religious Merit and Social Status among Burmese Buddhist Lay Associations," in *Merit and Blessing in Mainland Southeast Asia in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Cornelia Ann Kammerer and Nicola Tannenbaum (New Haven: Yale Southeast Asia Studies, 1996), 199–200. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (London: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1987), 12 and 20–24 for a discussion of hierophanies. Schober discusses how to many Burmese Buddhists veneration of consecrated images generates as much merit as service to the Buddha during his lifetime, contextualizing this concept within Eliade's theory of the manifestations of the sacred (hierophanies).
3. Rick Altman, *A Theory of Narrative* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 1. Altman argues that narrative is not bound by any media and its characteristics should not be defined by a specific narrative form.
4. *Ibid.*, 18. Altman argues that this is a fallacy.

characteristics of written narratives form the standard definition of narrative which can be applied across media and that imagery cannot convey a narrative as well as a written one because it cannot show temporality clearly—have yet to be overcome completely. The fact that pictorial material narrates stories differently than written texts does not necessarily mean that they have difficulty in telling a tale, since the assumption that literary and visual configurational qualities need to be contiguous is fallacious. Visual narratives must be approached in different ways than verbal ones, because they encapsulate meaning-making opportunities that written or oral examples do not (and vice versa). They need to be viewed for their own narrativizing characteristics, as opposed to following literary trajectories or exploring how textual narrative characteristics can be mapped onto them, otherwise the traditional hierarchy continues. Because they can tell stories differently from written ones and have means at their disposal not available to a textual narrative, pictorial narratives must be assessed for the qualities that they possess without necessary reference to written narratives.

Many issues with the narrative field result from narrowly defined ideas of what constitutes a narrative and how it functions temporally in telling a tale, demonstrating an assumption that a narrative is a monolithic construct dependent on the passage of time. Theoretically, the narrative studies field has gone some way to breaking down this barrier by developing the concept of the fuzzy set, whereby a variety of features can narrativize visual material. The difficulties in defining pictorial narrative stem from the numerous ways in which stories and ideas have been presented visually, and therefore further studies focused on utilizing a broad definition of what constitutes a visual narrative are necessary. Ultimately, many visual narrative features can be posited in relationship to Umberto Eco's theories on the role of the reader and the semiosis of texts. He gives credence to the codes, subcodes, means of expression, and the social context that contribute to the beholders' and producers' points of view. In terms of the narrative itself, Eco distinguishes between discursive elements (scene selection, where emphases fall, etc.; and I would include placement within space), narrative structures (themes, motives, functions, which in the Burmese context would include the enlightenment, merit-making, the Buddha's community), the roles of the various actors, and elementary ideological structures (such as merit-making and social hierarchy). These features interact with the viewer's first impressions (whether these impressions are confirmed or disproved) and metaphysical world structures (acceptance of truth, judgements of accessibility, recognition of propositional attitudes) to produce understandings of the narrative.⁵ Narrative is therefore a complex network of connections and associations, one that incorporates the method of viewing (reading) as a narrativizing function.⁶

5. Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Exploration in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1979), 3–43 and fig. 0.3.

6. Brian Richardson, "Recent Concepts of Narrative and the Narratives of Narrative Theory," *Style* 34, no. 2 (Summer 2000):169. Richardson's definitions of four basic narrative forms, including (1) the representation of events through time, (2) causal links between events, (3) any action or event since change is implied, and (4) a method of reading a text, rather than any inherent feature of the text, expands assessing narratives beyond the image itself.

In 2008, Rick Altman suggested a new way of understanding narratives, arguing that the assumption that narrative material and narrational activity are always located in the text is an insufficient foundation for analysis.⁷ He proposes a tripartite approach that encompasses narrative material (action, character, etc.), narrational activity (“a narrating instance capable of presenting and organizing narrative material”), and narrative drive (the reading practice that activates the first two approaches).⁸ At a more detailed level, Altman establishes “following” (a zooming-in on specific features) as an important criterion in narrative assessment and argues that each narrative will have its own following pattern.⁹ Together these features make the theory highly flexible. In visual narrative studies, emphasis has been upon narrative material and, to a lesser extent, narrational activity. Narrative drive has been little explored, and the potential interactions between narrational activity, particularly narrative organization, and narrative drive have usually been ignored. Altman’s theory, like Eco’s work, shifts the narrative perspective to the viewer and, essentially, reduces the traditional focal points of narrative studies—actor, time, action, etc.—to better proportions. These latter features become one aspect of an overall analysis, rather than the dominant characteristics, leaving the field open for other ways in which images function narratively, a crucial and essential shift in perspective for visual narrative studies.

H. Porter Abbott further posits narrative as a platform that enables the combination of a telling of an event with other types of material, such as description.¹⁰ This expands upon Mieke Bal’s argument that details cannot all be accounted for narratively, but they can contribute to a world view supported by the narrative portions of the text or image.¹¹ An outcome of this assessment is that an integrated approach to narrative and its environment is necessary to allow for the numerous ways in which events and ideas can be transmitted to and created by viewers or readers.¹²

In the introduction to *Rethinking Visual Narratives from Asia: Intercultural and Comparative Perspectives*, I argued that narrativity can be found beyond conventional text-image, time-space, and story-discourse relationships and that how visual narratives are actualized and utilized in specific ways is essential to understanding how they convey meaning.¹³ However, in the theoretical focus on defining narrative,

7. Altman, *A Theory of Narrative*, 18.

8. *Ibid.*, 10.

9. *Ibid.*, 15–16, 26–27. The implication for visual narratives is that the viewer can also construct this pattern.

10. H. Porter Abbot, “What Do We Mean When We Say ‘Narrative Literature?’ Looking for Answers Across Disciplinary Borders,” *Style* 34, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 261–62.

11. Mieke Bal, “Narrative and the Visual and Literary Arts,” in *Encyclopaedia of Aesthetics*, ed. Michael Kelly (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 328–31.

12. Benjamin J. Fleming and Richard D. Mann, “Introduction: Material Culture and Religious Studies,” in *Material Culture and Asian Religions: Text, Image, Object*, ed. Benjamin J. Fleming and Richard D. Mann (London: Routledge, 2014), 2. Fleming and Mann discuss the importance of an integrated approach towards the ways texts and objects are used at specific sites and in specific contexts. Leoshko argues that the boundaries between narrative and non-narrative are irrelevant in Bodhgaya imagery, and the ability to combine this material is more important. In other words, the content and structure together convey particular ideas. Janice Leoshko, “About Looking at Buddha Images in Eastern India,” *Archives of Asian Art* 52 (2000/01): 77.

13. Alexandra Green, “Introduction: Expansive Approaches to Visual Narrative Analysis,” in *Rethinking Visual Narratives from Asia: Intercultural and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Alexandra Green (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013), 4.

understanding its components, and describing how it is structured and functions (in other words in looking at the physical story alone), the physicality and the environment of the object, as well as the role of the viewer, have not been given the primacy that is due. This fact is flagged in Sabine Buchholz and Manfred Jahn's consideration of space in narratives, where they point out that because temporality has been considered one of the defining features of literary narratives (as opposed to spatial art forms) and space has been viewed primarily as a backdrop, it has not been as extensively considered in narrative theories as time has been.¹⁴ Recent studies of narrative space still tend to focus on the internal space of the story being presented—either the layout of the narrative itself or the setting in which the action occurs—rather than the place in which the retelling of the narrative is presented. The physical space occupied by the object and how it consequently operates is not a common topic of discussion. These are significant lacunae in the study of visual narratives that emerge in part from the fact that theories have been based on written narratives where the form of the book or manuscript is not automatically of importance in assessing the story.¹⁵ Consequently, the same approach has been assumed to be valid for visual narratives. However, pictures are located in or on something—a gallery, house, church, temple, music box, book, fan, and so forth, and these various structures should be part of the assessment of narrativity as they impact narrational activity, including Altman's concept of following, and narrative drive.

Some studies have addressed the importance of space in visual stories. For instance, Marilyn Lavin's volume on the arrangement of narrative painting within Italian churches moved the discussion beyond the layout of the stories themselves and looked at the relationships between stories and the connections between the stories and the architectural spaces in which they were housed.¹⁶ Spatial qualities exemplify the uniqueness of visual narratives in that they operate in varied places beyond the confines of a book, manuscript, or more recently, a kindle,¹⁷ and these assorted and diverse forms expand potential narrational activity and narrative drive.¹⁸ Because nar-

14. Sabine Buchholz and Manfred Jahn, "Space in Narrative," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan (London: Routledge, 2005), 551.

15. This is of course not always the case. For instance, Jinah Kim examines the mutually reinforcing roles of text, image, and book, considering these relationships as the reasons behind the long-standing cult of the book in South Asia. She argues that content (text) and form (object) combine in the book which then embodies the "classic tension between idea and the material." Jinah Kim, *Receptacle of the Sacred: Illustrated Manuscripts and the Buddhist Book Cult in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 5.

16. Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, *The Place of Narrative: Mural Decoration in Italian Churches, 431–1600* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

17. Digital narrative is an emerging subject of study.

18. Little systematic, broad-ranging work has been done on the subject of visual narrative organization or narrativization by the viewer. Leoshko comments on the lack of studies addressing interactions between sites in Eastern India (Leoshko, "About Looking at Buddha Images in Eastern India," 63); extrapolating from this in the Buddhist context, it may be possible to examine the narratives generated by considering networks of pilgrimage sites associated with Buddhist biography. Buddhist cosmology manuscripts with diagrams positing the distance of biographical sites from the Bodhi tree provide evidence of this potential form of narrativization. See Patricia Herbert, "Burmese Cosmological Manuscripts" in *Burma: Art and Archaeology*, ed. Alexandra Green and T. Richard Blurton (London: British Museum Press, 2002), 77–98. See also Alexandra Green, "Space and Place in a Burmese Cosmology Manuscript at the British Museum," in *From Mulberry Leaves to Silk Scrolls: New Approaches to the Study of Asian Manuscript Traditions*,

rational activity can come from the reader/spectator who interprets the events as a non-random sequence, texts and images can sometimes function as narratives and at other times not.¹⁹ This flexibility brings the role of the reader/viewer into a primary position and shifts narrative characteristics onto factors other than internal features alone. In a visual narrative, the role of the viewer gains prominence as the narrational activity depends on the way in which he or she interacts with the material. The narrator thus cedes some authorial power and control over narrative progression as the viewer is not necessarily constrained to look at the imagery in a specific order. This moves visual narratives away from a textual assessment, and one of the results is a narrative where disposition can be a significant part of the construct.

An integrated view that takes location into consideration has been developing in studies of Asian visual narratives, with monuments and their imagery explored for the numerous ways in which they communicate.²⁰ For instance, Stanley Abe in his article on art and practice at Dunhuang argues that the paintings not only illustrate texts and beliefs, but are part of a “complex of belief and ritual” that occurred in the caves with

the Lawrence J. Schoenberg Studies in Manuscript Culture, vol. 1, ed. Justin McDaniel and Lynn Ransom (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Libraries, 2015), 42–69.

19. Altman, *A Theory of Narrative*, 19, 21.

20. The discussion of Asian visual narratives has developed more slowly than the European field. The earliest phases were bound with the iconism/aniconism debate made famous by the exchange between Susan Huntington and Vidya Dehejia in *Ars Orientalis* in the early 1990s. The debate about the role of supposedly aniconic imagery in early Buddhist art was taken up by a number of scholars and has recently been revisited by Ashley Thompson who shifted the discussion to the relationship between iconic/aniconic and permanence/impermanence, placing the debate within a Buddhist methodological construct (Ashley Thompson, “In the Absence of the Buddha: ‘Aniconism’ and the Contentions of Buddhist Art History,” in *A Companion to Asian Art and Architecture*, ed. Rebecca M. Brown and Deborah S. Hutton [Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011], 398–420). More significantly for my purposes, the initial discussion prompted the examination of a variety of Asian visual narratives. In the early 1990s Dehejia produced a volume that established the eight main ways in which time and space are combined in Indian narratives, but, as with these early narrative studies, it did not necessarily contextualize the subject within its physical and cultural settings in a comprehensive manner (Vidya Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art: Visual Narratives of India* [New Delhi: Munshiran Manoharlal Publishers, 1997]). Dehejia’s volume was critiqued by Julia Murray, Quitman Phillips, and me, as the narrative modes that she proposed do not necessarily work cross-culturally and therefore do not establish a broad methodological path. In the case of Phillips and Murray, each explored how Japanese and Chinese imagery respectively does tell stories using culturally embedded concepts, and I assessed the ways that Burmese wall paintings combined time and space in relationship to the purpose of the buildings in which they were housed (Quitman Eugene Phillips, “The Price Shuten Dōji Screens: A Study of Visual Narrative,” *Ars Orientalis* 26 (1996): 1–21. Julia K. Murray, “What Is ‘Chinese Narrative Illustration?’” *The Art Bulletin* 80, no. 4 [Dec. 1998]: 602–15. Alexandra Green, “Narrative Modes in Late Seventeenth- to Early Nineteenth-Century Burmese Wall Paintings,” in *Burma: Art and Archaeology*, ed. Alexandra Green and T. Richard Blurton [London: British Museum Press, 2002], 67–76). A methodological counter-argument to Dehejia’s analysis was proposed by Robert Brown, who posited that narratives were meant to be icons that augmented the significance of the edifice to which they belonged and that their narrative role was of secondary relevance (Robert L. Brown, “Narrative as Icon: The Jataka Stories in Ancient Indian and Southeast Asian Architecture,” in *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia*, ed. Juliane Schober [Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1997], 64–109). In this, he began to connect the narratives with the building in which they were housed, but relegated this aspect to a subservient role. As I argued earlier in this volume, neglecting the narrative construction of imagery ignores the choices made by artists and donors, as well as the ways in which viewers may have interacted with the imagery, and consequently does not work well methodologically.

the architecture and imagery mirroring the relationships between belief and rituals.²¹ In her analysis of a new seventh- to eighth-century cave temple design in China, Sonya Lee also views the architectural arrangement as essential in establishing meaning, arguing that by analyzing the relationships between content and layout the materiality of the narrative is prioritized and discussion shifted away from the hierarchy between text and image. Most importantly, however, in these contexts, it was the spatial context that “activated the ideological meanings vested therein by cuing the images through the viewer’s bodily movement inside the structure.”²² In examining the ancient Javanese site of Borobudur, Julie Gifford integrates architectural form, religious imagery, and viewer movement, concluding that the sculpted reliefs mediated between Buddhist biography and architecture and showing how the monument “embodied Buddhist practice in relationship to material and visual forms.”²³ These types of approach can also be valid for sculptural forms, where the relationships between scenes on a stela, for example, can generate a number of potential viewings.²⁴ The attempted transplantation of spatial structures from one visual context to another can be seen in Robert DeCaroli’s interpretation of the sculptures at the entrance to Vihāra 19 at Bhājā as mimicking the layouts of imagery on railings around free-standing stupas.²⁵ And, Jinah Kim’s work on South Asian manuscripts demonstrates that books can be animated in numerous ways beyond a simple reading of the text and images themselves. She considers the relationships between text, image, and book, paying attention to the uses to which books were put, their relationships to monuments, and the movement inherent in a book’s structure.²⁶ Architectural and material forms thus not only establish an arena in which the narratives function, but also shape narrational activity and, by incorporating viewer movement and usage of the space or object, impact the narrative drive.

In the case of the Burmese wall paintings, the images are shaped by the architectural forms and posited in relationship to the sculpture. These three elements form a narrative “platform” on which to create the Buddha’s presence. The architecture, with its basic layout of an odd number of entrances into a (usually) single interior space, creates the frame for the Buddha’s presence and contains the field of merit. Its small size indicates the individual devotions that occur within it. In turn, the sculpture embodies the focal point when entering the temple and performing devotions and provides closure for the painted narratives that address the path to and lineage of enlightenment. It does so by presenting the moment of awakening through its gesture and position seated under the

21. Stanley K. Abe, “Art and Practice in a Fifth-Century Chinese Buddhist Cave Temple,” *Ars Orientalis* 20 (1990): 12.

22. Sonya S. Lee, “Storytelling in Real Space: Viewership and Nirvana Narratives in Cave Temples of China,” in *Rethinking Visual Narratives from Asia: Intercultural and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Alexandra Green (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013), 127.

23. Julie A. Gifford, *Buddhist Practice and Visual Culture: The Visual Rhetoric of Borobudur* (London: Routledge, 2011), 3.

24. See, for instance, Leoshko, “About Looking at Buddha Images in Eastern India,” 75–78. See also, Claudine Bautze-Picron, “The Biography of the Buddha in Indian Art: How and When?” in *Biography as a Religious and Cultural Text*, ed. Andreas Schüle (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2002), *passim*.

25. Robert DeCaroli, “Reading Bhājā: A Non-Narrative Interpretation of the Vihāra 19 Reliefs,” *East and West* 50, no. 1 (December 2000): 259–80.

26. Kim, *Receptacle of the Sacred*.

Bodhi tree, an image that occupies the entire wall facing the entrance to the temple space. The cause-and-effect painted narratives make sense of the main image's position and gesture, and through their spiraling format around the temple walls contribute to the creation of a Buddha field. However, not all the elements of the wall paintings are narrative, including, for instance, the Indian trade textile patterns. But, shown in conjunction with the sculptured focal point, overtly narrative murals, and framing architecture, these patterns emphasize the narrative of honoring the Buddha, and they contribute to and reconfirm a world view about the Buddha and social and economic status that is reinforced by the biographical material. They are part of the larger narrative platform of the temples.

The layout of the wall paintings demonstrates potential viewing practices. These were described in chapters 2 and 3 where the traditionally characterized narratives—the life of the Buddha, the previous Buddhas, and the *jātaka* tales—present one level of narrative construction, but then are arranged vertically (the perfection of the virtues, the attainment of enlightenment, and becoming part of the lineage of Buddhas) and horizontally (telling of the cycles of *samsāra* in relationship to Buddhist biography, reflecting circumambulatory motions, and making the Buddha present through a relationship with the local community) on the walls to provide other potential viewings. From the time that the devotee passed through the entrances flanked by guardians and entered the Buddha's field of merit—the center-periphery narrative connection—he or she was within a repeated narrative scenario where the Buddha preached and listeners became enlightened, as recounted often in Buddhist biography. The implication here is that each time a practitioner comes to pay homage, because of the positioning of the imagery, the narrative is repeated.

Within these spatial layouts, action, character, and setting also play roles in creating the visual narratives. Action develops in various ways: linearly in registers, in vertical progression, and through the interplay of particular locations within the temple space. Thus can be seen the narrative progression within each of the *jātaka* tales and the life of the Buddha, the development of the *bodhisatta* from sentient being on the lower portion of the walls to awakened one at the top, and the narration of an event of the Buddha's life where he tells stories to his community or is wrapped in them by his community. The main character of the multiple stories is the Buddha in the course of becoming an awakened being. The popularity of narrative imagery in Burma can thus be accounted for because it honors the Buddha by explaining him biographically with the main image's legitimacy infused by contact with the Buddha's life story.²⁷ The other essential characters in these stories are members of the Buddha's community, who support him and who, in these contexts, include seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century devotees who come to the temples to see and honor the Buddha depicted in

27. The issue of Buddha images and the Buddha's presence is a knotty one. It is a topic often discussed in conjunction with relics, but is beyond the scope of this volume. See Robert H. Scharf, "On the Allure of Buddhist Relics," *Representations* 66 (Spring 1999): 75–99. See also Thompson, "In the Absence of the Buddha: 'Aniconism' and the Contentions of Buddhist Art History," 398–420. And, Donald Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha: The Ritual of Image Consecration in Thailand* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2004; Delhi edition, 2007), 109.

contemporary settings. By so doing, the practitioners both activated and were enfolded in the narratives and therefore became participants in the stories being presented.

A story needs a narrator or narrators to present and organize the narrative material. Numerous voices are seen in the murals. On one level the Buddha narrated the painted stories; in another, the devotee did so through his or her presence in the temple. The monks who supervised, artists who produced, and the donors who commissioned the construction of the temple each contributed to the choice of subject matter, even if the alterations were only in minor details. The Buddha image did this through its position in the temple—the imagery swirls around the figure as if it were spinning the stories. Practitioners likewise triggered the various narrative threads by entering the temple and passing between the guardian figures and under the footprint or lotus pool, their position in front of the Buddha where they too were surrounded by the images, and possibly walking around the temple interior, following the stories. All sentient beings, and therefore the community, were called upon to witness the donors' generosity in the inscription, and, in so doing, they too became viewers and therefore participants in the narratives as witnesses, but also as the community watching the unfolding of the karmically intertwined lives of the Buddha, the donors, and by association themselves. These narrative roles are visible because these activities were physically presented to the viewer: the Buddha narrated his biography; donors and practitioners positioned themselves within the local community and the Buddha's community; the monks associated with production and local monastic complexes perpetuated the visual liturgy of the imagery and therefore ensured its ritual efficacy; and the community presented an environment in which devotees could engage themselves in normative practice. In these varying narrative voices, the model viewer (reader)—one who knows the stories and therefore can potentially visualize connections inherent within the imagery—is anticipated, seen, and created by the wall paintings.²⁸

The narratives were constructed by training the lens on both dramatic and exemplifying moments of the *jātakas*, the renunciatory path trodden to the awakening, enlightenment itself and the history of previous Buddhas, the consequences of specific forms of good and bad behavior, and the creation of a Buddha field and Buddhist communities. When seated before the Buddha image, devotees were at the center of the architectural and narrative complex, thereby emphasizing their prominent role in the narrative construction and demonstrating that the space was a driving force in the creation of the narrative networks. Space has often been deliberately shaped in Buddhist visual cultures, and the Burmese wall paintings are one manifestation of this phenomenon. In approaching visual narratives in an integrated fashion and by assessing how they function without recourse to textual narrative structures, the problem of how to move beyond considering visual material as merely illustration of a text, as referring to a text, or as dependent on a text is overcome. The word-image and narrative-icon dichotomies are shown to be continua that alter depending on the viewer. The need for a rigid, standardized definition of visual narrative is likewise unnecessary as narratives are

28. Eco, *The Role of the Reader*, 7–10.

assessed from the viewer's perspective and through the relationships between the narrative material, narrational activity, and narrative drive. This volume has looked at the articulation of these elements by discussing how the relationships between word and image, layouts, story and scene selection, and narrative themes both demonstrate and confirm social structures and changes, economic activities, and religious practices of seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century Burma. The visual material—paintings, sculpture, architecture—of the wall painting sites created narratives by juxtaposing stories, matching imagery, and connecting tales in space, and this type of analysis takes the narrative field beyond the concept that pictures are to be “read” and shows the multifarious and holistic ways in which they can be *viewed*.

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