

conclusion, he returns to this theme to express concern about museum boards' lack of receptiveness to contemporary scholarship, and the potential consequences of this for museum development.

As a whole, *Museums, history and culture in Malaysia* provides in-depth insight into the museum sector in Malaysia, its role in nation-building and identity formation, as well as the pressures it faces from central and local government, and from increasingly vocal elements in Malaysian society. The book's conclusions are therefore of importance to museum studies and to the growing discourse on public history and heritage in contemporary Southeast Asia.

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British Burma in the new century, 1895–1918

By STEPHEN L. KECK

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This book, one in the series *Britain and the World* edited by the British Scholar Society, pursues two lines of approach. One is to focus on a specific period in the history of Burma that the author considers has been neglected, that between the end, about 1895, of the ten years of British 'pacification' that followed the third Burma war and the abolition of the kingdom, and the emergence of nationalist activity around the end of the First World War, in particular with the opening of the University of Rangoon. Dr Keck thinks that the period has an integrity that historians have rather neglected, and that his book is 'the first to delineate this moment as a relatively discrete historical entity' (p. 3). In his view the period shows the 'colonial state' at work and permits clarification of its objectives and effectiveness. And that, he considers, ought to make it more of a feature in the history of Burma/Myanmar than it does in writings that tend to proceed rather too rapidly from conquest to nationalist movement. There is surely something to be said for this point of view, though it seems to be a bit exaggerated. A drawback is that it risks playing down the influence on the policies and assumptions of the period of the experience of the earlier conquests of 'Lower' Burma.

The second line of approach is to make use less of the official records than of 'colonial knowledge', to work, as the author puts it, 'outside the grain' (p. 22). In this he particularly refers to the writing about Burma in the period with which he is mainly concerned, especially those he calls 'Burmaphiles', such as Sir George Scott (Shway Yoe), V.C. Scott O'Connor, Harold Fielding-Hall, Colin Metcalfe Enriques, 'the most important strand of British intellectual history for this study'

(p. 18). The aim is to let ‘these largely forgotten figures’ — he adds in missionaries, ‘memorialists’, travellers and satirists — ‘introduce new century Burma’ (pp. 24–5).

After the first chapter has introduced these approaches, the second concerns itself with ‘locating’ Burma. The most interesting conclusion Dr Keck draws from his sources is their indication that Burma would develop as a new nation, but separate from India, of which it had been made a province. That notion is indeed worth bearing in mind when historians consider ‘separation’ in the inter-war period.

The third chapter, ‘Governing Burma’, draws on ‘colonial knowledge’ rather less and official records rather more. It discusses the role of the headman (though without the usual critique of the irrelevance of Sir Charles Crosthwaite’s approach), policing, prisons, the use of Insein as a reformatory, corruption, public health, and the handling of the outbreaks of bubonic plague.

With Chapter 4 the author returns us to ‘colonial knowledge’ for a discussion of the changing views of the defunct kingdom. The end of the monarchy and the destruction of its records at Mandalay seemed to give grasping the past a new urgency and at the same time to encourage elements of nostalgia in a vision of ‘Old Burma’, as there were indeed elements of nostalgia in Britons’ view of their own recent past. The writings of Scott and Fielding-Hall are prominent here. Worth noting, too, is Lord Curzon’s insistence that the palace should be preserved ‘as a national monument’ (quoted on p. 85), even though it meant turning out the Upper Burmah Club, and the founding of the Burma Research Society in 1910.

Fielding-Hall’s *The soul of the people* was the best-known book about Buddhism in Burma, the subject of the next chapter, but it had been preceded by *The Burman*, published by Scott under his pseudonym. As the author points out (p. 108), neither seem to have recognised the belief that the *sasana* needed to be saved, the argument in Alice Turner’s recent *Saving Buddhism: The impermanence of religion in colonial Burma* (University of Hawai‘i Press, 2014).

Something of the nostalgia theme re-emerges in Chapter 6. Though Rangoon flourished as the centre of ‘modernisation’, it was increasingly an Indian city. For British observers, ‘rural Burma was the real Burma’ (p. 126). Chapter 7 is entitled ‘Engaging Ethnicity’. One of the foci is, of course, Donald Smeaton’s *The loyal Karens of Burma*, and it features again in the final chapter, ‘Dacoits and dissent’, in which Dr Keck quotes his criticism of the destruction of the monarchy (pp. 173–4). The Burmaphiles, by contrast, were ‘relatively uninterested in dacoits’ (p. 189).

An appraisal quoted in the blurb on the back of this book refers to the author’s ‘lucid prose’. Your reviewer did not find it so. He did not, for example, know what to make of the sentence: ‘The Burmaphiles would have had much in the country without its rapid or savage modernizations’ (p. 194). For him the book was rather a struggle, though he welcomed its flashes of insight. He was not sure, however, whether his main difficulty was not after all a matter of style, but rather a more fundamental one: it may be that the two lines of approach are not so readily combined as the author hoped.

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