Chapter 4

Tilman Frasch

EARLY BURMESE INSCRIPTIONS FROM BODHGAYĀ

For Burmese Buddhists, Bodhgayā – the site of the Buddha's enlightenment and presumed place where Buddhism originated – held a special position, enjoying veneration and maintenance over centuries. This relationship dates back to the 11th century, when the first mission despatched by a Burmese king arrived there, and continued throughout the Pagan period (11th–13th centuries) and beyond. Royal ambassadors and private pilgrims alike went there for veneration and more importantly to maintain the temple through donations and repairs. Evidence of their efforts is a small set of artefacts with inscriptions, probably dating from the 11th to the 13th centuries. This investigation is limited to the Burmese inscriptions of the Pagan period, but it should be noted that a few records from the 19th century are known (Singh 2016, 378–80 and 408–7; Upinder Singh's summary of and comments on the long inscription from the 1290s, ibid., 377–8, are off the mark).

The inscriptions of the Pagan period consist of votive tables, one (or more) inscribed bricks, an umbrella bearing a date and the name of the donor or owner, and most importantly, a long inscription on 'black marble' recording the visit of two monks from Burma (Myanmar), who carried out repairs to the Mahābodhi temple in the late 13th century. This latter inscription is the focus of this contribution, as it is important not only for the history of early Myanmar and its relations with Bodhgayā, but also contains information relevant for the history of Bodhgayā (and, by implication, the history of India) at that time. This chapter begins with a brief survey of the short inscriptions found on various objects, but then focuses on the longer Burmese record. It first looks at its text and context, then discusses briefly its bearing on Myanmar/late Pagan period, and finally (and most importantly) examines what the inscription has to contribute to Indian history.

Shorter inscriptions

The Indian Museum at Calcutta (Kolkata) holds two clay tablets of Burmese origin found at Bodhgayā. Both show the image of a seated Buddha surrounded by miniature *stupas* on the obverse and bear a short inscription in Old Mon on the side. They are discussed in Chapter 9

in the present volume, along with the corresponding example in the British Museum. Their donor was the monk Mahādeva, of whom little else is known, although he may be identical with the eponymous monk mentioned in an inscription coming from a Buddhist establishment at Kyaukse (Upper Burma; Blagden 1923, 70–3). The use of the Old Mon language for these writings indicates that they were made during the 11th to the mid-12th centuries, when Old Mon was the preferred language at Pagan.

Alexander Cunningham (1892, pl. XXIX) shows a brick with Burmese writing on it, which is said to have come from the pinnacle of the temple. A version of this plate is preserved in the Cunningham archive at the British Museum and illustrated here in **Figure 4.1**. Unfortunately, deciphering this inscription is difficult because a few letters on the right-hand side have broken off and possibly more text is missing on the left-hand side and, above all, it is in a poor state of preservation; our problems are exacerbated by the small size and poor photographic reproduction. The script is a regular square Burmese of the 13th or 14th century, and the text reads *latta s*(*i*) *a ca tu pa …*, with *variae lectiones* being *l*(*e*)*tta ññ(a) rā ca ku va* respectively. If there is a circle above *tu*, this could render *tuiv* (the plural suffix) or possibly *kuiv* (dative case), but none of these suggestions makes much sense. It is possible the writing was incised in the bricks after the completion of the masonry, so the full text may have run across several bricks.

A fragment of a frieze that once surrounded the temple or one of the lateral *stupas*, now kept in Berlin, also contains several Burmese letters (Bautze-Picron and Bhattacharya 1998, 139). Again, the inscription is too fragmentary and too obliterated to allow meaningful decipherment. Although the letters are ‘Burmese’, those that can be read do not appear to be in the Burmese language. It is possible – but this is no more than speculation – the language is Mon, scratched into the frieze by the monk Mahādeva (or one of his companions, if any) on the occasion of their earlier visits.

This takes us to the last and perhaps most complicated inscribed item, a small golden, gem-studded umbrella, which was found ‘about 8 feet below the [then] level of the compound immediately west of the temple’ (Cunningham 1892, 75). The object and its inscriptions are shown here in **Figure 4.2**, the illustration taken from Cunningham’s notebook on Buddhism kept at the British Museum. The umbrella bears two inscriptions, one each in Burmese and Bengali, as well as two dates, neither of which seem to agree.

The reading is hampered by Cunningham's transcription, bearing in mind that he did not know Burmese. The Burmese text on the umbrella reads (*sa*)*karaj* (*6*)*55 khu* || *siri dhammarājaguru* || *mahāthiññ*. An alternative reading, as proposed by Gordon H. Luce, differs in two instances: (*sa*)*karaj* (*655*) *khu* || *siri dhammarājāguru* || *... kusuil* || (Luce 1976, 39). The Sanskrit version begins with what appears to be the date *sam*[*vat*] *397*, which is followed by the same phrase *Sri Dharmarājāguru*, a double *daṇḍa* and the syllables *mahā-*. This would suggest a continuation *-thera*, but the reading looks more like *revatā*, which would render the name *Mahā-Revatā* for the monk. The rest of this line and its continuation in the lower row is mostly illegible.

One would expect the two inscriptions on this umbrella to be related to each other, with one giving an explanation or translation of the other. This interpretation is supported by the appellation of the chief monk, *Siri Dhammarājāguru*, and its Sanskrit equivalent *Sri Dharmarājāguru*. On the other hand, however, neither the name of the monk nor the dates seem to agree. This question could be solved eventually with the help of an improved reading of the Sanskrit text. With regard to the date, a search for a solution will also require us to determine which of the various computations of time current at Bodhgayā were used. Apart from the Burmese Era (or Culasakkaraj) of 638 CE, these include the Buddhist and Lakṣmaṇasena Eras, the starts of which have not been established. Earlier calendars, notably the Gupta and Kalachuri Eras, can be excluded.

Context and text of the 'long inscription'

This inscription (shown here in **Figure 4.1**) was 'discovered' by a Burmese embassy to the Governor-General of India, sent out in 1833 by the Burmese king Bagyidaw (r. 1819–37). The mission was despatched in the aftermath of the first Anglo-Burmese War at a time when both sides were striving to bring their relations back to normal. The mission included a small guard of Englishmen under Captain George Burney, the younger brother of Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Burney, who served as the British Resident to the Court of Ava. The two Burmese envoys used the trip to India for a visit to Bodhgayā, where they probably alerted their British watchdog to earlier visits by Burmese pilgrims, referring to artefacts and inscriptions left *in situ*. George sent a copy of the inscription to his brother Henry, who later published a reading and explanation of the text in the *Asiatic Researches* (Burney, 1836 [2003], 161–89). This was one of the earliest translations of a Burmese inscription into

English. Henry Burney had taken a keen interest in Burmese history and historiography, but very likely the information he gave in his publication of 1836 was provided to him by Burmese scholars at the Court of Ava.

The two monks were among a series of Burmese visitors who arrived at Bodhgayā in the 18th and 19th centuries, with another notable mission following in the years 1871–3 (Leider 2005–6, 156–202, and Trevithick 1999, 635–56, esp. 648–51). On this latter occasion, the monks also tried to carry out repairs at the temple, but were eventually stopped by the British district officer (and later the archaeological officer) for allegedly spoiling the temple's decoration and architecture. Their work triggered British interest in the exploration and conservation of the site, resulting in publications by Rājendralāla Mitra and Alexander Cunningham, both of which contain sections dealing with the early Burmese inscriptions (Mitra 1878, 208–10; Cunningham 1892, 75–7). The last of the 'early' readings and translations of the main inscription was provided by Taw Sein Ko, then Acting Director of the Archaeological Survey of Burma, in his *Annual Report* for 1911–12 (Taw Sein Ko 1912, 18–19).

The controversial points these early translations raised and discussed are interrelated and concern the date and the name of one of the rulers mentioned. Beginning with Burney, all early scholars read the name in lines 9–10 as *Pyū-ta-sin Maṅ* or 'Lord of 100.000 Pyu'. This ruler was identified as King Alaungsithu (r. 1112/4–*c.* 1168 CE) because of the 15th-century royal cradle song *Yakhaing Min-thami Egyin* (*Rakhuiṅ-maṅ:-samī:-ekhyaṅ:*), in which the Pagan king Alaungsithu (*c.* 1114–*c.* 1168) is referred to as *Pyū-ta-sin Maṅ*. As it is unlikely that Burney would have known this poem, it seems (as just noted) that he relied in his translation and explanation of the inscription on information provided by Burmese scholars (Atu Min Nyo 1985, 8, stanza 16; note the misprint *phrū* for *pyū* here). This identification of the king appears to have informed Burney's initial reading of the two dates in lines 11–12 as 467 and 468. Although the dates were corrected to 657 (or 667) and 660 (or 668), the misreading of the king's name persisted in subsequent publications. This controversy about the name and dates was finally laid to rest by Luce in 1974, when he gave the correct readings *Putasin Maṅ* for the ruler and 65(7) and 660 for the dates (Luce 1976, 40–2). Luce's translation was taken over by Tsering Gonkatsang and Michael Willis (2013, 429–39). A slightly different translation has been provided by U Than Tun (1991, 112). Despite these and further efforts, and my brief summary of the current state of research to introduce the republication of Burney's article in the *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Studies* (1.2, 2006, 9), wrong

readings of the dates and the king's name continue to appear in academic literature (e.g., see Ahir 1994, 71–4, and Goh 2015, 54). Following Luce, a correct translation would therefore read like this:

> The [temple] standing at the site of the giving of alms-rice, which was among the 84,000 cetis built by Asoka, lord of Jambudipa, in the 218th year of the Buddha Sasana, had become ruined in the course of time. It was repaired by the monk *Paṁsukū*. Having become ruined again, it was repaired by *Satuiw Maṅ*. Having fallen into ruin once more, the *dhammāraja* (*tryā-maṅ*) [bearing the title] 'Lord of the White Elephant' sent, on his behalf, his teacher *Siri Dhammarājaguru* and pupil *Kassapa*. They had the funds, but could not do [the work], [until] on the occasion of giving alms to *Vanavāsi* Thera, *Putasin Maṅ* said 'go ahead' and gave permission to the 'young lord' [i.e. *Kassapa*] and the lord Mahathera [*Dhammarājaguru*]. Work was resumed on Friday, 10th day waxing moon of month Pyatho in the year 657 of the Myanmar Era [16 December 1295] and [concluded] on Sunday, 8th day waxing moon of Tazaungmon in the year 660 [12 October 1298] with an offering (read *lhū* for *lha*) of many flags and streamers, 1,000 rice offerings and 1,000 oil lights. Two children adopted as 'son' and 'daughter' [were offered], also a wish-fulfilling tree (*patañ̃sā paṅ*) hung with flowers of gold and silver, cups and lower garments. So that there will be permanent offerings of food and clothing, they bought land, serfs and cattle and donated them [to the temple]. As for this good deed, we want to attain *nibbān* and we want to become arahats at the time of Metteyya Buddha.

Bodhgayā and Pagan

As the connections between Bodhgayā and Pagan have been dealt with at length elsewhere (Frasch 1998, 69–93; Frasch, 2000, 41–50), the contribution of the above inscription to that relationship can be summarised here rather briefly. However, the following considerations should start with a caveat regarding the basic assumption of the above (and earlier) interpretations, that the statements made by the two monks from Burma refer to Burmese engagement with the Mahābodhi temple and hence reflect what they knew before visiting the site in the late 13th century. Alternatively, one could assume that the monks repeated the

story of the temple from its founding by King Aśoka through to earlier repairs as it was told to them on their visit. But there are a number of peculiarities that point to the former assumption being more likely. Above all, this concerns the tradition of 'rag-wearing' monks (*paṁsukūlin*), which was quite common at Pagan, where several monks bore that epithet, usually in recognition of their austere, ascetic way of living (see Luce and U Pe Maung Tin 1933–56, vol. 4, Pl. 378b, hereafter cited 'Pl. 4 378b' etc., and U Nyein Maung and U Aung Thaw 1972, vol. 1, 274). In addition, *Paṁsukū* monks are styled in the chronicles as strict renouncers of the world and a source of spiritual power as opposed to political power. They could therefore challenge kings for their moral failures (see Luce and U Pe Maung Tin 1960 [1923], 132, 147–8, 178). *Paṁsukūlin*s are also known from Sri Lanka, where they flourished during the Anuradhapura period, but the tradition seems to have disappeared there around the 10th or 11th century (Gombrich 2006 [1988], 156–7). In India the habit of rag-wearing does not seem to have been widespread – an observation is inferred from the absence of references to the tradition in standard accounts of Indian Buddhism. Recent research suggests that it was a Theravadin form of asceticism (*dhutaṅga*) but the point merits further investigation (Langer 2014, 125–44).

Secondly, the term *satuiw-maṅ*, 'Our Lord' or 'His Majesty', only makes sense in Burmese culture, where it has been common since the Pagan period and usually refers to a well-known ruler. Finally, the Burmese monks used their own calendar, the Burmese (or Culasakkaraj) Era, for the dating of the inscription, preferring it to all of the other eras current in North India and at Bodhgayā at the time. These would have been the Lakṣmaṇasena Era (of Aśokacalla's copper plate inscription), the Buddhist Era used by Puruṣottamasiṃha (Mallebrein 1991, 344–57) and the era used by the Sinhalese pilgrim Mahānāma in his record from the year 267 (Lévi 1929, 35–47; Fleet 1888, 274–9; Tournier 2014, 1–60). An argument for the last era (still undetermined in my view) is certainly weaker than the previous two, but it reinforces them as it indicates that the Burmese visitors had indeed brought to Bodhgayā much of their own 'intellectual baggage'.

It is against this backdrop that we can attempt to align the information given in the inscription with the two royal missions from Pagan known from other sources. The first mission recorded in the inscription was very likely the one dispatched by King Kyanzittha (r. 1084–*c.* 1112) in the late 11th century, who stated in one of his own records that he had sent money and gifts for the repair of the Sri Bajras, that is, the Vajrāsana (Blagden 1920, 163–4). As Old

Mon was the dominant language during Kyanzittha's reign, the votive tablets bearing the signature, also in Old Mon, of Mahādeva (mentioned above) may have been made to record this mission. Another royal mission from Pagan seems to have resulted in the construction of a replica of the Mahābodhi temple at Pagan, where it was built right in the centre of the walled city. Traditional Burmese accounts and a much later inscription inside the temple attribute this work of merit to King Jeyyasingha-Nadaungmya (r. 1211–*c.* 1230/31; Luce and U Pe Maung Tin 1960 [1923], 154; Duroiselle 1921, no. 12720). The third royal embassy in the late 13th century provided the occasion for the writing of the inscription under consideration. It had been commissioned by a king styled 'Lord of the White Elephant', a royal epithet that came into use around this time. The king reigning at the time the mission visited Bodhgayā was Kyawzwa, who had come to the throne in 1289. Luce therefore attributed the consignment of the mission to him, although the king never seemed to have used the epithet 'Lord of the White Elephant' in any other of his (few) inscriptions (Luce 1976, 39). Other names and titles under which Kyawzwa was known are Shwe-nan-shin (*Rhuy-nan-syaṅ*, 'Lord of the Golden Palace'), Nan-kya-min (*Nan-kla-maṅ*, 'Dethroned King') and perhaps also Tala-thugyi (*Talā-sū-krī*, 'Headman of Tala' (see Luce 1969–70, 'Names, Titles and Regnal Date of the Kings of Pagan', enclosure to vol. 2, folder at end).

In contrast to Kyawzwa, Sīhasū, the youngest of the three Shan brothers who became kingmakers at Pagan after the Mongols had withdrawn from the city, not only used the title 'Lord of the White Elephant' in his inscriptions frequently, but also claimed to be 'king' (*maṅ-krī*) of Pagan in 1298 CE, having dethroned Kyawzwa (Kingship in Pl. 3 285, l. 2–3 [1296]; first usage of epithet 'Lord of the White Elephant' in Pl. 4 403a, l. 3 [1306]). No matter whether it was Kyawzwa or Sīhasū who sent the mission to Bodhgayā, the symbolic assumption of patronage over the site of enlightenment may have served to reinforce their claim to kingship in a time of contested succession. In this, they possibly followed the example set by King Kyanzittha, who had done the same not long after he had become king in the late 11th century. This connection between religious patronage and legitimation of kingship is explored by Tilman Frasch (1996, 88–9).

However, this focus on the role of the kings in sending missions to Bodhgayā should not make us overlook the fact that interest in Bodhgayā and the Mahābodhi temple was deeply embedded in Pagan society. For example, the characteristic feature of the Mahābodhi temple, its pyramidal temple tower (*śikhara*), was relatively common in the architecture of the Pagan

period, both at the capital and at provincial towns such as Sale. Although dating the Pagan temples is difficult due to the lack of a proper survey, some of these Mahābodhi-type spires seem to have appeared in the architecture of the city before the full replica was built in the early 13th century (Frasch 2000, 45). Moreover, Burmese monks and laymen seem to have gone on pilgrimages to Bodhgayā quite often all through the Pagan period. For instance, an old courtier stated in 1248 that he had sponsored no fewer than three journeys to the 'land of the Buddha' (*pu-rhā-praññ*), the Burmanised equivalent for the term *Majjhimadesa* of the classical Buddhist literature, clearly centred on Bodhgayā (Pl. 3 308, l. 16 [1248])**.** In 1256 a 'rich person' (probably a merchant), who had come from Majjhimadesa, enshrined the two relics he had brought from Bodhgayā – possibly leaves from the Bodhi tree or votive tablets – in the *stupa* he had built at Chaung-U (Lower Chindwin district, Pl. 4 471, l. 5–9 [1256]). The references to monks or laymen having 'reached the Buddha' (*pu-rhā rok*), which are rather frequent throughout the Pagan period and beyond, are an obvious parallel to the label 'reached Sihala' (*sihuil rok*) used both in inscriptions and chronicles for pilgrims who had gone to Lanka (see, for example, Luce and U Pe Maung Tin 1923, 144, referring to the Theingo-yauk monastery, named after the monks who had returned from Sihala). Moreover, we also have two inscriptions from Halin, in which people recorded their financial contributions to a joint trip (U Nyein Maung and U Aung Thaw 1972, vol. 1, 189). There is one more yet unedited inscription inside the inscription shed at Halin that appears to record a similar financial agreement among sponsors and participants of a pilgrimage.

Taken together, the evidence from the Pagan period demonstrates that Burmese Buddhists had an on-going, deep-rooted interest in Bodhgayā and the Mahābodhi temple, which continued even after North India had come under the dominion of the sultans of Delhi in the early 13th century. Their rule made trips for Buddhists from Pagan doubtlessly a dangerous undertaking and very likely an expensive one too. The reconstruction of the Mahābodhi temple at Pagan by King Nadaungmya may also have been an attempt to rescue the temple from imminent destruction and keep it accessible for Buddhists from Myanmar and other parts of South and South East Asia (Frasch 2000, 46).

Implications for Indian history

The final section of this essay looks at the information the long inscription provides for Indian history. Three aspects are considered here: the repairs to the temple, the identification of the (apparently local) ruler Putasin Man, and the monk Vanavāsi Thera, who helped the

Burmese monks get started. Beginning with the first, the inscription lists (as shown above) three missions, which follow a similar pattern: the original temple fell into disrepair three times, and on each occasion a monk and/or the king had it repaired. Lest not interpretations go too far, the range of meanings of the verbs used here needs to be established. The first, *phyak*, does not cause much trouble, as it means 'damage, break, destroy', but the second, *pru*, has a much broader range, beginning with 'do, make'. In conjunction with *phyak* it can indeed mean 'repair, restore', but this may also come in the form of 'decorate, adorn, whitewash, clean up' and the like. In other words, if we do not know the degree of dilapidation or disintegration into which the temple had fallen, the exact measure and scope of the 'repairs' carried out by the Burmese monks cannot be determined either. Any claim that these repairs came in response to damage done by the Muslim conquerors therefore runs the risk of overexploiting the contents of the inscription.

This word of caution particularly relates to an architectural feature of the Mahābodhi temple attributable to Burmese workmanship, namely the triple vault in the cell on the first storey. The true vault is rare in Indian architecture, which the Mahābodhi temple shares with the temple at Bhitargaon near Kanpur, monasteries at Nālandā and at Ratnagiri (Orissa), and possibly Somapur monastery in Bengal. This peculiarity of the Mahābodhi temple has already been noted by Cunningham (1892, 85). In contrast to India, the true vault is very common in the monuments of Pagan since the 11th century, where it was employed in virtually every single temple and numerous monastic cells (Pichard 1993, 86–109). The Ananda temple, presumably consecrated around 1090–1 CE, can serve as a benchmark here, as it was not only the first monumental temple of Pagan but also employed vaults in all corridors, porches and the niches above its four images. As King Kyanzittha's mission to Bodhgayā took place not long after the completion of the Ananda – Luce (1969–70, 63) has suggested a date before 1098 CE – it is tempting to argue that the construction technology was transferred from Pagan to Bodhgayā on this (or any of the two later) missions. However, this is only speculation at the moment and requires further research and substantiation. It is also unclear if the brick wall on the north side of the temple, which was removed in the late 19th century, was a result of repairs carried out by one of the Burmese missions (see the illustrations in Chapter 1 in the present volume). As mentioned by Sam van Schaik in Chapter 5, the northern terrace and stairs leading up to it were noted by Tibetan visitors in the mid-18th century.

The second piece of information the inscription provides for Indian history is the name Putasin. As stated, there can be no doubt about the reading of this name, and the syntax of the sentence makes it clear that the person concerned must have been a local Indian potentate, as he was in a position to allow the work of the two Burmese visitors to commence. This evidence points at the dynasty of spiritual overseers of the Mahābodhi temple during the 13th century known as the *pīṭhīpati ācārya*s, a topic dealt with by Dániel Balogh in Chapter 3 in the present volume. Many of the *pīṭhīpati* names ended with -*sena* and this lends further weight to the assumption that it was a member of this dynasty who gave permission to the Burmese monks, because the Skt/Pali term -*sena* is occasionally spelt -*sin* in Pagan epigraphic Old Burmese. For instance, the name Acalasena is habitually spelt Acalasin (Pl. 1 105b, l. 13 [1239]; Pl. 2 222a, l. 6 and 15 [1268]; Pl. 4 397b, l. 6 [1340]. Similarly, the name of the minister Mitrasenajaya was usually spelt Mit(t)rasincañ̃ñ (Pl. 1 41, l. 3 [1216]; Pl. 4 371a, l. 5 [1219]).

The first part of the ruler's name could either be *Putta*- (*Putra*-) or *Buddha*-. In the case of the latter, which is also Luce's tentative suggestion (Luce 1976, 39), he can hardly be identical with the *pīṭhīpati ācārya* Buddhasena who met the Tibetan pilgrim Dharmasvāmin during his visit to Bodhgayā in 1234–5 (Roerich 1959, xv–xviii and 64; and Chapter 3 in the present volume). Buddhasena is known too from inscriptions dating from the mid-13th century (Sircar 1978; Sircar 1979, 29–34). At any rate, the Burmese inscription not only provides another member of this dynasty in addition to the Devasena, Buddhasena and Jayasena proposed by Sircar (1979, 31), but also illustrates that they were still in power at the end of the 13th century, that is, after the alleged takeover of the region by the Muslim rulers. To put the matter in a different way, we must conclude that the Putasin in the Burmese inscription records a second Buddhasena in the late 13th century, after the time of Jayasena (*c.* 1255–80).

The final piece of information from the inscription to merit consideration concerns the monk Vanavāsi. Clearly not his personal monastic name, this is either an affiliation to a certain group within the *saṃgha* or an indication of his place of origin. As an affiliation, it would apply to monks usually dwelling in a grove (*vana*), although we would normally expect this dwelling to be a forest (*araññ̃a*), as groves were permitted to monks as places of residence in the Vinaya. In contrast to the 'forest dwelling' – an ascetic practice that became a reform movement of the *saṃgha* in Sri Lanka and South East Asia from the late 12th century –

‘grove dwelling’ never became a distinct practice nor did the monks who dwelt in groves form a separate group within the *saṃgha*. Note, however, that there was no clear distinction between the *vanavāsi* and *araññavāsi* traditions, although by the 13th century the latter term and tradition were more common, at least in Pagan (Frasch 1996, 291–8). It therefore seems best to interpret Vanavāsi as a geographical place name, referring possibly to the old Kadamba capital of Banavasi in Karṇāṭaka. The Kadambas flourished from the 4th to the 6th century CE, and a local Kadamba dynasty was still in western India in the 13th century. Banavasi was no longer its seat of authority, but the city continued as a religious centre and lived on in Buddhist memory as the area to where the monk Rakkhita – one of the missionaries emerging from Aśoka’s Third Buddhist Council at Pāṭaliputra – had been sent (Geiger 1912, ch. 12: 4). Given that the missionary stories are found in the Sinhalese chronicles, this was probably the Vanavasi known to the Burmese monks and, regardless of the place of origin of the monk Vanavāsi they met at Bodhgayā, they may have applied the word to the region they knew. There is yet another southern twist to the story because Devasena, the first of the *pīṭhīpati* preceptors, seemingly hailed from Karṇāṭaka (Sircar 1978, 256 and most recently Balogh in Chapter 3 of this volume).

Conclusion

The Burmese developed a strong link with Bodhgayā right from the inception of their first kingdom of Pagan in the 11th century. Among other things, this relationship resulted in a host of official missions and private pilgrimages to the place and occasionally repairs to the Mahābodhi temple. These visits and restorations are attested through a set of objects and inscriptions left at the temple. Included in this set are clay votive tablets, bricks, a small golden umbrella and, most notably, a long inscription composed at the end of the 13th century. This latter inscription is of great importance because it not only gives a summary of the efforts undertaken by the Burmese (presumably the Burmese kings) to maintain the temple during the two centuries past, but it also has wider implications for the site itself and its Indian context. Three findings are worthy of note in this respect. First of all, the reference to repeated repairs to the temple carried out by Burmese visitors, as recorded in the inscription, suggests that a crucial achievement of Pagan architecture, the true vault, was introduced to the Mahābodhi temple between the 11th and 13th centuries. Secondly, the reference to a local ruler named Buddhasena, who helped the Burmese visitors in the 1290s, confirms that a dynasty whose names ended with *-sena* had become supervisors of the Mahābodhi compound, serving as *pīṭhīpati*s or *pīṭhīpati ācārya*s. That they were still in

power at the end of the 13th century throws a sidelight on the religious history of North India after the Muslim conquest. Finally, the reference to a monk (from) Vanavāsi seems to verify the link between the *pīṭhīpati*s and the Kadamba region that is found in other sources.

Captions

Figure 4.1 Alexander Cunningham, mock-up for Cunningham's book *Mahâbodhi* but never published. This illustrates a short Burmese inscription incised on a brick allegedly from the pinnacle of the temple, accompanied by Cunningham's reading. British Museum, 1897,0528,0.23, bequeathed by Augustus Wollaston Franks.

Figure 4.2 A page from Alexander Cunningham's notebook on Buddhism with a photograph of a small gem-studded umbrella made of gold bearing short inscriptions in Burmese and Bengali accompanied by Cunningham's reading of the inscription. British Museum, Department of Asia, bequeathed by Augustus Wollaston Franks.