

Large print exhibition text



Burma to Myanmar

Exhibition introduction panel, on the right:

Burma to Myanmar

Historically, Myanmar, also known as Burma, was composed of numerous states, kingdoms, and kinship networks with fluid spheres of influence and political connections. From 1826 onwards, it was brought under British colonial rule in stages. Its outline today was only formed in 1948 upon independence.

After a coup in 1962, Myanmar became isolated from the world by repressive military regimes. Yet, its arts and cultures have been shaped from an early date through connections made by global trade routes, religious networks and expansionist empires.

Map caption:

Map of modern Myanmar and its surrounding region.

The names shown and the designations used on this map and others in the exhibition are approximate and do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the British Museum.

Sub-section panel, to the left:

Burma or Myanmar?

Before British colonial rule (1826–1948), what we know as Myanmar today consisted of many different kingdoms, one of which was called ‘Myanma’ or ‘Bama’. ‘Burma’ became the country’s official unified name under the British. In 1989 the new military regime adopted the name ‘Union of Myanmar’. Based on United Nations and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) guidance, this exhibition uses ‘Myanmar’ to refer to the country generally, ‘British Burma’ during colonial times, and the adjective ‘Burmese’ for ease of use in English.

Today, the nation is home to peoples speaking over 100 languages and dialects. Several groups, including the Rohingya, are denied citizenship.

There is also religious variety. Although nearly 90% of Myanmar's inhabitants practise Buddhism, the country is also home to many Christians, Hindus, Muslims and animists.

Burma and Britain

The objects shown here are mostly drawn from UK collections. This reflects the historical relationship between the two countries, and the acquisition of objects during colonial rule. The provenance information for each object is given on its label as fully as possible. The names of artists went unrecorded until colonial times, and sometimes not even then. Artistic production can involve more than one person.

Display cases:

A golden letter

King Alaungpaya (ruled 1752–60) was the founder of the last Burmese dynasty. He sent this letter to King George II of Great Britain as a royal diplomatic gesture between equal heads of state. Engraved on a gold sheet set with rubies, the letter reveals the power and wealth of his expanding empire. It also graciously permits the British to use a local coastal port. Despite the importance the letter's sumptuous materials conveyed, George viewed it as a curiosity and never replied, causing great offense. Today this is the only known letter of its kind.

Archived at George II's request in his personal library in Hannover

7 May 1756

Made in central Myanmar; mined in the highlands
Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Library, Hannover,
Germany, Ms IV, 571a

Map of the Maingnyaung region in central Myanmar

Burmese kings sometimes commissioned maps as part of surveys reporting on land use and revenue for tax and military purposes. Here, the top of the map is east, rather than north, as it was the most important direction symbolically because of its association with the rising sun. The rectangles that mark cities and villages vary in scale according to their political importance, not actual size. Rather than taking a bird's-eye view, buildings, trees and even river creatures like crocodiles are seen from the front.

Presented in 1910 to Cambridge University by Louis Allan Goss, Inspector of Schools in British Burma and later a Burmese language teacher at the university

About 1860 | Cotton

Probably central Myanmar

Cambridge University Library, Maps.

Ms.Plans.R.c.1

King Mindon's procession

Historically, one aspect of warfare in Southeast Asia included acquiring people. Thousands of captives were brought back from raids and military campaigns and resettled around capital cities, sometimes in their original professions, to add their labour and skills to society and increase the number of people that could be taxed. Such movements resulted in multi-ethnic populations.

Here, King Mindon's (ruled 1853–78) royal procession contains resettled captives, including elites from neighbouring regions, all wearing Burmese dress to indicate they have been locally integrated.

Probably originally taken from the royal court at Mandalay in 1885; acquired by Rodway Swinhoe, a lawyer in British Burma from 1888–1927

1865–78 | Paper

Mandalay, central Myanmar

British Library, OR 12013

Section panel, on the far wall:

An abundance of riches

Myanmar is strategically located for cross-cultural interactions. In the north it borders China; to the west India and Bangladesh; and in the east Thailand and Laos. The long tail of its tropical coastline is bounded by the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea.

The country's varied landscape is home to many valuable natural resources, from gemstones to cotton, which have been traded by its peoples for more than 2,000 years across land and sea. Alongside these historic sources of wealth, today Myanmar is one of the largest exporters of rare earths – elements needed to make electric vehicles, mobile phones and wind turbines.

Central display case:

Silver

Much of Myanmar's silver comes from Bawdwin in present-day northern Shan State. Mined by the Chinese from about 1400 to 1868, the site was revived in the early 1900s by western businessmen including Herbert Hoover – an engineer who became America's 31st president – to produce silver, lead and zinc. Before the colonial period, silver was used for currency, tribute, religious objects and to indicate status. The letter cylinder shown here would have been used to transport documents, and the bar is stamped with the company name.

Silver letter cylinder (above)

Presented to Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India, during his visit to British Burma in 1901

About 1880–1900

Mandalay

Purchased in 1986 by the National Heritage Memorial Fund from Francis Curzon, 3rd Viscount Scarsdale (1924–2000). Gifted to the National Trust in 1987 by the National Heritage Memorial Fund

**99% pure silver ingot from
Burma Mines Company (below)**

Acquired from Simmons and Simmons, a dealership in coins and medals, in 1989

About 1910s

Bawdwin, northern Shan states

British Museum, 1989,0627.15

Sub-section panel, in case:

Resource extraction

Many of Myanmar's resources come from the mountainous regions that enclose the central lowlands. Resource extraction intensified during the British colonial period (1826–1948). After independence, conflicts and nationalised industries prompted the rise of black markets. Hazardous conditions and widespread abuses characterise resource extraction today, and communities in these areas are often subjected to systematic, state-sanctioned violence.

Local people's lives and the surrounding environment are also ravaged by pollution caused by uncontrolled extraction. Lawless practices create huge profits that benefit the military junta, local armies, and large corporations.

Ceremonial cotton and silk blanket (can-lo puan)

Cotton, grown centrally and in the Shan states from around the 1300s, became an important commodity exported overland to China and by sea to Bengal. This cotton textile is covered with patterns made from imported Chinese silk. Fine ceremonial blankets like this could only be woven by the wives of high-status men of certain Chin groups living in the western hills, for the men's exclusive use.

Donated in 1948 by D.R. Hay-Neave, a captain in the Indian army during the Second World War

About 1900–40

Hakha area, Chin Hills, Mara-Chin people

British Museum, As1948,07.100

Belt with cowrie shells and knife sheath

In addition to systems of barter, cowrie shells have been used as currency for thousands of years. They also symbolised power and status among societies like the Chin peoples of western Myanmar, and were displayed on clothing as a sign of prestige and to store wealth. A cowrie trade network once stretched from the Maldives to Bengal, across parts of Myanmar and into southwest China.

Field collected by Lieutenant-General Sir Michael J. Tighe, who participated in the Third Anglo-Burmese War (1885–86) and in military operations in the Chin Hills; donated in 1926 by Lady K.K. Tighe

About 1870s–90s | Chin Hills

British Museum, As1926,0409.3

Rubies

Myanmar is renowned for its rubies. Its most famous mine, Mogok, has been in operation for over 700 years. These vivid gems have been traded from at least the 1300s with China, where the imperial court employed specialists to secure the most prized examples. This 17th-century jewelled ornament shows that Burmese rubies also arrived early in Europe. Among Myanmar's cultures, rubies were often restricted to local elite use. They could symbolise kingship and were believed to function protectively.

Jar studded with rubies

Acquired by the East India Company Museum
in 1855

About 1850–5 | Gold, rubies

Probably central Myanmar; mined in the highlands
V&A: IS.02750

Lesser George of the Order of the Garter

Thought to have been made for William Compton, 1st Earl of Northampton, who was created a Knight of the Garter in 1628; inherited by William Bingham Compton, 6th Marquess of Northampton; donated by HM Treasury in 1980
1628–9 | Gold, enamel, diamonds, rubies
England, rubies probably from Mogok, Myanmar
British Museum, 1980,0201.3

Gold water bowl

For centuries, people have panned and mined for gold in the northern central region, Shan states, and Kachin regions. Laws restricted the use of gold to certain social ranks, but it was also used more universally as a form of gift giving, tribute between states and communities, and for religious purposes.

This shimmering ceremonial bowl is decorated with the twelve signs of the zodiac, a popular design in central Myanmar and the Shan states.

Presented by the Government of British India to Colonel Sir Henry Yule (1820–89) for his mission to the Burmese court in 1855; sold by his daughter, Amy Yule, to the V&A in 1911
Early 1850s | Probably Amarapura, central Myanmar

V&A: IM.106-1911

Jadeite vessel and cover

China has prized the green jadeite mined in present-day Kachin State for centuries. Like this vessel, jadeite was carved in Chinese workshops. Mining drew workers from surrounding regions, and sometimes mines were run by Chinese managers.

Historically chiefs allocated mining rights among kinship groups, but this ended with the arrival of international firms. Mining communities suffered economically when jade trade routes across southern China were disrupted by the Opium Wars between China and Britain in the mid-1800s.

Purchased from Spink & Son Ltd in 1961

1700–99

Carved in China, jadeite from Kachin regions

Private Collection

Ceremonial rice offering bowl (kauk khauk te)

U Maung Htun (active 1900–30)

Historically in Myanmar, rice was grown for local use and as a form of tax payment. From around the 1500s, rice also began to be sold abroad from coastal kingdoms, and during colonial times, British Burma became the world's largest exporter of rice.

Decorated with high-relief images of couples from local ethnic communities, this bowl was once used to offer rice at religious ceremonies in the Shan states.

Purchased in Yangon in 1990 by Ralph H. Isaacs (director of the British Council, Myanmar) and Ruth Isaacs and donated in 1998

About 1900–30 | Bamboo, lacquer, thayo (lacquer putty), gold

Kengtung (Kyaing Tong), Shan states

British Museum, 1998,0723.15

Amber ear plugs

Amber, a fossilised tree resin, has long been mined in present-day Kachin State and traded regionally.

Recently, Burmese amber has become important to scientific communities when it was discovered the material is much older than previously thought, and holds information dating from the late age of the dinosaurs (145–66 million years ago). Today, brutal mining practices and corruption typify the industry, although in some ways this violence is not new, as Burmese royal orders once authorised killing people who obstructed access to the mines.

19th century acquisition date; donor unknown

About 1800–50

Kachin regions

British Museum, As1972,Q.2791.a-b

Oil worker's helmet

Myanmar is one of Southeast Asia's oldest oil producers, with Chinese records dating Burmese oil wells to the 1200s.

Originally monopolised by Burmese kings, oil became a major export under British colonial rule. During the Second World War (1939–45), the retreating British army destroyed oil fields to prevent them falling into the hands of the invading Japanese. The oil industry has still not recovered from this act of damage.

E.C.S. George Collection, loaned to the Bankfield Museum in 1900, then given as a bequest in 1937

About 1870s–90s | Metal, glass

Central British Burma

On loan from Calderdale Museums Service, Bankfield Museum, Halifax

Steel knife with carved ivory handle

Myanmar is home to domesticated and wild elephants. Their ivory was used to make prestigious objects like regalia, dagger hilts and manuscripts, or given as diplomatic gifts.

Although commonly associated with and used in the Shan states, ivory was also carved in central and lower Myanmar. This ivory dagger handle is decorated with a demonic figure considered to be protective of its user.

Purchased from A. Dowell's auction house,
Edinburgh on 30 April 1891

Around 1850s–80s | Probably the Shan states
National Museums Scotland, Edinburgh,
A.1891.59

Lacquer offering vessel (hsun-ok)

Lacquer comes from the **gluta usitata** tree, which is native to Myanmar's forests. Trees are tapped to collect sap, which is used as a sealant against water and insect damage on both everyday and ceremonial objects, like this ornate offering vessel, as well as wooden buildings.

Lacquer is also used for decoration, and some patterns and techniques were shared with northern Thailand. The British encouraged production as a craft industry, and lacquer became a tourist commodity.

Acquired by Herbert Allcroft (1865–1911) during his travels in British Burma in 1894–5; kept at his Stokesay Court home until the house contents auction of 1994; purchased via the Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund from Spink & Son Ltd in 1994

About 1860–90

Bamboo, lacquer, coloured glass, gold leaf, gilded metal sheet, wood

Possibly Mandalay, central Myanmar

British Museum, 1994,1116.1

Teak steering chair

The mountainous forests that encircle central Myanmar today produce nearly half of the world's supply of teak. For centuries, Burmese teak was highly sought after as far afield as Persia and Europe. Its strength, and water and insectresistance make it ideal for shipbuilding, architecture, and furniture. This steering chair, which would have sat at the stern of a ship, exemplifies local woodcarving skills. Its decoration combines various types of imagery, including Burmese lions and foliage and European-style angels.

Collected by Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India, during his visit to British Burma in 1901

About 1870–1900

Carved in central or lower British Burma

National Trust Collections, Kedleston Hall

(The Scarsdale Collection acquired with the help of the National Heritage Memorial Fund and transferred to The National Trust in 1987)

Image caption:

A helmsman seated in a steering chair in a Burmese paddy boat (**laung-zat**).

Photograph by Philip Klier, 1907. Courtesy of the National Archives

Shell letter

Myanmar's south and west have long stretches of coastline whose oceans teem with marine life. Bound within an enormous seashell, the silk pages of this petition contain a request to the British lieutenant-governor for better infrastructure, including clean water, improved transport links, a bi-lingual science school and a hospital.

Although millions of people in Myanmar continue to depend on the sea for their livelihoods, lack of governmental protection and management has led to deteriorating coastal eco-systems.

Sent by the people of Myeik to Lieutenant-Governor Herbert Thirkell White
1907

Mergui (Myeik), lower British Burma
British Library, OR 16052

Marble market weights

Weights are commonly found in the markets that link the extensive trade networks criss-crossing what is now Myanmar, but marble ones like these are rare. The white stone is quarried in the country's central region and is often used to sculpt religious images, as well as for more practical uses. This set of weights replicates the domed shape of sea urchins, a comment on the region's vast coastal resources.

An abundance of riches

Acquired by Donald Gear, a geophysicist working in Myanmar from 1957–60 and 1970–2, and Joan Gear; donated in 1993

Possibly 1860s–early 1870s

Probably Sagyin quarry, central Myanmar

British Museum, 1993,0731 series

Section panel, to the left:

States and networks

After about 200 BC, urban settlements and, later, kingdoms began to develop in different parts of present-day Myanmar, including Vesali (west), Sri Ksetra and Bagan (centre), Thaton (south) and Mogaung (north).

In the 1300s and 1400s, other political centres appeared, including the Hanthawaddy kingdom in lower Myanmar, and Mrauk U in present-day Rakhine State. Shan states dominated regions in the north and east. Highland chiefdoms, linked by complex kinship networks, existed between these various centres. Frontiers and cultures were fluid and political control depended on personal loyalties. Warfare, the relocation of people, and interactions through diplomacy, trade, and religion, shaped the arts and cultures of each diverse region.

Sub-section panel, to the right:

Early urban centres: the Pyu and Bagan

The earliest urban centres in Southeast Asia were occupied by the Pyu peoples from about 200 BC. They had cultural links to Indian kingdoms, the Himalayas, Sri Lanka, China and Dvaravati in Thailand. The Pyu peoples were succeeded in central Myanmar by the Bagan (Pagan) kingdom, which flourished from the 11th to the 13th centuries. Both the Pyu and Bagan participated in the region's Buddhist networks and had dynamic, cross-cultural exchanges with the world around them.

In display case:

Gold plates inscribed with Buddhist texts

Texts, practices and scripts spread between regions through trade and religious links. These plates are inscribed in the Pali language using the now-extinct Pyu script, which was an adaptation of a southern Indian alphabet. The use of Pali also indicates connections with Sri Lankan Buddhism. An inscription in the Burmese, Pali, Mon, and Pyu languages, erected by a prince in 1113 at Bagan, is one of the last appearances of Pyu.

Sent by Sir Frederic Fryer, the Lieutenant-Governor of British Burma from 1897–1903, to Dr Hultzsch to give to the British Museum

About AD 400–499

Maunggan, Sri Ksetra, central Myanmar

British Library, Or 5340 A & B

Pyu silver coins

Pyu silver coins first appeared in the AD 400s in a variety of denominations. They have been found in regions like Arakan in the west, lower Myanmar, and at historic sites in Thailand and ports in southern Viet Nam. Their shape and patterning – circular with central motifs and dotting – are similar to those found in India and Persia. Their imagery includes emblems associated with Hinduism, Buddhism and kingship, and the auspicious **srivatsa** symbol, which is also found in India.

Pyu coins with throne, conch, bull, rising sun and **srivatsa** symbols

About AD 700–900

Variously from central Myanmar and probably Arakan

British Museum, 1884,0510.1 (from Mr Grindlay, a donor in the 1880s); 1921,1014.144 (previous owner was Mr Eyre, a coin collector in the early 20th century; purchased from Spink & Son Ltd in 1921); 1897,1201.1 (donated by the Government of British Burma in 1897); 1882,0508.41 (donated in 1882 by Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Phayre, first commissioner of British Burma)

Bodhisattva figure, probably Maitreya

Richly adorned and shown seated in a position known as 'royal ease', this figure probably represents Maitreya, a bodhisattva who it is believed will become the next Buddha on earth. A bodhisattva is a spiritually advanced being who chooses to help others on the path to enlightenment. Maitreya and another bodhisattva, Avalokiteshvara, were often represented in the early Buddhist world of Southeast Asia and southwest China.

Bought from F.E. Dempster Esq, acquired at

Bagan before 1922

AD 700–899 | Cast copper alloy, gold

Possibly Bagan, central Myanmar

V&A: IM.39-1922

Clay religious tablet with a Mon inscription

Prince Siddhartha renounced his riches to seek spiritual understanding, and eventually became the Buddha while meditating at Bodh Gaya, northeast India. Bodh Gaya became a major Buddhist pilgrimage site, and Burmese and Mon (lower Myanmar) inscriptions have been found there. Because this tablet's Mon inscription was carved while the clay was damp, it is likely that it was made on site, indicating the presence of Mon-speaking pilgrims in India in the 11th century.

Donated by Major-General Sir Alexander
Cunningham, founding head of the Archaeological
Survey of India from 1870–85

Around 1070–99

Bodh Gaya, northeast India

British Museum, 1887,0717.82

Religious tablet with the Buddha under a Mahabodhi temple-style superstructure

The Mahabodhi temple in Bodh Gaya, India, marks the place where the Buddha gained enlightenment. The shape of the holy building was reproduced in architecture, models and imagery across the region, as on this religious tablet found at Bagan. Here, the Buddha sits under a roof displaying the straight-sided tower of the Mahabodhi temple. This shape became common at Bagan after King Nadaungmya's repair mission to Bodh Gaya between 1211 and 1235.

Acquired by Rodway Swinhoe, a lawyer in British Burma from 1888–1927, and donated in 1896 by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks
1200–99 | Terracotta clay
Bagan, central Myanmar
British Museum, 1896,0314.15

Image caption:

After the Bagan king Nandaungmya ordered a mission to repair the Mahabodhi temple at Bodh Gaya in India in the early 1200s, a replica was built at Bagan (shown here).

© Image courtesy Charlotte Galloway, 2016

Bronze seated Buddha image

From the AD 700s to 1100s, artistic ideas from the Pala empire in northeast India spread across the Himalayas, Myanmar and Indonesia through trade and religious networks.

Early Bagan Buddha images show Pala links in the arrangement of robes, body shape and facial features. The pose seen here with the right hand touching the ground symbolises the Buddha's enlightenment and, in part due to Burmese connections with the site of that event at Bodh Gaya, became very common, and remains so today.

Purchased via the Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund from Spink & Son Ltd in 1971

1100–99

Central Myanmar

British Museum, 1971,0727.1

Sandstone panel of the deity Brahma

In the AD 400s to 900s, evidence of Brahmanical (Hindu) deities began to appear in early urban centres like Thaton (lower Myanmar) and Sri Ksetra (central Myanmar).

In local worship, these deities were incorporated into Buddhist practice and the Buddha's life story, like this image of the Hindu god Brahma. Brahmin specialists, many from India, carried out rituals at Burmese courts until the British abolished the monarchy in 1885.

Collected by Dr John Anderson, a Scottish zoologist at the Indian Museum, Calcutta between 1865–86 who made several visits to British Burma; bequeathed by his wife Grace Anderson in 1917

Around 1100–1200 | Probably Myebontha temple, Bagan

V&A: IM.39-1917

Sub-section panel, to the right:

Central Myanmar's kingdoms

After Bagan's decline, central Myanmar's kingdoms (with capitals at Ava, Amarapura, Toungoo and Mandalay), waxed and waned until the late 1800s. Their political sway could stretch from Ahom (Assam) and Manipur in the west, to Ayutthaya, Lan Na and Lan Xang in the east, and extend down the Thai-Malay peninsula, periodically making successive kingdoms the largest empires in mainland Southeast Asia. Warfare and the colonisation of surrounding regions led to the relocation of people into central Myanmar. These population influxes brought new ideas and skills and produced a diverse cultural environment.

Display case ahead:

A queen's robe of state

Kings from central Myanmar repeatedly attacked the kingdom of Ayutthaya (central Thailand), beginning in the 1560s. In 1767 the Burmese destroyed Ayutthaya, and thousands of people were forcibly relocated to central Myanmar, including artists, musicians, and dancers.

At the Burmese court, Thai theatre troupes' performances were greatly admired. Their costumes were copied as a new type of formal court dress, like this robe which includes Thai-style swags on the front-piece and flourishes at the shoulder.

Purchased by Mr L.M. Parlett, a divisional judge in British Burma in the early 20th century; acquired by the V&A in 1912

1860–78 | Velvet, tinsel, satin, gold braid, lace,
silver-gilded wire, sequins, bamboo, cotton
Mandalay, central Myanmar
V&A: IM.45-1912

Military court robe

This high-ranking Burmese military robe for the **Atwinwun** (Secretary of State) is an example of how designs can be reinterpreted. The ‘cloud collar’ here is an adaptation of Thai theatrical costumes based on court dress. In turn, the Thai court had based this collar on Chinese formal robes. The gold and silver embroidery seen here was a technique adapted from Indian textiles, which were a popular luxury import in Myanmar.

Purchased by Mr L.M. Parlett, a divisional judge in British Burma in the early 20th century; acquired by the V&A in 1912

1853–85 | Velvet, satin, gold braid, sequins,
bamboo, cotton
Mandalay, central Myanmar
V&A: IM.44-1912

Image caption:

The ruler of the Shan state of Yaunghwe and his wife wearing Burmese formal dress on an official visit to the Burmese court.

Photograph by Philip Klier, 1912, taken from **The Pacification of Burma** by C.H.T. Crosthwaite

Religious manuscript (kammawasa)

Kammawasa manuscripts contain Buddhist texts that define the rules governing monastic rituals and behaviour.

The lettering here, along with the central Thai-style motifs, is made of mother-of-pearl, a common technique in central Thailand. The combination of manuscript type, technique and patterns suggests that this **kammawasa** was made by Thai artists who had been relocated from Ayutthaya to central Myanmar in 1767, or by one of their descendants. Sometime before its purchase, the manuscript was wrapped in a Japanese brocade cloth.

Purchased at Sotheby's, 1860

Around 1770–1850 | Mother-of-pearl, lacquer, cloth

Probably central Myanmar

British Library, Add MS 23939.

Silver-wrapped Buddha image with central Thai patterns

For those unable to afford silver in both Myanmar and northern Thailand, Buddha images were made inexpensively from resin and wrapped in metal foil to make them as valuable looking as possible. The thrones of such images were often incised with central Thai stylised floral patterns, showing extensive cross-cultural interactions.

Donated by Miss M.G. Tylor

About 1770–1899 | Resin, wrapped in silver

Myanmar

British Museum, 1925,0606.1

Wall hanging (shwe-chi-doe or kalaga) illustrating scenes from the Ramayana

The vibrant scenes embroidered on this wall hanging are episodes from the **Ramayana**, an epic tale that originated in India and was adapted in parts of Southeast Asia. The **Ramayana** became popular at the Burmese court after the relocation of Thai theatre troupes there in 1767, and was performed around the country. Known from about the 1600s, panels like this would have been hung in the eaves or as room dividers and backdrops.

Donated by Henry Ginsburg (1940–2007),
former curator for Thai, Lao, and Cambodian
collections at the British Library

Around 1900–30 | Cotton, flannel, sequins

British Burma

British Museum, 1999,1103,0.2

Copy of a map of King Alaungpaya's military campaign against Manipur in 1758–59

Manipur (now northeast India) was once an independent kingdom. It raided central Myanmar often in the early 1700s, and kings from central Myanmar repeatedly attacked it in turn, starting in the 1750s. Although not to scale, this map uses yellow dots to mark the route of King Alaungpaya's invasion of Manipur. The country was almost emptied when its people were relocated by force to central Myanmar where their descendants, called Kathe, remain today.

Collected by Henry Burney (1792–1845), British resident envoy to King Bagyidaw's court from 1829–32; donated to Cambridge University Library by M. d'Arblay Burney in 1921

About 1829–32 | Paper | Probably Ava, central Myanmar

Cambridge University Library, RCMS 65/9/9

Luntaya acheik skirt-cloth

Some Manipuris who were resettled in central Myanmar went to work in the silk industry. These weavers may have introduced to central Myanmar the complex tapestry technique used to produce **luntaya acheik** cloths, identifiable by their wavy designs. The technique probably arrived in the region initially via trade with China or Chinese settlers. Although the main wavy motif is a Burmese innovation, some of the secondary patterns link with Manipuri textile designs.

Purchased from Krishna at Chaupal dealers,
New Delhi, India in 2007

Around 1890–1930 | Silk, cotton

Probably Amarapura, central Myanmar

British Museum, 2007,3013.2

Manuscript (parabaik) showing courtiers playing polo

Captured Manipuri cavalry soldiers were incorporated into central Myanmar's army because of their sought-after horse-riding skills. They brought with them the game of polo, which takes place on horseback. Polo became popular at the central Burmese court during King Bagyidaw's reign (1819–37), and was often depicted in manuscripts illustrating court activities like this. Although the Manipuri cavalry was given elite status, soldiers were tattooed to mark them in case they escaped.

Purchased from Steven's auction house, London on 22 October 1918 (lot 72a); previously owned by C.B. Jarvis of Mandalay in 1893

Around 1830s–92 | Gouache, paper

Mandalay, central Myanmar

Wellcome Collection, London, 727619i/47114i

Shiva on his mount Nandi

Brahmin (Hindu) priests were among the people relocated from Manipur to central Myanmar. They became part of regional court life, where they determined auspicious times for activities, recited protective chants, and acted as royal counsellors. Objects like this gilded and painted image of the deity Shiva on his mount, the bull Nandi, were part of essential royal rituals administered by Brahmins.

Donated by Miss W. Carey in 1937; possibly taken from Mandalay Palace in 1885

About 1850 | Wood, lacquer, gold leaf

Probably Mandalay, central Myanmar

British Museum, 1937,0112.2

Qur'an box

Muslims arrived in what is now Myanmar around the AD 700s. Some came as traders, others entered royal services as mercenaries. In the 1700s Muslims from Manipur and Arakan were forcibly relocated to central Myanmar. By the mid-1800s, thriving Muslim communities existed there, with many people employed at court or in the gem trade. This Qur'an box speaks to their cultural integration, as it is decorated in a common Burmese style of lacquerware with glass inlays. The panels on each side feature the **Shahada**, the Islamic 'Profession of Faith'.

Purchased from Yonok Treasure, River City,
Bangkok, Thailand in 1996

Around 1870–1930 | Lacquer, glass, wood

Central or lower Myanmar

Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum,

National Heritage Board,

Singapore, 1996-02182

Sub-section panel, to the left:

Lower Myanmar's kingdoms

Associated with the Mon peoples, kingdoms emerged in lower Myanmar at Thaton, Mottama (Martaban) and Bago (Pegu). Made wealthy from trade, the region's ports teemed with Chinese, Indian and Southeast Asian traders, and later European, Persian and Abyssinian (Ethiopian) merchants. The area had strong links with Thai kingdoms and Sri Lanka. Invasions from Arakan, Ayutthaya (central Thailand), and central Myanmar resulted in the frequent movement of peoples. Bago briefly defeated the central Burmese kingdom in the 1740s, but was quickly reconquered and its distinct history marginalised.

In display case:

Gold reliquary

The kingdom of Bago's 'Golden Age' occurred under Queen Shin Saw Bu (reigned 1453–72) and her successor King Dhammazedi (reigned 1472–92). During this time, the kingdom developed strong ties with Sri Lanka and became an important Buddhist centre. Showing stylistic links with Sri Lanka, this gold reliquary in the form of a stupa (a ritual burial mound housing Buddhist relics) speaks to the wealth of Bago.

Excavated when building barracks on the site of an old pagoda east of the Shwedagon, Rangoon (Yangon) in 1855; in the India Museum, London, until its closure in 1879; transferred to the V&A

Around 1450–1530 | Kingdom of Bago

V&A: IS.02755

Architectural plaque with creatures from Mara's army

This plaque came from King Dhammazedī's Shwegugyi temple, which recreated the sacred area around the Mahabodhi temple at Bodh Gaya, India, where the Buddha gained enlightenment. The inspiration for the Shwegugyi possibly came from northern Thailand, where a similar temple was constructed in the early 1400s. These colourful creatures are from the army of Mara, god of worldly desires, come to disrupt the Buddha's enlightenment. Similar plaques of Mara's army were also used on Bagan temples.

Donated in 1965 by Cyril Newman, who fought in the Burma theatre in the Second World War, receiving a Burma Star medal

About 1479 | Glazed terracotta

Kingdom of Bago

British Museum, 1965,1217.1

Storage jar

Bago's ports handled products like gems, teak, sugar, cotton, rice and cloth from across the region. By the 1500s, their trade networks had extended to Europe and Japan. Sturdy ceramic jars like this, produced for export in lower Myanmar, were used on trading ships, including Middle Eastern and European ones, to store goods, water and food. Major kilns making such stoneware were based at Mottama (Martaban) and Twante near Yangon.

Collected in Myanmar, purchased from Tom White (MBE), in 1997 via the Brooke Sewell

Permanent Fund

About 1400–1600 | Glazed stoneware

Twante, Kingdom of Bago

British Museum, 1997,1004.1

Image caption:

Southeast Asian rulers employed Portuguese people for their military skills. Some were relocated after being captured to central Myanmar, where many worked as guards (shown in this mural in a guardhouse wearing a black European hat).

Monywe complex, Salingyi. Late 1700s

© Image courtesy Alexandra Green, 2008

Divination manual

This manuscript is written in the Mon language, suggesting that it came from lower Myanmar, although the imagery follows a common central Thai format. It is a fortune-telling and divination guide that uses the Chinese zodiac of twelve animals. Each animal has personality traits assigned to it, and this text outlines the key characteristics of people according to their zodiac sign.

Acquired in Rangoon (now Yangon) by Mr Stewart, the medical officer attached to John Crawford's mission to Myanmar's central court in 1827; presented to the Royal Society of Edinburgh by George Swinton, chief secretary of British India; purchased by the British Library from the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1989

About 1750–1820 | Paper, lacquer, watercolour, ink, gilt

Lower Myanmar or central Thailand

British Library, Or 14532

Crocodile zither

The Mon people of lower Myanmar had strong cultural links with central Thailand, one expression of which is the crocodile zither. Although zithers exist across Southeast Asia, the reptilian shape is mostly found from lower Myanmar across to Cambodia. In Thailand and Cambodia, these zithers are highly stylised and abstracted.

Only in lower Myanmar do they realistically resemble crocodiles. The zither would have had strings that ran the length of the crocodile's back.

Presented to Queen Victoria for her Golden Jubilee in 1887 by the town of 'Margai' (probably Mergui [Myeik])

About 1886 | Wood, glass, metal, gold leaf

Probably Myeik, British Burma

Lent by His Majesty The King

Digital media caption: 

Listen to the sound of a crocodile zither being played, heard here alongside a clapper and cymbals – the instruments that usually accompany it.

Played by Saya Nai Kon Ha Ti from Duya Village, Ye Township, Mon State

Running time: approximately 1 min

Sub-section panel, to the right of display case:

The kingdoms of Arakan

Arakan's strategic coastal position gave rise to several kingdoms, like Dhanyawadi and Vesali. Frequented by traders from China to Persia and later Europe, the most powerful kingdom was based at Mrauk U. Arakan peaked between 1500 and 1700, selling goods and trading enslaved people. It expanded into neighbouring areas, including the Bengal Sultanate, the Hindu Tripura kingdom, Portuguese-Asian territories and lower Myanmar. In 1784 it was annexed by King Bodawpaya (reigned 1782–1819) of central Myanmar and its most sacred Buddha image, the Mahamuni, taken. In subsequent Burmese histories, its unique identity has been disregarded.

In display case:

Silver coin (tanka)

From the 1580s to 1635, Arakan's kings minted coins with inscriptions in three languages – Bengali, Persian (written in Arabic script) and Arakanese. The use of these languages together expressed the king's power and sovereignty across trading networks. The king who issued this coin was known as both Manh Khamon and Dharmaraja Hussain. The latter is a combination of a Buddhist title and a Muslim name.

Donated in 1882 by Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Phayre, first commissioner of British Burma (1862–67)

1612–22

Issued by Dharmaraja Hussain, Kingdom of Arakan

British Museum, 1882,0508.4

The Royal Capital of Arrakan (Arakan)

Wouter Schouten (1638–1704)

Wouter Schouten, a Dutch naval surgeon, was one of the many Europeans who visited Arakan. On his return home, he published an illustrated account of his travels. This panoramic view of the cosmopolitan city Mrauk U, capital of the kingdom of Arakan, correctly depicts its natural features, like the curves of the river. While the buildings offer a sense of the kingdom's scale and grandeur, they are represented in a fanciful manner.

Purchased in 2022 from The Prints Collector,
Amsterdam via the Brooke Sewell Permanent
Fund

1708 | Paper

Printed in Amsterdam; published by Andries van
Damme

British Museum, 2022,7039.1

Trading permits issued by King Sanda Wizaya (ruled 1710–31)

Given its coastal location, customs duties, royal monopolies and overseas trade were important sources of income for Arakan's rulers. In 1728 two trading permits, one in Burmese on palm leaf and one in Persian (written in Arabic script on paper), were issued to the same Armenian merchant, Khwajeh Georgin, who was living in Chennai, India, across the Bay of Bengal. The use of two languages and the merchant's multi-cultural identity reveal Arakan's extensive connections with the world.

Collected by Sir Hans Sloane (1660–1753);
purchased at his death by an Act of Parliament
establishing the British Museum

1728

Mrauk U, Kingdom of Arakan

British Library, London, Sloane MS 4098, Sloane
MS 3259

Buddha images

Buddha images reveal the breadth of Arakan's religious interactions, from Sri Lanka to India and the Himalayas, and central and northern Thailand. The Arakanese style of Buddha image that was modelled on Chinese and Tibetan forms continued with variations for about four centuries. It also influenced images of Buddhas made in central and lower Myanmar and the Shan states. This cross-cultural connection can be seen in the way the necklaces are draped on these images, as well as the occasional persistence of the covered jar.

Crowned Buddha image (left)

Purchased in 1969 from the Berkeley Galleries (operational from 1942–77) via the Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund

About 1600–1799 | Bronze, gold, lacquer, clay
Central Myanmar or the Shan states

British Museum, 1969,0211.1

Crowned Buddha image (right)

Acquired from the India Museum, London after it closed in 1879

Around 1700–1830 | Wood, gold, lacquer

Lower Myanmar

British Museum, 1880.251

Image caption:

On this Arakanese Buddha image, the jewellery, crown and covered jar are a result of exchanges between monks from Arakan and the Himalayas. Made in Arakan, found in Thailand, about 1500–1699

© The Trustees of the British Museum 2023

Sub-section panel, in display case:

Shan states

Various Shan states once stretched across vast territories in present-day Myanmar, Thailand and China. Many of these principalities became wealthy from mining gems and jade, as well as the numerous trade routes that ran through them. They received tribute from surrounding states and communities, and in turn paid allegiance to China, northern Thailand, central Myanmar and Manipur. One Shan state, Mohnyin, controlled central Myanmar temporarily, but by the late 1500s, central Myanmar's kingdoms became increasingly dominant, and many Shans were relocated there.

Label to the left:

Silver as tribute

The Shan states varied in size and power. Unlike today's notion of territory as defined by borders, power in Southeast Asia was historically exercised through spheres of influence. These relationships were partly maintained through acts of tribute, with silver objects like these often used as payment. This also spread motifs around the region – the Western zodiac decoration on this bowl is found in central Myanmar, and the rosettes and high-relief animals on the box can be seen on silver in northern Thailand and Manipur respectively.

Silver bowl

Purchased from Mata-Hari Traditional Arts and Antiques, Singapore in 2013
1895

Silver box

Purchased from Mata-Hari Traditional Arts and Antiques, Singapore in 2012

About 1870–1930

Shan states

Honeybill collection

Label to the right:

Shan map

Before British colonisation, political frontiers were fluid. This map may have been produced as a guide for when British, Shan and Chinese authorities worked together to determine borders in the late 1880s. It shows an area along the Nam Mao (Burmese: Shweli) River where three Shan states converged – Namhkam (the area in red), Selan (black, in the top left corner), and Mong Mao (yellow).

Mong Mao is now part of China; the others are part of Myanmar's Shan State.

Collected and possibly commissioned by James Scott, assistant commissioner and then superintendent of the northern Shan states; donated to the library in 1934

About 1889 | Paper

Shan states

Cambridge University Library, MS Scott LR13.34

Coat showing a fusion of styles

Coats became common at Shan courts in the 1920s, possibly as a result of Shan princes visiting India. This example has been adapted for European use. It is made of silk decorated with popular European designs of East Asian buildings set among landscapes. The buttons are in a Chinese style, while the lapels and sleeves are adaptations of European fashions. The flare of the hem resembles the robes of Indian rulers.

Acquired by Colonel James Henry Green while working in British Burma between 1918 and 1934; loaned to the Brighton Museum in 1992
About 1900–30 | Silk, cotton | Shan states
James Henry Green Collection, Brighton & Hove Museums, G125

Textiles and trade

Yarns and fabrics were common trade items at markets. This skirt cloth for a wealthy woman combines European purple velvet with locally produced black cotton and red and yellow Chinese silk. Patterns and techniques also travelled across regions and cultures, as we can see in the other skirt, where the designs in the vertical stripes were common across the northeast Shan states, neighbouring southwest China and northern Thailand and Laos.

The floral motifs in the horizontal band are silk brocade, a sumptuous cloth often made in China.

Skirt (left)

Collected by William Nisbett, a British army soldier, in the 1880s, donated by his granddaughter Janet Browne

About 1870s–80 | Cotton, velvet, silk, gilded thread, metal sequins

Shan states

Brighton & Hove Museums, WA508311

Skirt (right)

E.C.S. George Collection, loaned to the museum in 1900, then given as a bequest in 1937

Around 1870–90 | Cotton, velvet, silk, gold wrapped fibre

Shan states

On loan from Calderdale Museums Service, Bankfield Museum, Halifax

Sub-section panel, in display case:

Markets and trade

Records from Ming-dynasty China (1368–1644) describe trade routes across Shan regions, along which Chinese commodities like salt, tea and silk were sold. Resources including cotton, jade and gems were also exported from the Shan states and other regions. Routes extended down to the coast, linking the Shan states with intercontinental trade from an early date. Travelling traders brought goods to sell at regular rotating local and larger-scale markets, to which people from different communities travelled, sometimes across long distances.

Silver sword (dha-lwe)

Silver ceremonial swords were made in the Shan states and central Myanmar. Later they were adopted as part of the formal dress of Kachin communities living in the southern part of present-day Kachin State in northern Myanmar. This example is decorated with figures from the **Ramayana**, as well as floral designs and patterning found in central Myanmar and Thailand.

Purchased from Michael Backman Ltd in 2012

Around 1870–80s

Shan states or central Myanmar

Honeybill collection

Sub-section panel, in display case:

Highland regions: the Kachin peoples

The diverse hill regions of Myanmar contained complex political networks often organised by kinship, rather than states. The powerful Kachin peoples were linked by clans extending into Yunnan and north-eastern India. Highland communities like the Kachin held considerable influence between states by controlling areas rich in resources, and access to strategic mountain passes. Because the region was linked with global economies, communities suffered when trade and access routes were disrupted from the 1830s by the Chinese-British wars, and the establishment of hard borders by the British East India Company.

Skirt-cloth (labu)

On Kachin textiles, some patterns were common across several groups, while others were distinct. Fashions constantly changed too, facilitated by the markets where people intermingled. The vertical patterned stripes on this skirt-cloth were once woven by Jinghpaw and Hkauri Jinghpaw communities from the southeastern Kachin Hills or the northern Shan states. They are now associated with Lachik Kachins of the same region, and the black section's narrow stripes can be seen on Lawngwaw Kachin textiles.

Collected by Lieutenant-Colonel Thyne of the military police before his departure from British Burma in 1934; donated by his daughter Anne Smith in 1992

Early 1900s, before 1934 | Wool, cotton

Kachin Hills

British Museum, As1992,01.5

Blanket for a northern climate

The Nung-Rawang were once the most remote Kachin group, living in the far north of what is now Myanmar. Because of the region's cold climate, people would have worn blankets wrapped around their upper bodies as part of everyday life. Zig-zag patterns, the use of red and the diamond-shaped, locally named 'mother pattern' are in keeping with other Kachin textiles, but the tufting and spots are associated with the Nung-Rawang.

Collected before 1934 by Colonel James Henry Green, who documented Kachin communities while working in the northern regions; donated in 1934

About 1900–30 | Hemp, pigment, possibly dog hair

Upper Nmai river valley, Kachin regions

Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford

Bag

Kachin textiles share some patterns across groups and incorporate Chinese, European and regional materials, displaying both diversity and interconnectedness. Probably produced by the Htingnai Jinghpaw Kachin group, this bag is decorated with silver, beading, pom-poms and ribbons. A similar fringing style can be seen in Lawngwaw and Zaiwa Kachin textiles. Bags like this were used generally by Kachin soldiers recruited into the British-Indian Army from the late 1800s, which may explain their extensive presence in museum collections.

Collected in 1926 by Colonel James Henry Green, who documented Kachin communities while working in the northern regions

Probably 1910s–26 | Cotton, metal, glass beads, silver, seeds

Kachin Hills

James Henry Green Collection, Brighton & Hove Museums, WAG 000001

Ammunition pouch

Through regular contact with nearby China, the Kachins learned to make gunpowder at an early date. The Kachins' use of guns saw them develop a reputation among surrounding communities for raiding and fierce defence of their territories. Various types of ammunition holders like this one were made for storing bullets.

Donated in 1871 by Colonel Sir Edward Bosc Sladen, collected during his mission to find a route into China via Bhamo in the Kachin Hills in 1868

Early 1860s | Vegetal fibre, cotton | Kachin regions

British Museum, As.7133

Woman's jacket

The origins of Kachin designs are not clear-cut, as many parts of the region have seen extensive migration and displacement of peoples. Evidence of this movement can be seen in this jacket made by a Maru woman. While particular weaving techniques and the use of red are common to many Kachin groups, the Maru incorporated indigo stripes into their textiles. These are also seen on textiles from Lisu communities living in the northern Kachin Hills.

Collected in Myitkyina, Kachin State by
Elizabeth Dell, Keeper of Non-Western Art and
Anthropology, in 1996

About 1920s–60s | Cotton, wool, dyed goat
hair or dog hair

Maru Kachin, Nmai region, Kachin State
Brighton & Hove Museums, WA507425

Photograph of a Kachin leader

James Henry Green (1893–1975)

Inter-cultural knowledge and the ability to negotiate with different cultures were crucial to success in highland communities. Leaders often indicated their cross-cultural authority through their dress. Here, the powerful Hkahku Kachin chief, Nga Lang La, wears a Chinese dragon robe, a Chinese helmet held in place by his Hkahku turban, and a Burmese man's skirt-cloth. He smokes a silver pipe common across the region.

Photographed by Colonel Green who documented Kachin communities while in the northern regions between 1918 and 1934
1920s | Paper

Near Putao, Kachin regions

James Henry Green Collection, Brighton & Hove Museums, 0166

Sub-section panel, in display case:

The Kachin name

Today, modern simplified forms of terminology are applied to the complex groups of peoples living in Myanmar, reflecting colonial legacies. The word 'Kahkyen', once used by Burmese and Shan officials to refer to Jinghpaw peoples, became the umbrella term 'Kachin' under British administration. Flexibly embracing diversity, the Kachin are actually a family of related groups, including the Jinghpaw, Zaiwa/Atsi, Lashi/Lachik, Lawngwaw/Lhaovo/Maru and Nung-Rawang.

Section panel, to the left:

Colonial eclipse

The British colonisation of Myanmar between 1826 and 1948 imposed the British empire's administrative procedures and erased existing social structures, including abolishing the monarchy. The management of Burma from India, the separation of peoples from the 'frontier areas' and the central plains, and the immigration of labour, set the stage for divisions that persisted after independence. The colonial period effectively ended with the Second World War (1939–45), which ravaged Myanmar, but hastened independence from the British.

Expanding trade networks and industrialisation brought new technologies and materials to British Burma. Artists also adapted new designs to suit local markets and new European and immigrant communities.

Sub-section panel:

The Anglo-Burmese Wars

Britain annexed Burma in three stages, in 1824–26, 1852, and 1885. The First Anglo-Burmese War was triggered by border issues between the British East India Company and the Konbaung dynasty in central Myanmar's expansion into Arakan. In 1826, the British took Manipur (now in India), Arakan, and part of the Thai-Malay peninsula from the Burmese. The rest of lower Myanmar was seized after the second war in 1852. Finally, on 1 January 1886, the whole country was formally incorporated into British India, with a new capital at Rangoon (Yangon).

Seated Buddha image

During the First Anglo-Burmese War, there was substantial looting by British soldiers. This Buddha image is one of nearly 200 objects obtained by the naval officer Captain Marryat. Figures like this were typically made in central Myanmar for sale in the Shan states. Elements like the jewelled band across the forehead were a new stylistic development at the time, suggesting the image was recently produced when Marryat acquired it.

Acquired by Captain Frederick Marryat (1792–1848) during the First Anglo-Burmese War; donated in 1826

Around 1790–1824 | Lacquer, wood, gold, textile, shell

Central or lower Myanmar

British Museum, 1826,0211.1

Manuscript showing the departure of King Thibaw

In 1885, the British exiled King Thibaw (reigned 1878–85) to India. Here the deposed king is being escorted away by British soldiers, followed by grieving court attendants. Afterwards Mandalay Palace was stripped of its treasures. The king was the lynchpin of Burmese society, and the abrupt dismantling of the monarchy ended an entire social, religious, and political order.

Collected by Herbert Allcroft (1865–1911) on his visit to British Burma in 1894–5; kept in his Stokesay Court home until the house contents auction of 1994; purchased by Spink & Son Ltd and sold in 1994

1886–94 | Paper | British Burma

British Library, Or 14963, fol.1r

Image caption:

British soldiers burned the royal library and government archives after the Third Anglo-Burmese War. Court members desperately salvaged records, transcribing and publishing them, and producing manuscripts like this to record the country's history.

From **Designs of things in daily use in the Golden Palace**, 1894

Purchased from Reverend A.D. Cope in 1912

© British Library Board, Mss Burmese 199, f.48r and f.49r

Sub-section panel, on the wall:

Religious changes

The 1800s saw substantial religious changes in Myanmar. As its royal political power weakened due to the advancing British, the monarchy looked to strengthen its Buddhist role. In 1871 King Mindon (reigned 1853–78) hosted a major meeting of Buddhist monks, including some from Sri Lanka and Thailand. Acknowledging the presence of other religions, Mindon also allowed Muslims to build mosques in the capital city Mandalay. Western Baptist, Catholic and Anglican missionaries established themselves but were mostly successful among such groups as the Karen, Chin and Kachin.

In display case:

Standing Buddha image

Because of religious changes across the Buddhist world, the appearance, hand gestures and body positions of Burmese Buddha images shifted from about the 1840s. They became less elaborate and more naturalistic, and many were inlaid with coloured glass. Seated images in the gesture of enlightenment remained important, but new standing and reclining poses recalled other events in the Buddha's life.

Obtained by Captain James Edgar Ballantine (about 1856–1922) of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company; donated by Mrs Ballantine in 1923
Around 1850–99 | Wood, lacquer, gold, glass
British Burma
British Museum, 1923,0305.1

Kammawasa manuscript

Europeans collected texts like this manuscript of monastic rituals to learn about Buddhism. Yet, when the monarchy was abolished in 1885, the head of state stopped being the protector of the religion in Myanmar. This destabilised Burmese Buddhism and caused new associations and practices. A Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) was established, and the monk Ledi Sayadaw (1846–1923) led the way in promoting meditation and mindfulness for all Buddhists. His movement spread to India and the West, with the UK now having an All-Party Mindfulness Parliamentary Group.

19th century acquisition date, donor unknown
1792 | Lacquer, gold, cotton cloth, wood, bamboo
Central or lower Myanmar
Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland,
Burmese 86

New Testament in Karen (Sgaw dialect)

In the 19th century, Christian missionaries established schools and were relatively successful at converting peoples like the Chin, Kachin and Karen. They worked with local communities to develop written scripts for oral languages, in order to print religious texts like this bible written in a Karen dialect. Later, churches and missions came under local control, and greater numbers of conversions occurred then.

Purchased from Trubner & Co in 1855 with other books on Christianity in various languages
Published by the Karen Mission Press, Tavoy in 1843, translated by Francis Mason | Paper
British Burma
British Library, 11103.a.90; 000332468

On the wall:

Inside View of the Gold Temple on the Terrace of the Great Dagon Pagoda at Rangoon

George Hunt after Joseph Moore

Although it is customary to remove one's shoes at Buddhist sites as a sign of respect, Europeans disregarded local traditions and refused to do so. The British even used some religious places, like the major pilgrimage site depicted here, as military camps. In the early 20th century, the Burmese began to demand Europeans remove their shoes at sacred sites. The British government finally yielded in 1919.

Part of a print series depicting the First
Anglo-Burmese War purchased from Nathaniel
Thomas Wetherell in 1872

1825 | Hand-coloured aquatint with etching

Published by Thomas Clay in London, UK

British Museum, 1872,0608.208

Sub-section panel, in central display case:

New materials, designs and clients

After fully annexing the country in 1886, the British modernised some local transportation and communication systems. Myanmar's new global links enabled the introduction of different designs, technologies (including the industrial production of glass), and materials such as synthetic dyes. The British also established local art exhibitions and encouraged artists to submit work to international fairs and competitions, like the Paris World Exposition of 1900 and the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924. Artists adapted shapes and patterns to satisfy their new clients.

In central display case:

Silver

During the colonial period, Burmese artists began to create new shapes and designs for British customers. This ewer typically displays zodiac patterns in low-relief, but its shape is entirely European. The later centrepiece combines local stories, such as the **Ramayana**, with European patterns like the acanthus leaf, and its high-relief imagery and cast figurines were popularised by British demand. Burmese silversmiths participated in British-organised competitions and international exhibitions, and became renowned for their work.

Silver ewer and stand

Presented by Lord William Bentinck to William IV
in 1836

About 1834

Probably lower Myanmar

Lent by His Majesty The King

Silver centrepiece

Bequest from Mrs C.C. Jeffery in 1971

Maung Yin Maung (active about 1880s–1910s)

About 1890–1910

Rangoon

V&A: IS.19-1971

Necklace of silver rupee coins

Silver coins were used in jewellery and sewn on clothing by many communities across Asia as a means to store and display wealth. This example is made of quarter rupee coins issued by the British Indian government between 1910 and 1936, which display the head of King George V. Each coin is intrinsically valuable, made of 91.7% pure silver and weighing 2.92 grams.

Acquired by D.R. Hay-Neave, a captain in the Indian army during the Second World War; donated in 1948

1910–early 1940s | Silver, wool, cotton

Chin Hills

British Museum, As1948,07.21

Glass mosaic surround

Following the Second Anglo-Burmese War in 1852, King Mindon tried to keep the remainder of his country free from colonial control through modernisation. He established factories and mills for rice, iron, cotton and glass, and the sons of noble families were sent abroad for technical training. Many of these initiatives failed, but glass became popular in religious settings. This mosaic would have been the backdrop for a Buddha image or a monk's preaching seat.

Unknown acquisition date, but likely between the late 19th century and 1901 when the Russell-Cotes house was completed

Around 1870–99 | Wood, lacquer, glass

Central or lower Myanmar or the Shan states

On loan from the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum, Bournemouth

Textile innovation and trade

The majority of synthetic dyes and fibres were developed in the late 1850s, reaching Myanmar in the early 1860s. The exception is Chrome Yellow, which was produced as a dye from the 1820s. These new materials spread quickly along the trade routes that spanned the region, indicating that today's remote areas were once closely connected with global trade. The British Museum's Science Department analysed six Karen textiles in the collection, dating from the 1830s to about 1900, including the two here, to understand when synthetic materials were adopted.

This skirt is made entirely of natural dyes and fibres, but the tunic combines natural dyes with a synthetic one and uses materials pre-dyed in Europe.

Karen tunic (hse)

Collected by Morden Carthew, the divisional commander of Pegu (Bago) province between 1861–3, or his son of the same name, the civil administrator for Moulmein (Mawlamyine) and then deputy commissioner for Mergui (Myeik) province from 1858–60

Before 1863 | Cotton, felted wool, Coix seed

Probably lower Myanmar

British Museum, As,+.6880

Karen skirt-cloth (ni)

Donated in 1872 by Augustus Wollaston Franks, who probably acquired it from the dealer William Wareham

1840s–60s | Cotton, Chinese silk

Karen regions or lower Myanmar
British Museum, As.7765

Image caption:

Details of European felt, and the green and orange threads, which combine synthetic Chrome Yellow with natural dyes.

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Carved ivory chair

As the British became established in Myanmar, furniture was crafted in traditionally European shapes for foreign and sometimes local use. This ivory chair has a European shape but is covered with dense Burmese floral patterns in high-relief. A similar type of intricate carving was used by Burmese woodcarvers. This chair was reputedly made for King Thibaw (ruled 1878–85), the last king of Myanmar's Konbaung dynasty (1752–1885).

Probably taken from Mandalay Palace; acquired from a Rangoon merchant by Dr Barnardo who sold it at a Red Cross auction in 1892; purchased by Mr MacAndrew; sold for the Red Cross through Christie's in 1914 to benefit the War effort and was purchased by Mr MacAndrew's son; donated for safekeeping in 1941 to the Natural History Museum, London, which gave it to the Liverpool Museum during the Second World War

About 1880–85 | Ivory, fabric

Probably Mandalay

Lent by National Museums Liverpool, World Museum, 56.115

In display case, ahead, to the right:

Album classifying hill groups and animals

While regional courts had conducted surveys for tax and mobilisation purposes, British colonial administrative procedures like the census, which began in 1872, also established boundaries and categorised peoples. The British stereotyped the vast complexity of peoples living in the region, as seen in albums and models like these, and homogenised ethnically diverse Buddhists into a generic Burman identity. They failed to understand that local dress and customs were flexible, altering for changing contexts.

Given to J.G. Scott, superintendent of the northern Shan states, before 1910 by the ruler of Kengtung, given to the library in 1934

About 1900–10 | Paper

Kengtung, Shan states

University of Cambridge Library, Scott LL4.153

Wooden models of ethnic peoples

Possibly Maung Nyun (active 1930s–40s)

Parts of present-day Myanmar experienced colonialism differently. Parliamentary rule was imposed on central and lower British Burma and Arakan, while areas like the highlands and Shan states were controlled indirectly through local rulers. The British partially defined ethnicity by classifying clothing through writings, collections, paintings and models. Meanwhile, however, the region's diverse populations developed their own modern local identities based on cultural contexts and historical experiences.

Acquired by Reginald Dorman-Smith, governor of British Burma (1941–46), donated to the Royal Hampshire Regiment Museum, Winchester in 1975, donated in 2022

1930s to mid-1940s | Possibly Mongnai,
Shan states

British Museum, 2022,3020 series

Immigrant communities

As a province of British India, Burma was transformed by immigration. Numerous Indian and Chinese people arrived, providing cheap labour and entrepreneurial and administrative skills. By the 1930s, the capital Rangoon (Yangon) was only about 30% Buddhist Burman, creating anxiety about the preservation of Burman culture. Yet, locals produced commercial goods for these new communities. This Indian-style lunchbox is made of Burmese lacquer.

Mahatma Gandhi, who visited British Burma while campaigning for Indian independence, is depicted on this plate made in the Burmese **shwezawa** gold leaf technique.

Tiffin lunchbox

Ko Bo Yu (active around 1900–39)

Acquired by Ralph H. Isaacs (director of the British Council, Myanmar) and Ruth Isaacs in Yangon in 1993 and donated to the British Museum in 1998

About 1900–39 | Lacquer, wood

Kyaukka, Sagaing region, central British Burma
British Museum, 1998,0723.221

Plate depicting Mahatma Gandhi

Purchased from Joss Graham Oriental Textiles in 2001

1930s | Bamboo, lacquer, gold

Possibly Bagan

British Museum, 2001,0612.1

On the far wall, behind central case:

Photography: a new technology

Photography was introduced to British Burma in the 1850s, and pictures became marketable commodities as souvenirs, carte-de-visites and postcards like these. The first photographic studios were European-owned, followed by Japanese and Indian firms. Only in the 20th century were local firms established. Ohn Maung, the owner of the earliest Burmese-operated studio, London Art, and one of the founders of Burmese cinema, started his career working under the well-known Indian photographer D.A. Ahuja.

Carte-de-visite showing a Burmese carpenter

August Sachtler

About 1865 | Paper

Photographed in British Burma

Printed in Hamburg, Germany by C. Dammann

British Museum, Oc,A3.98

Postcard of a Burmese woman rolling cigars

D.A. Ahuja

Purchased in 2015 from Bella Bennett, a
postcard dealer

1900–20 | Paper

Published in Rangoon (Yangon)

British Museum, EPH-ME.5022

Sailing ships

U Ba Nyan (1897–1945)

After U Ba Nyan returned to Burma in 1930 from London, the acting governor, Sir Joseph Maung Gyi, allowed him the first solo exhibition of a Burmese artist at Government House. When the Mayor of Rangoon gave a banquet in 1930, U Ba Nyan was also commissioned to make individual paintings for the menus, including this one.

Maurice Collis, a district magistrate who was friendly with the artist, kept his menu card's picture.

Purchased via the Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund in 2022 from the descendants of Maurice Collis, who acquired it at the Mayor's Dinner in 1930
1930 | Gouache on paper | Rangoon, British Burma
British Museum 2022,3022.4

Painting of Government House, Mandalay U Ba Nyan (1897–1945)

In the late 1800s, Burmese painters began to experiment with European forms. Eventually, two Burmese artists – U Ba Nyan and U Ba Zaw – were sponsored to study in the 1920s at the Royal College of Art, London. U Ba Nyan also represented Burma at the 1924 Wembley Empire exhibition.

This painting shows Sir Charles Innes, the governor of British Burma from 1927–32, leaving Mandalay Palace (renamed Government House).

Purchased via the Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund in 2022 from the descendants of Maurice Collis, district magistrate in Rangoon, who acquired it from the artist in 1931

1931 | Tempera on paper | Probably Mandalay, British Burma

British Museum, 2022,3022.1

A new consumerism

British Burma's vast commercial expansion under colonial rule encouraged a new form of consumerism, which can be seen in advertising for Western clothing and other goods.

Many artists produced commercial images, some of which drew on nationalist themes. This poster for Sunlight Soap depicts General Mahabandula, the leader of the Burmese army in the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824–26). The Nestlé condensed milk advert presents a Western stereotype of beautiful Asian women.

Poster advertising Sunlight Soap

Original painting by U Ba Nyan (1897–1945)

1930s | Paper

British Burma

Collection of John Randall, Books of Asia

Poster for Nestlé and Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company

Original painting by U Ngwe Gaing (1901–67)

About 1935 | Paper

British Burma

Collection of John Randall, Books of Asia

**British Burma Film Pictorial Magazine,
vol. 1, no. 12**

In the 1920s and 1930s, traditional theatres were replaced by new forms of entertainment, especially cinema. Burmese film studios like 'British Burma' produced many types of film, from documentaries to love stories and nationalist works. Films were accompanied by song sheets, record sleeves, and magazines like this, which provides information about film plots and filmmaking. It also contains anti-Indian-immigrant sentiment, a response to economic difficulties and fears for the loss of Burman Buddhist culture circulating at that time.

1938 | Paper Rangoon, British Burma
Anonymous lender

Cartoons

Cartooning became a highly appreciated art form in Burma in the early 20th century. Two of the main cartoonists were U Ba Gyan and the Muslim artist U Bagale, who satirised British and Burmese alike, while also commenting on the unrest of the 1920s–30s. This unsettled period saw rebellions against colonial rule, strikes and a boycott of non-local goods.

Running time: approximately 30 secs

U Bagale (1892–1945)

That Loin Cloth

1931, published in the Rangoon Times

This cartoon points out the hypocrisy of British shock at Gandhi wearing a loincloth during an official visit to London in 1931.

It's a Long Way to Home-Rule

1930s, re-published in *Shwetalay Cartoons*,
Mandalay, 1969

Burmese politics were contentious during the 1930s, with compromise unlikely, as seen in this cartoon of buffalo butting heads. Based on a Burmese proverb, the fight between political parties only damages the grass that represents the country.

U Ba Gyan (1902–53)

Untitled

1948, re-published in *Ba Gyan: Cartoon Anthology*, Yangon, 2015

Here, U Ba Gyan comments on the terrible conditions in which the British left Myanmar in 1948. A departing British official tells a Burmese couple to care for their children named 'Debt', 'Finance', and 'Reconstruction'.

Sub-section panel, to left of display case:

The Second World War

In the 1920s and 1930s, there were many protests and strikes opposing colonial control. Some reforms were enacted, including separation from British India in 1937. The invasion by the Japanese in 1942 during the Second World War (1939–45) ended these changes. At first the recently formed Burma Independence Army (BIA) joined the Japanese as a way to escape British control. But, when it became clear the Japanese were merely a new coloniser, the BIA switched allegiance. 'Scorched-earth' policies by both the Allies and Japanese destroyed the country's infrastructure and agriculture.

In display case:

Lacquer box

Trade, industrial and craft connections existed between Myanmar and Japan from the early 1900s. Experts from Japan worked in British Burma, and cultural contact was promoted from the 1930s. The second Burmese head of the Government Lacquer School was sent to study in Japan. He brought back new techniques like marbled lacquer (Burmese: Japan yun) as seen on this box, produced by sprinkling gold or silver powder between layers of brown lacquer.

Purchased new from Htun Handicrafts
1995 | Bamboo, lacquer, gold powder
New Bagan, central Myanmar
British Museum, 1996,0501.44

Japanese occupation money

Burma was occupied by the Japanese from 1942 to 1945 during the Second World War. Special occupation currency was printed at that time, featuring Japanese and English text and local imagery like the Buddhist temples of Bagan. The economy was soon dominated by the Japanese, as they set up financial institutions and companies and took over businesses that had been owned by the British and other Europeans.

Variously donated by IFS School of Finance (formerly the Chartered Institute of Bankers) in 2009 and Mrs Wilkins in 1992; bequeathed by Andrew Frederick Wiseman in 2006; purchased from Eleanor Barker and Phyllis Hill in 1996

1942–45 | Paper | Myanmar

British Museum, CIB,EA.104; CBA199477;
CBA199484; CBA204460;
CBA204468, CIB.10896

Burma Star medal

Burma Stars were awarded to acknowledge Allied troops who served in Burma between 11 December 1941 and 2 September 1945. The associated ribbon has a red centre, representing the British army, flanked by orange (the sun) and blue stripes (British naval forces). This medal was awarded to a Nepalese Gurkha, one of the elite soldiers recruited into the British Army since 1816. Gurkha regiments were vital in the Allied struggle to regain Burma in 1944–45.

Awarded to Ramchandrabahadur Ghale of the
3rd Battalion, 3rd Gurkha Rifles
About 1945 | Silk, copper zinc alloy
Designed by the Royal Mint, UK
The Gurkha Museum, Winchester, 2000.09.143

Image caption:

Gurkha soldiers of the British Army march past a Buddhist site, Prome (Pyay), May 1945.

Associated Press / Alamy Stock Photo

Silk 'escape' map

When Japanese troops and the Burma Independence Army (BIA) invaded Myanmar in 1942, British, Indian and Anglo-Burmese communities evacuated to India. Easily concealed, silent while in use, and durable, silk maps like this were issued to Allied soldiers to aid escape from enemy territory if they were shot down or captured and held prisoner. This map shows central Burma on one side, and the northern regions on the other.

Issued to Private E. Dexter, 4th Platoon, 2nd Battalion, York and Lancaster Regiment for the Chindit operation in north Burma, 1944

Early 1940s

Possibly British India

Imperial War Museum, EPH 4012

Image caption:

Prisoners of war and Asian labourers were forced to build the infamous 'Death-Railway' across the forested mountains between Burma and Thailand, to ensure supply routes for the Japanese army. Horrendous conditions caused massive numbers of deaths.

Unknown Japanese photographer, about 1943

Courtesy of the Australian War Memorial,

P00406.034

British flag in a silver presentation box

The British initially barred the Buddhist Burmans from their army but encouraged Karen, Kachin and other groups to join, contributing to associations between religion, ethnicity and nationalism. The city of Patheingyi (Bassein), which had a significant Karen population, was liberated from the Japanese in May 1945. The Union Jack that was hoisted to mark this moment was later presented to King George VI by local Karens. They believed in the possibility that the British might grant them an independent state. This, plus pro-British sentiment during the war, contributed to antagonism with the newly independent Union of Burma. Civil war broke out in 1949.

Presented to George VI by Reverend J.W. Baldwin
on 7 February 1947

1945 | Cotton, silver

Patheingyi (Bassein), lower British Burma

Lent by His Majesty The King

Bust of General Aung San

General Aung San (1915–47), was leader of the Burma Independence Army. He initially supported Japan to hasten independence from Britain, but after Japanese colonial intentions became clear, he agreed to fight with the Allies, provided talks for independence began after the war. He also negotiated with the Shan, Chin and Kachin groups to persuade them to join the new Union of Burma. Although regarded as the founder of modern Burma by many, Aung San was assassinated by a political opponent before independence.

Bought by a donor outside a Buddhist temple

Late 1950s to early 1980s | Plaster

Possibly Myanmar

British Museum, new acquisition

Section panel, to the right:

After independence

Upon independence in 1948, Myanmar was still economically and physically devastated by the Second World War. The new government also faced the monumental task of unifying a country that had never been a single entity before.

Although various regions, like Kachin State, were promised internal self-rule in discussions in 1947, this was not fulfilled after independence, resulting in civil wars.

Myanmar's democratic phase was short-lived. A military coup in 1962 initiated a period of severe isolation and violence. The impact of successive military governments and extreme censorship has been catastrophic for the population, as well as damaging for art and culture.

Throughout Myanmar today, the legacies of colonialism, decades of civil war, and repressive dictatorships still cast a long shadow.

In display case:

Silver tea set presented to Queen Elizabeth II

U Nu (1907–95) became the first prime minister of the independent Union of Burma. Although anti-communist, his government tried to take a neutral position during the Cold War. In 1955, U Nu went on a world tour, visiting countries like the USA, UK, Israel and communist Yugoslavia. Official gifts included silver objects like this tea set decorated with scenes of Burmese life and local stories, which became popular during the colonial period.

Given by Prime Minister U Nu to Queen Elizabeth II
on 21 June 1955
1954–55

Union of Burma

Lent by His Majesty The King

U Thant making a statement about the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962

U Thant (1909–74) was unanimously elected as secretary-general of the United Nations in 1961, a post he held until 1971. In 1962, he successfully negotiated between US president John F. Kennedy and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev to diffuse the Cuban Missile Crisis and avert nuclear war. This fact is little remembered today. Although deeply respected internationally, U Thant was seen as a threat by General Ne Win and upon his death, his funeral received no official ceremony, causing demonstrations that were violently repressed.

Running time: approximately 3 mins

Courtesy of the United Nations

Express 2 (above, right)

San Minn (1951–2021)

Corruption became widespread in Myanmar as economic conditions deteriorated. Cars, alongside housing, education and access to modern medical care were only available to those with military connections. In this painting, the car's tank-tread tires speak to the repressive political situation. The colour red was censored for its allusion to violence and rebellion, as it does here, referencing the wars that have forced people to flee their homes.

Purchased from the artist's family
via the Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund
1986 | Oil on canvas
Rangoon, Union of Burma
British Museum, 2022,3029.1

Sub-section panel, ahead:

Military control

In 1962, General Ne Win (1910–2002) seized power and set the country on the ‘Burmese Path to Socialism’, focusing on the nationalisation of industries, self-sufficiency, and isolationist policies. During this time, the economy collapsed, people perceived as foreigners were expelled, and human rights abuses and censorship became common. In 1989, the military changed the country’s name from Burma to Myanmar, supposedly to be more inclusive of ethnic groups. Yet communities have been forced to conform to the Buddhist majority culture promoted as representative of the whole country. The 2010s saw military control briefly loosen, but another coup in 2021 plunged Myanmar into violence again.

Betel box (kun-it) in the shape of a mythical karaweik bird from the royal regalia

The royal regalia of Myanmar's last king, which included this box, was seized by the British during the Third Anglo-Burmese War in 1885. It was finally returned in 1964 to General Ne Win's government, and this box was then donated to the Victoria and Albert Museum as a thank you for its custodianship. The return of the regalia connected Myanmar's royal court with the military regime – a form of legitimisation Ne Win was keen to promote.

Taken during the looting of Mandalay Palace in 1885 and deposited at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; donated by the Union of Burma Government in 1964

Around 1840–85 | Gold, rubies, glass | Mandalay, central Myanmar

V&A: IS.246&A-1964

Exhibited as Untitled (1974) and as Hunters (1976) (above)

Maung Theid Dhi (1950–2014)

After the 1962 military coup, access to goods dwindled. Artists were forced to use cheap materials and re-use or re-purpose surfaces, as indicated by this painting, which has been made on a tabletop. As part of a performance at the Wild Eye Art Exhibition in Yangon in 1974, Maung Theid Dhi chained this self-portrait to himself to expose the military's suppression of creativity. The piece was censored, and the artist was jailed after exhibiting the work for a second time in 1976.

Purchased from the artist's family via the Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund

1974 | Oil on teak wood

Rangoon, Union of Burma

British Museum, 2022,3027.1

Persistence 2 (above)

Nan Da (born 1981)

In 1988 protests over corruption swelled into massive uprisings. Aung San Suu Kyi (born 1945), the daughter of General Aung San, rose to political prominence and became one of the founders of the National League for Democracy (NLD) party. Although the NLD won a landslide victory in the 1990 elections, the military seized power again and placed her under house arrest. Representing Aung San Suu Kyi in art became another form of rebellion.

Purchased from the artist via the Brooke Sewell
Permanent Fund

Ink and acrylic on paper

Yangon, Republic of the Union of Myanmar

British Museum, 2022,3040.2

Image caption:

In 1987, Ne Win changed the country's currency to align with his lucky number 9. 25-, 35- and 75-kyat notes were replaced with 15-, 45- and 90-kyat notes, erasing people's savings overnight and triggering economic turmoil.

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Lost in Reflection: a Rohingya's Gaze into Hope's Abyss

Ro Mehrooz (born 1999)

The predominantly Muslim Rohingya are persecuted religiously and as illegal migrants. Their plight came to international attention when many fled Myanmar to escape economic deprivation starting in the 1990s and again after the 2017 genocidal attacks. About one million Rohingya now live in refugee camps in Bangladesh.

Winner of a photographic competition in the camps, this image illustrates issues with water quality for drinking and washing. Since the 2021 coup, with the military also waging war against the Buddhist ethnically Rakhine and Burman majorities, there has been greater sympathy for what other groups have suffered.

Courtesy of the artist

2022 | Photograph

Rohingya refugee camp, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

On wall:

Green Burmese Python

Soe Yu Nwe (born 1989)

There can be prejudice against mixed marriages between different religions or groups in Myanmar today. This iridescent ceramic serpent was produced by Soe Yu Nwe, a Chinese-Burmese artist, during her residency at the famous Jingdezhen kilns in China.

The sculpture combines the artist's Chinese zodiac sign with the Burmese belief that pythons are protectors of the Buddha, visually symbolising her unified identity.

Purchased from the artist via the Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund

2018 | Glazed porcelain, gold, mother of pearl lustre

Jingdezhen, China

British Museum, 2022,3019.1

Modern 'traditional' Kachin outfit

Myanmar's military state uses Union Day celebrations to display its ethnic diversity, requiring groups to perform dances in 'traditional' dress. At the same time, because of negative stereotypes of non-Burmans, the government also enforces a unified identity based on the Burman Buddhist majority culture.

Minoritised communities in part resist this homogenisation and denigration on these occasions by displaying clothing that reflects new ideas of modernity and tradition. The Jinghpaw are the majority and culturally dominant Kachin group, and their dress has come to stand for all Kachin peoples at official events.

Commissioned by Brighton Museum as part of a programme to revive textile production in Kachin State U Thwin Tailors, Hkaw Ma Sar and weaver Sadau Roi Ji

2001 | Cotton, velvet, synthetics, sequins, zinc
Myitkyina, Kachin State

Brighton Museum and Art Gallery, WA508693,
WA507439, WA507441, WA507440

Behind:

100 Projectors Anonymous artists

In 2020, the National League for Democracy party won the election again, despite the weak economy, Covid-19 and ongoing persecutions of ethnic groups. When the military declared the result void and seized control in 2021, artist-activists beamed images of resistance onto buildings. People adopted the three-fingered salute, a symbol of defiance and hope from **The Hunger Games** films used by pro-democracy protestors across Asia. Alongside the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) and other forms of resistance, making art in Myanmar continues to be an act of rebellion and a reimagining of politics.

After independence

For the safety of the artists who made this and the people featured, please do not take photographs.

Anonymous artists of the 100 Projectors Project
2021

Running time: approximately 2 mins

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