The Art of the Burmese Buddha Statue

Collection of James and Deborah Finch

JAMES FINCH

All of the photographs in this article are by the author of pieces in the collection of James and Deborah Finch. Mr Finch is a lawyer, practising in Burma and has lived in Burma with his family for approximately ten years. He has completed his thesis on the sacred art of Burma, and will shortly receive his PhD in art history. The collection of Mr and Mrs Finch from Burma is an extensive one, consisting, for example, of sacred lacquer and wood temple objects, ancient ceramics, silver repoussé, antique ethnic textiles, colonial-era furniture, ceramics and clocks, Hindu and animist sculpture and antique silver coins and gold jewellery. This article has focused only on the Burmese Buddha statuary in the Finch Collection because it is pervasive in the Burmese culture. The similarities in these statues provide Mr Finch with a “base line” by which to comment in the article upon the various Burmese sacred artistic styles.

THROUGHOUT history, sacred art in Burma has been a direct expression of the faith, doctrine and lore of the Buddhist religion itself. Its purpose has been to engender awe, devotion and symbolically portray the tenets of the faith.

In keeping with the use of standardised conventions to depict the figure of the Buddha in Burmese art, few if any sculptures are signed by individual artists, although the donors, including monarchs under whose auspices the statues were created, are occasionally identified. Traditionally, Burmese statues of the Buddha are portrayed sitting, standing, reclining (1, 2, and 7 respectively) and walking.

Though there are more than fifty mūdra, a few are most often in Burma seen with the Sakyamuni, the incarnation of the present Buddha’s life—that of Gotama Buddha. (1) illustrates earth-touching or bhūmiśparśa mūdra. One hand is palm up in the Buddha’s lap and the other gently touches or reaches for the earth in front of the Buddha. This mūdra stands for the enlightenment under the bodhi tree at the moment of defeating Mara, the essence of evil.

In practically all Burmese earth-touching images the hand touching the earth is the right. In some images the deity known as Vasumāthari or Prithivi, comes to witness the enlightenment and can be seen on a pedestal below the Buddha. In Mahayanaist texts Vasumāthari or Prithivi is the earth god, but a popular interpretation is that this is a goddess and wrings the water from her long hair, giving witness to the Buddha’s merit (38) and crowning the armies of Mara. In the Theravada version, the earth, neither a god nor a goddess, roars in witness to the merits of the Buddha’s former lives, and Mara and his armies flee. (2) Bhumisparśa mūdra is the most common of all mūdra seen in Burma.

A standing Buddha (2) illustrates compassion, or mahākārma mūdra. One hand, either the left or right, is pressed palm down against the breast. (3) The left hand in (3) is in mahākārma mūdra, the right in boon-granting, benediction or varada mūdra, in which one arm is pointed down with the palm out. This hand may hold a jewel or a piece of fruit between thumb and forefinger, or resting in the palm. The combination of varada mūdra and abhaya mūdra in (37) is also sometimes seen in standing figures.

(7) is a reclining Buddha. The popular wisdom is that a sculpture of the Buddha lying on his right side with his right hand supporting his head on his right cheek with eyes closed symbolises his parinirvāṇa. In fact, in Burmese iconography, a reclining Buddha can be sleeping, resting, meditating or in parinirvāṇa. (7) If the head is pointed toward the north, the statue is of the parinirvāṇa. Of course, this reasoning is most conclusive in the case of stationery statues, such as the massive Sīwe Tha Laung in Bago, with the head in the direction of the north, and the feet in the direction of the south, and the feet in the direction of the north, not considered to be of the parinirvāṇa.

The Burmese Buddha statue exists principally in three media: wood, metal and stone. Some images, particularly large ones at Pagan, are of masonry, stone brick or kiln or sun-dried brick. Lacquer, though often referred to as a medium itself, is used to coat various surfaces, including split bamboo, wood and metal.

Lacquer is the resin of the tree Gluta usitata. The tree is known in Burmese as thei. It is, when dried, a natural polymer. The best lacquer, when dry, is black and shiny. Lacquer can be coloured by mixing colours such as cinnabar (mercuric sulphide) with lacquer and a small amount of oil for red. (5) is an example of red lacquer on wood.

It is likely that the use of lacquer on sculpture in Burma came from China. Chinese texts relate use of lacquer by the Pyu. As illustrated further below, lacquer can be gilded with thinly pounded gold sheets, known as gold leaf. Small pieces of mirrors are often set in the lacquer.
4 Alabaster. Height 35 inches. The Buddha with rice offering bowl and four monks, the Buddha’s right hand in abhaya mudra. Probably late 19th century AD. For the reasons discussed in this article it is practically impossible to determine the exact period of creation of most Burmese Buddha statues. Thus the dating by century in the captions to this article is included only to give the general public a very rough idea of when these statues were made.
Descriptions
(For 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 30, 31, 40, 41, 50 refer to the photographs)
1 Bronze. Height 36 inches (detail). Arakan. Bhumiśparśa mudra. Note that left hand, in meditation position, is supported above the lap by a small metal peg
2 Alabaster. Height 33 inches. Yadanabon period. Southern Shan State
3 Bronze. Height 41 inches. Inwa style, but Amarapura period. Right hand in varada mudra, left in mahākārūna mudra. Note latticed base
4 Lacquer on wood. Height 39 inches. Small pieces of mirror are attached to the lacquer. Early 19th century AD
5 Gold leaf on sandstone. Height 26 inches. Inwa style. Mid-18th century AD
6 Gold leaf and black lacquer on wood. Height 62 inches. Mon. Mid-19th century AD
7 Lacquer and gold leaf on wood. Note intricate carving on chest with chisel. Height 62 inches. Amarapura period. Arakan. Considering the pros and cons, argument or vitarka mudra. One or both hands are raised at the elbow, palm out, with the thumb and forefinger touching
8 Gold leaf and thayo on carved wood. Note the intricacy of carving with small tools. The ear flanges are carved from different blocks and attached by a means such as glue. Pagan style
9 Bronze. Yadanabon style. Height 58 inches. Early to mid-19th century AD. The intricacy of the garment on this figure was created by building up and carving the wax layer
10 Bronze. Arakan. Height 34 inches. Late 18th to early 19th centuries AD. Note that the elaborate ear flanges and crown on this statue were added by artisans after the original casting
11 Sandstone, with gold leaf. Height 21 inches. Arakan. Inwa period. Note elaborate carving and gold leaf
12 Marble reclining image. Length 45 inches. Yadanabon style. Mid to late 19th century AD
13 Alabaster. Height 17 inches. There is a hole on the ushnisha for a finial, which has been detached. Yadanabon style. Mid to late 19th century AD
14 Bronze. Height 60 inches. The elaborate crown and costume of this figure are suggestive of the king's images attributed to the Mahayanist school of the faith. Arakan. Yadanabon period
15 Lacquer on wood and bamboo. Height 58 inches. Note thayo and gold leaf. This crowned figure displays the graceful elongated limbs and curves of the classical Gupta period of India. Shan. Amarapura period
16 Gold leaf on alabaster. Height 22 inches. Though this figure has a neck ornament and shoulder bracelet of a king, most of the costume is undamaged, as that of a monk. Late 18th century AD
17 Bronze. Height 30 inches. Under the semicircular breast ornament on this figure can be seen the robe of a monk continuing toward the waist. Arakan. Amarapura period
18 Bronze. Height 17 inches. Shan. Amarapura period. Note latticework in base
19 Bronze. Height 40 inches. Note elaborate crown and ear flanges. Arakan. Amarapura period. Early to mid-19th century AD
20 Bronze. Height 19 inches. Note unique robe. Amarapura period. Early to mid-19th centuries AD
21 Bronze. Height 50 inches. Note that both feet are facing up, with ankles crossed and feet tucked up tightly. Mid to late 18th century AD
22 Bronze. Height 48 inches. Double lotus base. Inwa period
23 Bronze. Height 36 inches. Inwa period
24 Bronze. Height 38 inches. Inwa period. Note carving, waisted throne
26 Lacquer and gold leaf on wood and split bamboo. Height 46 inches. Elephant throne. Shan. Early 10-19th century AD
27 Lacquer and gold leaf on wood. Height 45 inches. Yadanabon period. Single lotus base. This statue is a very typical Yadanabon standing figure
28 Bronze. Height 51 inches. Inwa style. Double lotus base. In fact, this base has three layers of lotus. The double layer is that with a band between it pointing both down and up. The third is right below the figure's feet, with petals pointed down. Late 18th century AD
29 Bronze. Height 50 inches. Arakan. Inwa period. Lattice base. Right hand in varada mudra
30 Bronze. Pagan style. Height 25 inches. Note robe mainly invisible on the contours of the body. Typical of the Pagan style, the mouth is curled in a slight smile and the lower lip is smaller but thicker than the upper. Eyes are half-closed, gazing downward. Fingers are of different lengths. Double lotus base
31 Bronze. Height 46 inches. Pagan style. Although certain elements, such as the aquiline nose and lips on the face of this figure appear to be from the classical Pagan era (11th through 13th centuries AD), the elaborateness of the garments and the ushnisha would place the era at the early to mid-15th century. The small figure at the centre of the base, on the right from the perspective of the viewer, may be the earth god or goddess. Double lotus throne. The flying figures and symbols at the top of the reredos are two celestialis, expressing the Buddha's divinity
32 Bronze. Height 23 inches. Pagan style. Note aquiline nose, creases on neck, flame finial and rows of peppercorn curls
33 Bronze. Height 35 inches. Shan. Inwa style. Note downcast eyes, bulging in centre of head
34 Bronze. Height 43 inches. Inwa style. Note smile, with lips roughly equal in size. Late 18th century AD
35 Bronze. Height 33 inches. Shan, but Inwa style. Notice wide distances between eyes and eyebrows
36 Bronze. Height 47 inches. Amarapura period, but showing elements of Inwa style. Note inverted "V" in garment, untapered fingers of equal length, incised eyebrows, long earlobes. Early to mid-19th century AD
37 Gold leaf and lacquer on split bamboo and wood. Height 40 inches. Amarapura style. Note that the fingers are slightly tapered
38 Bronze. Height 36 inches. Yadanabon period with Jambupati crown and attire. Preaching, teaching or dharmamahakara mudra. Both hands are joined at the chest. Thumb and forefinger are touching on both hands. This mudra symbolises the first sermon at Sarnath, the setting in motion of the wheel of law, i.e. the dharma
39 Bronze. Height 61 inches. Single lotus base. Note elaborate robe and rounded ushnisha, flattened at top. Yadanabon style and period. Mid-19th century AD
40 Yadanabon period. Gold leaf and lacquer on split bamboo. Note elaborate decoration with small pieces of glass mirror. 18th century AD
5 Lacquer on wood. Height 58 inches. Pagan style

6 Gilded lacquer on thayo and split bamboo. Height 37 inches. Jambupeti image Southern Shan State. Amarapura period

7 Bronze. Length 39 inches. Inwa style, but probably early Amarapura period. Note serene expression and relaxed pose
Lacquer, mixed with fine powders, can also be used to make a soft substance that can be moulded into relief-like decorations. This is known as thayo. Gold leaf has traditionally been made in workshops around Mandalay and is done by laboriously pounding and rolling pieces of the precious metal. In addition to use with lacquer, gold leaf is used extensively with stone and wood.

Burma is the traditional location of the largest stands of hardwood in the world. It is especially famous for its teak, *Tectona grandis* (kyun in Burmese). The historical method for carving wood statues is that the initial design was traced on the wood with charcoal. The basic design was roughly cut out with chisel, gouge and mallet. Progressively smaller, more precise tools were used with mallets as the sculpture took form. Lacquer or gold leaf could also be applied to the final product.

The vast majority of metal statues in Burma are in bronze, an alloy of copper and zinc. For bronze images, a lost wax technique is used. First, a basic form of the image is built up from layers of clay mixture. When the form has dried, a layer of beeswax and other ingredients is applied to the surface of the form. Details are carved into the wax or added by building up layers of wax. Layers of soft clay and other ingredients are then placed on top of the wax mixture and allowed to dry, forming the outer layer of a mould.

The mould is heated and the wax melts and runs from holes in the outer layer of the mould. These holes are sealed and the molten bronze is then poured into holes made in the outer mould for this purpose. When the metal has cooled the outer form is broken, revealing the image. An artisan does filing and trimming. The inner core is removed and parts such as ears, headdresses...
and ear flanges are added by an artisan, using metal rivets or pins, usually combined with a welding technique (15). The image is refined with abrasives such as sandpaper and petrified wood and, finally, polished with sesame oil.30

Stone Buddha images are often plastered, lacquered or gilded.31 Sandstone (16) was quarried at Toungoo and at Pakokku. Likewise, Saiyin and Kyaukse were sources of marble32 (17). Buddha statues of alabaster are also found in Burma (18). Generally, heavy blocks of stone were hewn in the rough and transported to the site where they were to be carved.

Starting in the 13th and 14th centuries AD, some Burmese Buddha statues were adorned as kings, not simple monks as they had always previously been. There is a traditional story to explain this. An ambitious king, Jambupati, threatened the realm of Buddhist King Bimbisara of Magadha. To protect Bimbisara, the Buddha transformed himself into a magnificent king. On seeing the Buddha in this form, Jambupati converted to Buddhism.33

It may be of course that the Jambupati image is simply Mahayanist (19). Luce observed, however, the reason for the Jambupati tradition in Burma may well relate back to the history of the Buddha image as it came from India. In early Indian art, there was not an obvious distinction between Buddha and bodhisattva34 (20). The kingship metaphor for the Buddha appears, moreover, not only in Mahayanist but also in Theravadan history. In Buddhist tradition, when he was born, Prince Siddhartha had signs of a wheel on the palms of his hands and the soles of his feet, symbols that he would grow to be a chakravartin.35 From the time of Ashoka, moreover, the ideal Theravadan ruler was the dhammanaga or “righteous king.”36 It is likely that this ideal was applied by faithful artisans, Theravadins as well as Mahayanists, to the Buddha.

The likelihood that some of the royal images are part of the Theravada artistic tradition, and not merely Mahayanist anomalies, is reinforced by the fact that on a number of these images the Buddha is not fully dressed as a king.37 The figure can be crowned, but otherwise dressed as a monk, not a king. The figure can have a mixture of kingly and a monk’s garb (21). Finally, the figure can be dressed as a king with a monk’s robe underneath (22).

One unusual image of the Buddha in Burma is that with eyes closed (23) or lowered (24), holding a pot in the left hand. With the right hand the forefinger and thumb hold a seed. This image is Bhaisakaguru, the “healing teacher”, or Medicine Buddha often seen in statues in Japan, Tibet and China. Although Bhaisakaguru is basically a Buddha who heals the spirit, many believe him to be capable of healing the sick. The pot holds the water of long life, symbolic of his healing powers.38 Many of these images are uniquely adorned (25).

The leg positions of seated figures are most often padmasana or ardhapadmasana. Sometimes called “full lotus posture”, padmasana is the position in which the legs are crossed at the ankles. The feet rest on opposite thighs and the bottoms of these face up (26). In ardhapadmasana, sometimes called “half lotus posture”, the right leg rests on top of the left. The bottom of the right foot faces up and is visible and the left foot is mostly covered by the right leg. The most common thrones are padmasana,
or lotus throne, in which there is a row of lotus petals, or a double layer (27). Another common throne is the diamond throne, a vajrasana, after a monument commissioned by King Ashoka simulating the place under the bodhi tree where the Buddha reached enlightenment (28). A curving diamond shape of this type of throne is shown in (29), tiered in (30). Variations of this include a footed throne (31) and a latticed throne (32). Other thrones are the sunikasana, or lion throne and the gojasana, or elephant throne (33).

The bases on standing figures are adorned in similar styles to the thrones on seated figures. They are regularly seen, for example, in modified single lotus (34), double lotus (35) and lattice (36).
There are several recognisable styles of Burmese Buddha statues, some associated with historical periods, some with distinguishable ethnic groups. One subtlety that is constantly present to confound those trying to identify the period and dates of these sculptures is the fact that very often a particular style was simply imitated by artists of another era or ethnic group. See, for example, (3), (6) and (39). Styles and eras can also be mixed. See (38). This explains the fact that a number of the dates given for the statues in the photos for this article differ from the dates of the eras in which the styles of the statues correspond.

Of particular historical interest is that of Pagan, because of its influence on all that came later in Burma. The Pagan
style evolved drastically, particularly at the height of the empire, from the 11th to 13th centuries AD. There are a few common characteristics, particularly evident in bronze, but variations are wide, especially in other media. The eyes are half closed, gazining downward. The garment tends to be simple across the shoulder and is less well-defined than in some later styles. The fingers are of different lengths (36). The left hand of the figure in (37) is in boon-granting, benediction or varada mudra. The hair on the head consists of small spiral curls that are in rows. The ears tend to be flat, bend forward slightly, are flat at the bottom and do not touch the shoulder. The nose is somewhat hooked. The finial is an indented bud or is a small flame. It is
placed a little back from the centre of the head. There is no fillet band. There are three creases in the neck 39).

Despite the long history and wide variety of statues that are subsumed under the rubric of Arakan, there are a few stylistic similarities. Arakan, now known as the Rakine State, is the northwest corner of the country and shares a border with Bangladesh. In bronze, the Arakan Buddha statue can be decorated with ear flanges and there can be a straight, thin finial (40). There may be shoulder flanges and a flame finial. In stone, particularly, but also in other media, the shoulders, arms, hands and even legs tend to be large relative to the body. The body, particularly in metal statues, is relatively slender. Metal statues often have plain or simple latticed bases (32). In stone, the figures are generally not crowned but have large, low umishna. One form seen in Arakan and seldom elsewhere is the small stupa housing even smaller Buddhas (41).

The Ava or Inwa style is another connected to historical developments in Burma. The dates of the corresponding historical period are 1365 until 1752 AD, but the style may be seen in later sacred statues. There is a rounded bud finial in the middle of the top of the head, with eyes, often downturned and half closed (42). There is, generally, a smile. Both lips are thin, and of approximately the same size (43). The face and chin, relative to other styles, tends to be round and somewhat flat, as is the forehead. The eyes and eyebrows are relatively far apart (44). There also may be a garment that falls from the shoulder in the direction of the waist with an inverted “v” or split ribbon. The “v” may also be seen in garments of the Pagan style (38) but that in Pagan is usually a little higher up. The fingers, except the thumb, may be of equal length and untapered (this feature can also be seen in Pagan), and the ear is long and the lobe can touch the shoulder. Some features, such as eyebrows, are incised or painted. The curls of the hair are small. There is often a thin fillet band between the forehead and the hair (45). There is generally no umra carved on the figures, but it may be painted on. Particularly in stone, these figures tend to appear rounded, somewhat fatter, compared to other styles (46).

Within the Konbaung period (1752-1885 AD) there were two distinct styles that are widely disbursed geographically in Burma. Again, these styles were also used in later statues. The robe on the Amarapura style is over the left shoulder continuing all the way to the lap in sitting figures. The fingers of the hand are likely to be slightly tapered (47). The finial is in the form of a spike (24). Eyes are rounder than in earlier styles and the lower lip follows the upper in a slight smile (8). The cars touch the shoulders; there is a fillet band and no umra (48).

The predominating style of Burmese Buddhist statue from the 19th century is commonly known as the Mandalay or Yadana period. Crowned images may have elaborate, even spiked crowns (48). Otherwise, the umishna is round, and often low and flat (49). The hair is in tight, barely noticeable rows, often with a wide fillet band and no umra or, if there is a finial it is detachable (50). Wood and lacquer Buddhas in this style are often decorated with coloured glass and gold leaf. The robe over the shoulder is in ruffles and the garments are elaborately folded (14). Fingernails are noticeable. The fingers are of equal lengths, except the thumb. All are tapered (51). Often the car itself does not reach the shoulder and maybe is connected by a small peg.

It is often observed that the ethnic and cultural differences between the various regions that comprise Burma suggest that the country is nothing more that the figment of the imagination of some colonial cartographer. In fact, the subtle similarities between the styles and regions within the country reflect a common art history that transcends the country's regional and historical diversities and that is recognisable in comparison to that of other Buddhist nations.
Notes

1 The Buddha was born Sidhrathum Kamara, a prince, in what was Northeast India at the time and is now Nepal. He is also known as Sakyamuni, the sage of the Sakya clan. At the age of thirty-five he achieved complete enlightenment while meditating under a bodhi tree, after which he was known as the Buddha, the Enlightened or Awakened One. In the Buddhist view there have, over vast ages, been many Buddhas and the one discussed above is known as Guatama Buddha. In this article he will be referred to simply as "the Buddha." According to Buddhology, Guatama Buddha is one of the fourth of five Buddhas to arise in the world cycle known as Bhadda Kappa (kalpa in Sanskrit). The fifth is Arimeteya (Maitreya). “What Buddhism Is, Vipassana Research Association Lecture No. 1,” p. 6. Sao Hun Hmat Win, Director of Research and Scripture, Lectures on Basic Principles of Buddhism and Essentials of Burmese Buddhism, Department of Religious Affairs, Rangoon, 1979, p. 4. May Kyaw and San Lwin, A Pail Myanmar-English Dictionary of the Noble Words of Lord Buddha, Published by U Kyi Soe, Yangon, 2002, p. 264.

2 A few other posts such as visiting, pointing and eating the milk rice, are also seen, though rarely, in Burma.

3 Sao Hun Hmat Win, Director of Research and Scripture, Lectures on Basic Principles of Buddhism and Essentials of Burmese Buddhism, Department of Religious Affairs, Rangoon, 1979, p. 4.


5 In particular, Luce mentioned that touching the earth with the left hand, while common at Sri Ksetra, is rare at Pagan. Ibid., p. 133. Luce, op. cit., Volume 2, p. 143, plates 316, a, b, and c. Also see Sao Hun Hmat Win, Burmese Buddhist Iconography, Department of Religious Affairs, Yangon, 1986, pp. 68–69.


9 It can be the fruit of a rose-apple tree, that of the myrobalan tree or a mango.


12 But see Luce, Plate 141 (f).


14 Than Tha Aung, op. cit., p. 79.

15 Sao Hun Hmat Win, Burmese Buddhist Iconography, op. cit., p. 36.


17 Ibid.


20 Ralph Isaacs and T. Richard Burton, op. cit., p. 31. Glaya astula has also been known as Myeinmara khaun eitaa or muatistan. See also Appendix II.


23 Ibid., p. 2.


26 Rodger, op. cit., p. 18, et seq.

27 Max and Bertha Ferrars, Burma, first published 1901 by Sampson Low, Marston & Co. Ltd, reprinted by AVA Publishing House, Bangkok, 1990, p. 120.

28 As explained above in the description of the lacquer process.


30 Ibid., p. 131.

31 Luce, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 231.

32 Fraser-Lu, Burmese Crafts, op. cit., p. 65.


34 Luce, op. cit., p. 186.


36 Ibid., p. 35.

37 Luce, Vol. 1, op. cit., p. 185.

38 Than Tun, Pindaya, op. cit., pp. 65–76. Mehr Mearthur, Reading Buddhist Art, Thames & Hudson, London, 2002, p. 31. Note that the pot of elixir is also seen with Amritasir.

39 Than Tun, op. cit., p. 25.

40 Chiacelli, Charles F., Buddhist Art, As Illustrated Introduction, Silkscreen Books, Chiang Mai, 2004, pp. 259–261. For the sake of consistency, all of the information in this paragraph has been taken from this source, but it is also presented, with variation, in numerous sources.

41 A few of these, in particular the Mon (see illustration 11, for example), the Pyu and the Shan (see illustrations 2, 8, 20 and 23, for example), have their own rich styles which have evolved throughout history but are beyond the scope of this article. The Pyu as a distinct ethnic group disappeared before the young flower of the Pagan civilization in the 11th century AD. Luce and others have speculated that they were absorbed at approximately that time into the Burman ethnic group, which now accounts for the majority of Burma’s population.

42 Thus, as in some of these examples, the style of the statue and the era in which it was produced can differ. This distinction is made, wherever possible, in the captions to the photos to this article.

43 Than Tun, Buddhist Art and Architecture with Special Reference to Myanmar, op. cit., pp. 17 and 19.


46 Fraser-Lu, Burmese Crafts, op. cit., p. 21.

47 The Amarapura style was seen primarily in the 18th century AD. Min Sithu, op. cit., p. 215.

48 Min Sithu, op. cit., p. 216.

49 Ibid., p. 216.

50 Ibid., pp. 215–220.

Glossary

The following are definitions of a few of the important terms used in the article:

Alabaster: a fine-grained white or light-coloured translucent form of gysum, often streaked or mottled.

Chokarattin: a "turner of the wheel", either a king or a great religious teacher.

Bodhisattva: beings who have deferred enlightenment, often to help other beings toward enlightenment. They are especially revered by Mahayanaists.

Fillet band: ornamental band between the forehead and hair of a statue such as that of the Buddha.

Fimal: term used for the ornamental tip on a spire, spire, church or building.

Mahayana: the "great vehicle", or more popular school of Buddhist doctrine. The sacred language of the Mahayana school is Sanskrit, whereas that of the Theravada school is Pali.

Modra: a Sanskrit word traditionally not strictly accepted by Theravada Buddhists, are the various names for the standard hand-postions of the Buddha expressed in art. Most Burmese are Teravadin, and thus think of Pali, not Sanskrit, as their sacred language, but the term modra is widely used in Burma.

Panininnaza: the moment of the death of the Buddha’s body and his final release from samsara, the endless cycle of suffering.

Theravada: the Buddhist school of the elders, the first of the Buddhist doctrinal schools and that predominate in Burma. In general, the Theravada school is more conservative and artistically austere than the Mahayana school.

Uma: tuft of hair (which can be on a mole) between and above the eyebrows on the forehead. It is a symbol of intelligence.

Uttirishna: lump in the hair at the top of the Buddha’s head, symbolising omniscience.