The Pagan Period in Burma: to what extent did it influence Burmese resistance to the British Empire?

"Valiant, clever, and lovable…they bear no malice and nurse no grievance" was the description of the Ashanti people of tropical Africa after they fell under British rule in 1895.[1] This serves as just one example of a people delighted to be engaging with British diplomats and honoured to be respected by the perceived greatest empire in the world, namely the British Empire. Yet, it could not have been more different in Burma. Although, as in many other colonies, the British initially imposed a system of indirect rule in Burma, British attempts to subjugate the Burmese elite, to remove King Thibaw in order to find a local leader loyal to Britain, and to give authority to local Burmese people over local governance provoked a fierce response. Yet, given that indirect rule was implemented throughout the Empire and often successfully, I would argue that it is lazy to simply attribute Burmese resistance to British failings. Instead, this essay shall examine the influence of the Pagan Kingdom from 1044 to 1287 and of King Alaungpaya from the 18th century, in the emergence of a Burmese sense of identity and nationhood that made their people so determined to achieve autonomy in all forms from the moment of British arrival.

In the words of Burmese-American historian, Michael Aung-Thwin, "without a study of the Pagan period, one's understanding of Burmese society subsequently…is incomplete"[2] on account of the extensive cultural and religious changes, which occurred and united the Burmese race within one nation for the first time.[3] Indeed, the sacking of Hanlin, formerly one of many divided Pyu city states, by the powerful kingdom of Nanchao, which dominated western Yunnan, now in southwest China, introduced a political vacuum. The Burmans exploited this political vacuum, since the Nanchao chose not to settle, developing a strong Pagan Kingdom. This kingdom united the Pagans, Pyus and Mons for the first time but crucially, prompted the emergence of a unique sense of Burmese identity around the Theravada Buddhism of mainland Southeast Asia influenced by features of Hinduism and Brahmanism. Hence, in Beikthano Myo, at the beginning of the Pagan period, a Vaisnava temple, originally constructed by a Tamil merchant for Hindu believers, assumed Theravada Buddhist practices. Indeed, the following inscription both serves to confirm this and to demonstrate some of the key values of the Theravada Buddhist system, which became instilled into the hearts and minds of Burmans, as it stated:

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[1] Sir Francis Fuller, *A Vanished Dynasty - Ashanti* (Routledge, 1968), 229

[2] Michael Aung-Thwin, *Pagan: The Origins of Modern Burma*, JSTOR (Univ of Hawaii Pr; First Edition 1985), 1 https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv9zck80

[3] The Bamar (Burmans) are one of 135 ethnic groups currently recognised by Myanmar's national government.

"I have no regard for merit, none for a heap of wealth, none at all for the enjoyment of lust. Whatever is to happen, let it happen, O God! in accordance with previous action! This alone is to be prayed for and highly valued by me"[4]

Thus, the unforgiving principle of *Kamma* within the Hindu belief system was adapted as a result of Theravadin influence such that it placed a greater emphasis on merit as a reward for morality and accomplishment rather than in the sense of entitlement from status. This is indicated by the fact that "merit" in the first line is included alongside "a heap of wealth", thereby suggesting that moral reward and status cannot be gained from riches but still can for "previous action". This contributed to the failure of the British Empire in Burma, still dominated in the 19th century by Theravada Buddhism, since the British Empire thrived on the basis of a hierarchy developed from wealth and familial relations. This was in conflict with the Burmese system of hierarchy, which permeated Burmese social, political and religious systems by the 19th century and was influenced by "previous action". Thus, the British experienced great difficulty in establishing indirect rule in Burma as British-appointed local government leaders, of Burmese heritage, could not secure respect for themselves, as they had not reached their position on account of "previous action", and by extension, could not secure respect for British rule. This was in contrast to British colonies, such as Nigeria, which had been invaded by Britain at a similar time, and in the north of which, a successful system of indirect rule had been created since the Islamic emirs already had a hierarchical system, which could be neatly combined with the British imperial hierarchy in Nigeria. Yet, not just were British officials in Burma not worthy of their position on account of a lack of merit but they were also not engaged in merit sharing, which was an additional principle of Theravada Buddhism and continued to influence Burma into the 19th century. Indeed, Theravada doctrine stated that an individual of royal stature should select "all creatures" as co-beneficiaries of their merit, in practical terms meaning the redistribution of money, land and labour to all subjects.[5] It was thus contingent upon upright rulers, with the greatest merit and the capacity to accrue more merit, to secure salvation for their people by granting them sufficient merit. Indeed, this principle was beautifully outlined by King Alon-cañsū in his twelfth-century prayer:

"…I would make my body a bridge athwart
The river of Samara, and all folk
Would speed across thereby until they reach
The Blessed City. I myself would cross
And drag the drowning over…"[6]

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[4] Michael Aung-Thwin, *Pagan: The Origins of Modern Burma*, JSTOR (Univ of Hawaii Pr; First Edition 1985), 34, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv9zck80
[5] Michael Aung-Thwin, *Pagan: The Origins of Modern Burma*, JSTOR (Univ of Hawaii Pr; First Edition 1985), 46, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv9zck80
[6] Michael Aung-Thwin, *Pagan: The Origins of Modern Burma*, JSTOR (Univ of Hawaii Pr; First Edition 1985), 48, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv9zck80

In practical terms, British officials did not make their "body a bridge" as they first removed Thibaw as King in 1885 due to their concern that he was collaborating with other Empires and giving them access to Burmese goods, thereby undermining the primary British aim of obtaining commercial gain from Burma. Their removal of the rightful king, who had, in the view of the majority of Burmans, the greatest merit, provoked fierce opposition from Burmans, to which the British responded through a brutal system of burning villages and shooting Burmese dacoits. This action compounded Burmese opposition as it did not conform to the concept of merit sharing since the British chose to destroy land rather than redistribute it. Additionally, since the British showed little respect for Burmese religion and regarded Burmans as "guileless", "gay, careless [and] lighthearted", they were unable to win over the hearts and minds of Burmans to British rule.[7] Once peace had been secured, the British further violated the principles of Theravada Buddhism as they imposed an income tax, which was more intrusive than the previous Burmese levy on property. The British, in a further violation of Burmese religious principles, extracted and shipped away their coveted mineral resources, since, in the words of historian Robert Turrell, "Upper Burma was annexed for British commerce".[8] Therefore, this failure to redistribute the saltpetre, teak, ivory, cotton and ruby gemstones amongst other resources, which were sourced from Burma, further contributed to Burmese opposition to British control. The British also failed to redistribute the animals of Burma, as accurately foreseen in 1885 by a representative of the Sangha, the education system of Burma. Indeed, this representative wrote:

> "If foreigners are to rule Burma, it will cause many terrestrial animals to be killed and destroyed. The reason is that western foreigners are the type of people who have appetite for enormous quantities of meat. If they arrive in Burma, they will set up killing factories of cows, of pigs, of goats, where so many such creatures will meet their death"[9]

Yet, beyond the British violation of religious principles with their destruction of the Burmese economic system, British avarice in Burma also directly destroyed the economic system, which had operated in Burma since the centralisation of resources in the Pagan period. Indeed, in the Pagan era, Burma was divided into the circle (khwan), town/fortress (mriuw) and the village (rwā), enabling the system of the fief, by which the aforementioned redistribution of land and labour was achieved but also by which economic revenue was respectfully obtained. Burmans felt attached to this economic structure as central

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[7] Kwasi Kwarteng, *Ghosts of Empire: Britain's Legacies in the Modern World* (Bloomsbury, 2012)

[8] Anthony Webster, *Business and Empire: A Reassessment of the British Conquest of Burma in 1885*, The Historical Journal, Volume 43, Issue 4, JSTOR (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1012 https://www.jstor.org/stable/3020877

[9] Tobiasz Targosz and Zuzanna Sławik, *Burmese Culture During the Colonial Period in the Years 1885-1931: The World of Burmese Values in Reaction to the Inclusion of Colonialism*, Politeja, no.44, JSTOR (Księgarnia Akademicka Publishing, 2016), 292 https://www.jstor.org/stable/24920307

coordination ensured the consistent irrigation of lands and a relatively stable supply and price of essential goods. However, when the British arrived in Burma with a view to commercial gain, "in the rice districts, the source of almost all this wealth, nearly half the land [was] owned by foreigners, and a landless people [could] show little for their labour but their debts, and, for about half the year, most of them [were] unable to find work or wages".[10] The British disrespect for the quality of life of Burmans as they deconstructed the fief system of the Pagan period, for the purpose of a more efficient farming system and greater exports angered many Burmans. Employment in urban areas was also highly limited for Burmans as available work in large-scale enterprises, the civil service and jails was predominantly taken by Indians. Indeed, the resulting hunger and desperation of many Burmans, which became most extreme in the final decade of British rule, encouraged them to express their objection to Britain's destruction of Burmese religion, customs and the Burmese economy and to engage in direct action against the British. In this hardship, Burmans became more aware of and more angered by the shortcomings of Western capitalism, which they associated with significant inequality and market failures. For instance, although predating the British invasion, Burmans grew more frustrated by the absence of a functioning sewage system in Burma such that "the Irrawaddy died the ocean brick-red a hundred miles out to sea" with "the most disgusting filth piled up in heaps or fermenting in pools at their very doors".[11]

Alongside the economic decisions made by the British which disregarded Theravadin Buddhist doctrine and the fief system, the British most acutely disrespected Burmese religion through destroying the aforementioned Sangha, a legacy of the Pagan era. The Sangha's religious environment and teaching was viewed by Burmans as the natural environment for scholarly work. However, the British appointed secular teachers to the monasteries and further undermined the Sangha by establishing an education system designed to convert Burmans to Christianity. Indeed, one missionary wrote with conviction and distaste for Buddhism, "God is with us, tyranny and the Buddhism are a dying monster" as the British aimed "to preach the Gospel among nations, to dispell [sic] the darkness that still pervades so large a portion of the globe, to spread abroad the light of Christian truth". The British thus failed to provide an education "consistent with the tenets of Buddhism", which had united Burmans since the Pagan period. Ultimately, in the face of opposition, Sir Arthur Phayre's reform was reversed in 1924 and the majority of Burman children returned to the monasteries for education.[12] Yet, this did not subdue Burmans' opposition to the

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[10] Ian Brown, *Tracing Burma's Economic Failure to Its Colonial Inheritance*, The Business History Review, Volume 85, Issue 4, JSTOR (Cambridge University Press, Winter 2011), 728 https://www.jstor.org/stable/23239422?seq=1

[11] Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire, 1781-1997* (Vintage, 2010)

[12] Tobiasz Targosz and Zuzanna Sławik, *Burmese Culture During the Colonial Period in the Years 1885-1931: The World of Burmese Values in Reaction to the Inclusion of Colonialism*, Politeja, no.44, JSTOR (Księgarnia Akademicka Publishing, 2016), 295 https://www.jstor.org/stable/24920307

British and explains how the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA), founded in 1906, gained support and became the first organised threat to British rule since the deposition of Thibaw. Many Burmans felt unforgiving towards the British, who had overlooked their customs and education system, practised since 11th century Pagan times. However, after 1924, a large proportion of the Burman elite continued to educate their children in British schools, which continued to operate in Burma. These schools thus reduced the influence of Theravada Buddhism on the next generation of Burmese leaders and caused greater distaste amongst poorer Burmans towards the British since the commitment of future leaders to principles, such as merit, was greatly diminished. Fundamentally, with regard to both Christianity and other British impositions on Pagan traditions, Burmans viewed the British as "intolerant, arrogant and absolutist".[13]

In conjunction with the development of culture and a sense of national identity, the Pagan period also created a sense of cohesion within Burma with the establishment of a unifying legal system, albeit one that obligated citizens of a lower social status to pay a larger fine. Indeed, the Shwe Myañ Dhammathat, a treatise on the law, stipulated, "if a man, free born and of a respectable state in life, kills a poor man, he must pay the price of ten kywan; and the fine is the same in [the] case [of] a poor man who kills a *kywan*: but if he kills a person superior to himself, he must pay the value of fifteen kywan".[14] Those of a lower social status accepted this legal structure because it was influenced by Theravadin Buddhist beliefs in merit and because its judgements also recognised one's social position. Indeed, Pagan law declared, "if the offender does not possess…[the] amount, then the fine inflicted shall be proportional to his means…if a man were hungry there shall be no fault in his eating fruits and other things".[15] Thus, the British destruction of this traditional legal system, closely linked to Theravada Buddhism, and the imposition of lay law, in the form of English Common Law, can also explain the development of resistance to British rule. British law was unvarying and impartial in all circumstances, giving less consideration to the position of the poor when administering justice, with equal fines for all and so further deepening the poor's resentment towards the British. Fundamentally, the lack of divine authority behind British rule and law reduced support and respect for British presence.

After the Pagans, the next unifying ruler of Burma was a rather obscure village chief, Alaungpaya, who in 1752 launched a successful rebellion against the King of the Mon people

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[13] Tobiasz Targosz and Zuzanna Sławik, *Burmese Culture During the Colonial Period in the Years 1885-1931: The World of Burmese Values in Reaction to the Inclusion of Colonialism*, Politeja, no.44, JSTOR (Księgarnia Akademicka Publishing, 2016), 290-1 https://www.jstor.org/stable/24920307

[14] Michael Aung-Thwin, *Pagan: The Origins of Modern Burma*, JSTOR (Univ of Hawaii Pr; First Edition 1985), 124 https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv9zck80

[15] Michael Aung-Thwin, *Pagan: The Origins of Modern Burma*, JSTOR (Univ of Hawaii Pr; First Edition 1985), 125 https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv9zck80

and founded the Konbaung Dynasty, of which the aforementioned King Thibaw was a member. Alaungpaya can thus be viewed as another reason for Burmese resistance to the British Empire as Burmans became loyal to his Dynasty such that commitment to King Thibaw can not just be attributed to Buddhist conceptions of kingship but can also be linked to the personal appeal of kings of the Konbaung Dynasty, "semi-Divine" figures, in the words of Lewis McIver MP.[16] One of the core means by which Alaungpaya secured unity and gained appeal was through his links to religion with his name, which he gave himself at the beginning of his reign, meaning 'embryo Buddha'. Accounts of his highly spiritual life and many miraculous actions spread while his military success, analysed below, strengthened perceptions amongst Burmans of associations between Alaungpaya and the historical Buddha, whom Theravada Buddhists greatly revered.[17] Indeed, according to *Alaung Mintaya Ayeidawboun*, the primary contemporary depiction of Alaungpaya's reign, written by Letwè Nawratha, one of his close advisors, Alaungpaya was destined for greatness from his youth. Nawratha portrayed his exemplary leadership and immense commitment to the five precepts of Theravada Buddhism, and this portrayal was supported by *Michael Symes' Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava* from 1795, in which he declared:

> "there was a dignity in [Alaungpaya's] deportment that became his high station"[18]

One area of administration in which Alaungpaya demonstrated great capability was in relation to the military, with Alaungpaya's immense influence still evident as a giant statue of him stands on the military parade grounds in Myanmar's capital Naypyidaw. Indeed, Alaungpaya first united Burma under his rule by driving the Mons out of Burma as he seized Ava in 1753, overwhelmed a strong army under Binnya Dala in 1754 before seizing Dagon, site of the revered Shwedagon Pagoda, Syriam, a major trading port, and Pegu, capital of the Mon kingdom, from the Mons between 1755 and 1757.[19] This impressive military advance coupled with preserving his kingdom as he suppressed Mon uprisings and achieved stability, convinced Burmans that Alaungpaya was the rightful king, whose success could only be explained by the accumulation of substantial merit in his current and former lives. Alaungpaya's military talents were recognised by the British as Dodley's Annual Register stated that Alaungpaya was one of "those bold and adventurous spirits that occasionally are

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[16] Kwasi Kwarteng, *Ghosts of Empire: Britain's Legacies in the Modern World* (Bloomsbury, 2012)

[17] Alaungpaya Dynasty, Britannica https://www.britannica.com/topic/Alaungpaya-Dynasty

[18] An account of an embassy to the kingdom of Ava sent by the Governor-General of India, in the year 1795 / By Michael Symes, Wellcome Collection (London: Printed by W. Bulmer and Co., and sold by G. and W. Nicol and by J. Wright, 1800), 52
https://wellcomecollection.org/works/m3jvvu5e

[19] Konbaung Kingdom - Alauangpaya amd His Sons, Global Security
https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/myanmar/history-konbaung-1.htm

to be found in the Eastern as well as Western hemisphere of the globe" and whose "military talents…rescued his countrymen from the foreign yoke". Crucially, this success thus instilled military pride in many Burmans.[20] Such military pride was augmented in November 1885 with the brave Burmese resistance to the British during the Third Anglo-Burmese War, as indicated in the House of Commons by Henry Richard, ardent pacifist and anti-imperialist Liberal MP for Merthyr Tydfil, who declared, "we are told [the Third Anglo-Burmese War] would only be £300,000. But we always begin our wars with very modest demands".[21] Thus, the British decision to "disarm and disband", on 1st January 1886, the millenium-old Royal Burmese Armed Forces, originating from the Pagan Kingdom and developed most rapidly under the Konbaung Dynasty, contributed to the many years of insurrection.[22] The military advances under Alaungpaya, prompting the expansion of the army under Thibaw to one with approximately 15,650 men, developed a military body, which many Burmans valued highly, and thus its abolition as part of the British deconstruction of the Burman state caused particular ire.[23]

Further to the legal reforms of the Pagan period, the poor gained an increased consideration within the legal system during Alaungpaya's reign as magistrates were "appointed from among the laymen and the business of courts of Justice…conducted by professional advocates, and not, as in the Mohammedan courts, by the parties themselves. [Alaungpaya] however introduced from the latter the great improvement of transacting all judicial business in open court". This depiction by Baron Henry Brougham, who re-edited Symes' Account, is in stark contrast to both the harsh and unadaptable nature of British Common Law discussed above and the condescending view of Burmans held by British officials as one wrote:

> "the fact of a Burman becoming a policeman is prima facile evidence that he is an inferior man of his class; he must be more or less idle, thriftless, wanting in energy and manly independence if he quit the illimitable field for private industry"[24]

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[20] Jacques P. Leider, *Alaungmintaya - King of Myanmar (1752-60). Representations in Burmese and Western historiography*, Aséanie 33 (AbeBooks, 2014), 19 https://www.persee.fr/doc/asean_0859-9009_2014_num_33_1_2317

[21] Kwasi Kwarteng, *Ghosts of Empire: Britain's Legacies in the Modern World* (Bloomsbury, 2012)

[22] Kwasi Kwarteng, *Ghosts of Empire: Britain's Legacies in the Modern World* (Bloomsbury, 2012)

[23] Amitava Mukherjee, *King Thibaw and Upper Burma: A Review*, Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, Volume 72, Part 2 (Indian History Congress, 2011), 1039 https://www.jstor.org/stable/44145715

[24] Janell Ann Nilsson, The Administration of British Burma 1852-1885, School of Oriental and African Studies (ProQuest, 2018), 253 https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/33532/1/11010282.pdf

Moreover, the legal reforms under Alaungpaya, regarding the involvement of the poor in the legal system, were not maintained under British rule since few Native judges were employed with very limited powers. This therefore contributed to Burmese resistance to the British Empire as both the fundamental religious tenets of the legal system along with more recent reforms, valued by the poor, were both destroyed.

Alongside Theravada Buddhism, the growth of academia in both arts and sciences, especially under the reign of Alaungpaya, further contributed to a sense of national cohesion and identity. This was broken by the British and thus provoked a negative response. Indeed, the aforementioned Michael Symes, in his *Account*, emphasised Alaungpaya's long-lasting influence over the artistic and scientific development of Burma,

> "Considering the limited progress that the Birmans [sic] had yet made, in arts that refine, and science that tends to expand the human mind, Alompra [Alaungpaya], whether viewed in the light of a politician, or soldier, is undoubtedly entitled to respect…had his life been prolonged, it is probable, that his country would at this day have been farther advanced in natural refinement, and the liberal arts"[25]

Symes was alluding to the development of theatres and cultural institutions, which grew alongside a comparatively high adult male literacy rate in Burma for the era, with half of all males and 5% of females literate during the reign of Alaungpaya.[26] Alaungpaya's reforms can also be linked to the Sudhamma Reformation, led by his son, Bodawpaya, who strengthened Theravada Buddhism as he increased religious discipline within the Sangha. Bodawpaya also recognised Theravada Buddhism as the only Buddhist sect in Burma and supported monks as they destroyed rival monastic sects, thereby affirming Theravada domination over the education system and Burmese society as a whole. As part of the intellectual growth of Burma, Alaungpaya encouraged the importation and translation of Sanskrit texts with 236 introduced to Burma and with "fifty-eight focused on astrology, fifty-six on grammar, twenty-five on medicine, twenty-three on logic, eight on law and the remainder on miscellaneous topics, from dictionaries to treatises on elephants".[27] Thus, the British destruction of the Burman educational system was felt keenly by Burmans both on account of the Buddhist foundation to education from the Pagan Kingdom and on account of the Konbaung reforms. These reforms augmented the influence of Theravada Buddhism and

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[25]Jacques P. Leider, *Alaungmintaya - King of Myanmar (1752-60). Representations in Burmese and Western historiography*, Aséanie 33 (AbeBooks, 2014), 18/19 https://www.persee.fr/doc/asean_0859-9009_2014_num_33_1_2317

[26] Victor B. Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c.800-1830*, volume 1, Integration on the Mainland (Cambridge University Press, 2003)

[27] Michael W. Charney, *Literary Culture on the Burma-Manipur Frontier in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, The Medieval History Journal (SAGE, 2011), https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/2793998.pdf

linked academia even more closely to religion as the patronage and power of Konbaung kings prompted the import of texts, developments to the Sangha and hence enabled the intellectual growth of Burma. Burmese arts and sciences also declined as the absence of a Burmese monarch resulted in Burmans losing access to academic works from other Asian nations, since any academia which the British obtained was returned to the mother country. Additionally, under British rule, only one public library operated with a very limited annual budget of £10, a clear decline from the intellectual height of the Konbaung Dynasty, to which many Burmans were attached because of the benefits which it brought to all classes of Burmese society.[28] Meanwhile, the British removed patronage for theatre and arts and created competition in the theatre industry from Chinese and Indian performers as migration of these ethnic groups into Burma rapidly grew after the British invasion of 1885. This most acutely affected Burma's puppet theatre, which gained national importance in the 19th century during Alaungpaya's reign and which Burmans treasured as evidenced by the expression *thi'ta hmau*, which was first used to describe a puppeteer's ability to take a puppet out of a box but came to mean trustworthy, demonstrating the esteem with which puppeteers were regarded.[29] "No other people in the world enjoy theatrical performances more than Burmese" and particularly puppet theatre together with academic institutions involved in the import of academic works closely associated with traditional religious values were both supported by the King. Their decline contributed to Burmese anger at the removal of King Thibaw maintaining momentum for a protracted period thereafter.[30] Indeed, such anger surrounding cultural destruction was by no means limited to the wealthy, with the poor both well educated and literate, as a consequence of the Sangha, as outlined above.

Burma's resistance to the British Empire was, as has been indicated, "a passion of insurrection, a very fury of rebellion against the usurping foreigners" and this essay has sought to understand the underlying reasons why such fury developed.[31] Although the removal of King Thibaw by the British was undoubtedly a reckless mistake, for aforementioned cultural and religious reasons, it is hard to imagine a situation in which Thibaw, the Burman with the greatest merit, could have stayed as King without full autonomy without provoking a negative reaction from the Burmese people. Saya San, an obscure former Buddhist monk in his early 40s, who at about 11:30 in the morning on 28th

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[28] Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire, 1781-1997* (Vintage, 2010)

[29] Tobiasz Targosz and Zuzanna Sławik, *Burmese Culture During the Colonial Period in the Years 1885-1931: The World of Burmese Values in Reaction to the Inclusion of Colonialism*, Politeja, no.44, JSTOR (Księgarnia Akademicka Publishing, 2016), 288 https://www.jstor.org/stable/24920307

[30] Tobiasz Targosz and Zuzanna Sławik, *Burmese Culture During the Colonial Period in the Years 1885-1931: The World of Burmese Values in Reaction to the Inclusion of Colonialism*, Politeja, no.44, JSTOR (Księgarnia Akademicka Publishing, 2016), 288 https://www.jstor.org/stable/24920307

[31] Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire, 1781-1997* (Vintage, 2010)

October 1930, declared himself King of Burma in a failed revolution, once said, “the heretics took away King Thibaw by force and robbed him of Burma. They have ruined our race and religion and now they have the effrontery to call us rebels”.[32] Thus, San himself acknowledged that Thibaw’s influence was closely linked to the Burmans’ national identity and religion, which originated from the Pagan Kingdom, in which the Mons were driven out and Burmans were united around the principles of Theravada Buddhism. Therefore, Burmese resistance was not solely provoked by the removal of Thibaw but was also stimulated by the British failure “to conserve, not to destroy, their social organism, to preserve the best element of their national life; by the maintenance of peace and order, to advance the well-being of the Burmese people”, as recognised by Henry Thirkell White, Lieutenant Governor of Burma between 1905 and 1910, in his 1913 book *A Civil Servant in Burma*.[33] Fundamentally, in relation to this social organism, although Burmese military pride and attachment to arts and theatre undoubtedly originated from the Konbaung Dynasty, this essay has endeavoured to demonstrate how the primary sense of national identity and life surrounding Buddhism and by extension, the Sangha, the economic structures and the legal system of Burma developed during the Pagan period and was preserved by these institutions until the 19th century. Therefore, it was the Pagan Kingdom of medieval Burma, which most greatly influenced Burmese resistance to the British Empire such that in response to British arrival and continued British presence, Burmese people bore so much malice and nursed rather a lot of grievance beyond that of many other colonists and in direct contrast to the Ashanti.

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Dermot Christmas

[32] Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire, 1781-1997* (Vintage, 2010)

[33] Kwasi Kwarteng, *Ghosts of Empire: Britain’s Legacies in the Modern World* (Bloomsbury, 2012)

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