

Burmese Art and Architecture have been smothered for years by a cloud of indifference and unconsciousness on the part of the British and Burmese public and officials. Through the initial action of Lord Curzon, a good deal has been done to safeguard these objects, but nothing has been done since Sir Henry Yule wrote his "Mission to the Court of Ava" in 1855, to dispel the public ignorance that exists as to the nature, the intellectual and artistic value of Burmese buildings.

So much has this spirit of "What, can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" been prevalent, that very few people are aware of the existence of a wonderful series of Burmese semi-religious buildings contemporaneous in date with the Great Temples of the 11th and 12th centuries.

I refer to the monasteries large and small, simple and complex, that are grouped in large numbers in and around Pagan. These monasteries are in themselves quite a complete study and reveal much that is not disclosed by the study of the Temples alone. The free manner in which the plan and arrangements were varied, according to the special needs of each case, is most marked, and shows that the Burmese were not slavish copyists of accepted forms and features, where the religious rules permitted freedom. In addition to this versatile spirit, the mastery of considerable architectural problems is revealed in the magnificent scale of the larger monasteries, which is quite startling to the average person who believes that the priest or *phongyi* never lived in anything better than a ruined wooden *kyaung*.

An average example of one of these monasteries would approximate to the size of the Keep to a Norman Castle, the Burmese buildings having large vaulted halls and passages two storeys in height, reached by staircases arranged in the thickness of the walls. The whole was finished with plaster enrichments, *terra-cotta* enamels and frescoes, all of which seem to have been of a higher artistic excellence than much of what was attempted by the Normans. The Burmese carried out massive vaulting on the

lower and upper floor levels without difficulty and disposed of the great thrusts of vaults which provided difficult problems for the Gothic builders. The arch in all its forms, circular, pointed and flat was well known and constantly used, while in India the arch at this period was unknown and only the circular arch was in use in Europe. The exterior treatment was refined, well balanced, and worthy to take a distinguished place among the achievements of the past. Thus it appears that the affluence of that Burmese period was doubtless much in advance of any culture the East then knew or that has since been known in Burma. All this we shall see portrayed even in the dwellings of such renowned ascetics as the Buddhist Monk. Of the many types of these monasteries, there are clearly defined groups showing distinct stages of development, and I propose to describe these now in sequence.

Plate 1. This is the simplest and most elementary form. A square building containing one apartment downstairs and one upstairs, and vaulted with plain pointed vaults springing from one central pier. This pier contained a small cell on the first floor. Attached to the entrance front or main facade was a large square platform covered by a triple gable wood roof, and supported by rows of wood posts. This external feature is confirmed in several instances by the remains left of the lines of the roof on the wall, and the stone sockets for the upright posts carrying the roof which yet remain on the platform. The main shrine in this type of monastery was outside the building in this open porch, and formed the central feature of this facade in an elliptical recess on the central axis, with a door on each side leading to the building, the three features being enriched with small pilasters and flame *pediments*. In the later types the shrine or image is placed inside the monastery. In general effect these buildings were well handled. Two of these monasteries were grouped together about 50 feet apart and enclosed with the usual bold fence wall. The main walls were battered, i.e., sloped inwards, and finished with a main cornice, angle pilasters and strongly marked *plinth*; all these

* Delivered at an Ordinary Meeting at Rangoon College on 6th February, 1920.

features are well proportioned and divide the main masses in excellent taste. The narrow and tall nature of the building is accentuated and made a pleasing profile by the tapering effect produced by the batter of the walls.

Stone Enrichments: Stone is employed to some degree. The angle enrichments to the cornices, the gargoyles and quatrefoil windows to the upper floor are executed in stone. The latter feature shows how well acquainted the Burmese were in handling this material.

Plate 2. The next type found at Dayinpatto was a larger edition of the foregoing, but with many more exterior embellishments, so that, without consulting the plan, the relation to the first type would not be so clear. The main differences of plan are the addition of a central cell and three large bays or recesses on the axis of three walls. The latter was turned to great account as an architectural feature of the elevation, and ranks with anything produced in the Renaissance period for the restraint, the balance of parts and general scholarly treatment. There are no first floor rooms but it is crowned by a central tower with a turret of bold and pleasing Chinese character. The intermediate angles of each recessed surface on the tower, central turret and four angle turrets, have an outward batter which gives a wonderful effect in suggesting force and a visible life to the design.

Plate 3. The third instance of this series near Upali Thein was almost similar in exterior appearance, but is a much larger structure with a first floor storey. The plan however, is entirely different, providing eight priests' cells in addition to the central cell, which may have contained an image. These cells are arranged around three sides of the processional passage around the central cell, the main entrance hall occupying the fourth side. This example shows resource in planning, and is a dignified design entirely free from all suggestion or features of the Pagoda or temple, and expressing its purpose as a residence of affluence and importance. If one can conceive its original form and finish the structure, it would have reflected a cultured taste several centuries in advance of anything produced in Europe at this period.

Plate 4. The next group of monasteries for consideration is found at Tamani. They reflect a great advance and growth in the requirements of

the religious order, partaking more of the nature of a Buddhist University. As previously noticed the practice of grouping the monastic buildings together, *within one enclosure, is again seen in this instance*, but with the difference that one building is constructed purely for devotional studies and uses, while the other appears to fulfil the needs of the school and college with its students and probationers. In the first-named building the shrine or image chamber now takes a very important place at the west end, being of large dimensions and two storeys in height with images on both floors. Around this chamber is the usual processional corridor which is very lofty and vaulted. Attached to the east end of this Buddhist Chapel are the monks' cells arranged around a great central hall, but the head monk or archbishop appears to have been provided with a special apartment on the other side of the chapel on the main axis of the building. Another instance of this type of plan occurs at the village of Minnanthu (Plate 5), where the great vaulted hall and cells are carried up and repeat the same scheme on the upper level—while in this instance only the shrine and corridor are carried up as a great tower. This, by the way, finally disposes of Captain Yate's statement that "Any person to occupy a floor over one's head would be felt as an intense degradation, and that there is no such thing as a two-storey dwelling in the country."

Now, to return to those college buildings. The second block or wing (Plate 6) is placed on the south of the chapel block about 30 feet apart and contains two central halls, one large hall 55 feet long and 36 feet wide, and one 36 feet square hall. On the north and south sides of these halls are arranged the monks' cells with a separate passage from the main hall to the outside between each cell.

It is only possible to conjecture what the original use of the building was. It is evident, however, that it was designed for accommodating large numbers, and ample provision is made for easy ingress and egress. This is evidenced by the numerous passages and doorways from and between the halls and double staircases at the vestibule. From this indication and from the known fact that the priests were the only channels of education and maintained religious schools and colleges, as they do to-day, it can be reasonably inferred that this building was a wing

devoted to the educational side of the priests' life. It is unlikely that these halls were employed for ordination as they are far too open to public access, and the presence of the priests' living cells is against it. The staircases arranged on both sides of and off the main porch are quite what we should expect in European buildings, and not in Eastern buildings, where they are generally relegated to some odd and out of the way corner. These stairs led to the first floor level, which appears to have existed over the square hall only. The exterior design of this building was most successful and direct. The oblong building is treated with a pedestal, plinth pilasters, cornices and parapets, on good classical lines, while the upper floor is set back and forms a kind of "Attic." The whole facade forms the restful setting for the projecting pyramidal central porch, giving the keynote of richness and national spirit to the composition.

Plate 7. The last type of monastery is the largest and combines the arrangements of the last two buildings in one. This example is found near the temple of Apeyatana and marks a climax in coherent and articulate planning, which throughout is such a marked characteristic of Burmese construction. The outline of the building is an exact square broken on its east and west sides by the projecting entrance hall and chapel respectively. A great central hall about 45 feet square is the main apartment with cells and exit passages around the north and south sides and angles. A staircase with its tower occupies the south-east angle and evidently only led to the flat roof which was of wood and has disappeared. But the shrine chamber was carried up to the roof level and a similar shrine and image appear here, which was finished externally as a central western tower to the west facade. All the arches to the windows and most of the doors are flat arches with radiating voussoirs beautifully finished. This form of arch was well known to the Burmese, as it appears in many other buildings, and is freely used as a relieving arch. This is a remarkable thing, as it is very doubtful and improbable that this refinement of the arch principle was even known to any nation in Europe at this period of history. Now I decline to attempt to trace the prototypes of these buildings, as it would require an extensive knowledge of the early Indian and Chinese buildings before any-

thing conclusive could be reached. But I have observed the very close similarity between the Indian rock-cut Vihara caves at Ajanta and the last monastery near the Apeyatana. A series of these are illustrated in Fergusson's History of Arch. The examples described as caves Nos. 2, 3 and 16 are almost replicas of this Burmese example as far as the plan is considered, with the exception that in the rock-cut halls there was no need for the numerous side exits, and the entrance took the form of a long portico rather than a square entrance hall. The interior effect of these rock-cut examples with their massive stone columns and heavy entablatures and ceiling were undoubtedly very far removed from the effect produced by the Burmese buildings. This goes to show that the procedure conventions and religious system of the Indian Buddhists were faithfully adhered to as far as it could be conveyed by written rules, and we see the established precedents of religion reflected in the arrangements of the plan, but the way in which the plan has been clothed by the Burmese is entirely national and peculiar to the race. Having given some outline of a few of the types of the monasteries I was fortunate to come across in my brief visit to Pagan, I now propose to describe a few of the minor parts. The *phongyi* or priest's cell is an apartment common to all these buildings and seldom varied much. This was an apartment about 8 feet or 10 feet square placed on an outside wall, vaulted with a plain intersecting pointed vault. The external wall contained one window often filled and divided up into squares with brick mullions and bars, or finished with a wood open frame of the same character. The two side walls contained niches generally arranged with two in one wall and one in the other—the entrance door being on the internal end, which was also of wood. On careful inspection of all the cells the old beam holes of an upper floor still remain. This doubtless formed the monk's sleeping apartment and could be reached by a bamboo ladder. Light was often admitted by small spy holes through the wall. All the wall surfaces were properly plastered and were finished with very plain frescoes consisting chiefly of black and gold lines cutting the wall surface up into panels and marking the cornices and skirting lines, and picking out the niches with ogee shaped arch heads. The whole effect

was most refined and well lighted, making living rooms that would not be despised to-day.

I should be unworthy of my subject if I left it without some reference to the cardinal and national feature of Burmese Architecture; I refer to what has been described as the Flame Pediment or Gable which is employed both as a structural form and decorative feature to doors, windows, porches, gables and in every conceivable position where its character could be displayed to some artistic advantage. Its form and composition is probably too well known to need any description from me. Its astonishingly unusual character expressed through the medium of brick or stone has formed the subject of wide speculation and conjecture, without ever reaching any reasonable or satisfactory solution as to what brought it into being as a pronounced national feature. This question was constantly before me during my stay in Pagan and much that I saw there led me to what appears as a very reasonable solution. In studying the broad issues of each national style of architecture there is always one condition which inevitably shaped its characteristics in one certain set direction. That was the character of the building material each nation was forced to use. To take a few instances—the Egyptians had to depend upon reeds and Nile mud for their early buildings, and this necessity produced the great sloping expanses of wall surface, the peculiar cornices, the reeded columns, and almost every detail that attracts the eye. The Assyrians had no timber or stone, and perforce the brick was evolved, with all its possibilities in arches, domes and so on. The Greeks employed timber and we see the resulting post and lintel and finally the column and entablature in marble. The Romans discovered the use of concrete and spanned enormous spaces with the dome, and were enabled to take the greatest stride in engineering the world has ever known. Examples could be continued thus with almost every nation. Now with this clue to work upon, an examination of the earliest building materials employed in Burma or China, their original home, should furnish some data—but the difficulty here is that in the majority of cases these materials were of a perishable nature and nothing is left to us. However, sculptures, frescoes, carving and the like come to the rescue and

supply the missing evidence. From sketches of certain examples of frescoes and sculptures, that now exist in Pagan, it can be fairly established that this original building material was the palm tree, possibly in combination with timber and the bamboo. In several frescoes in a triple temple at Minanthu (Plate 8) are bold and clear drawings of this early type of construction, showing that the great stems of the large palm leaf were used in the construction of the angles of building and gave the concave curve so closely associated with Mongolian forms. In the use of these palm stalks the leaves were left on as a decorative feature and adorned every angle, gable and doorway with a fine bold and flame-like feature. The drawing shows a fine example of a tower of more markedly Mongolian type than anything usually associated with Burmese work and the palm leaf angles and gables are so unmistakable in their representation that it leaves little room for doubt as to the correctness of this theory. No form in wood could ever be practically executed in the manner shewn, but it will be observed how much it was modified when in later times wood was employed for this feature, until finally this again was represented in the brick and stone conventional lines seen to-day at Pagan. An example of this feature after it had attained a wooden form will be seen well represented in a sculpture group at the Ananda (Plate 8). This shows the palm leaf already subdued, but the curved form of the walls are still retained, although the wood was used in beams and up-rights as are clearly shewn. The scroll form below the palm leaf or flame was derived from this form of ornament which always appears carved on the large boards of wood buildings even to-day. This scroll ornament was one of the symbols of Buddhism, used before the image of Buddha was introduced by the Greeks. It forms the shield of the Trident.

In bringing my remarks to a close, I wish to express my indebtedness to Professor Ward and Professor Luce, whose enthusiasm in this neglected cause was inspiring, and through their wide knowledge and guidance I was enabled to gain some grasp of the extent and vast fund of information and history that lies at Pagan.

W. BRANTON SINCLAIR.



Fig . 1.



Fig . 2.



Fig . 4.



Fig . 3.

Fig. 1. and 2. Dayinopate Monastery. See Plate 2.

Fig. 3. A Monastery N-W. of Upali Thein.

Fig. 4. Monastery S. of Apeyatana. See Plate 7.

Fig. 5. A plain leaf pediment.



Fig . 5.

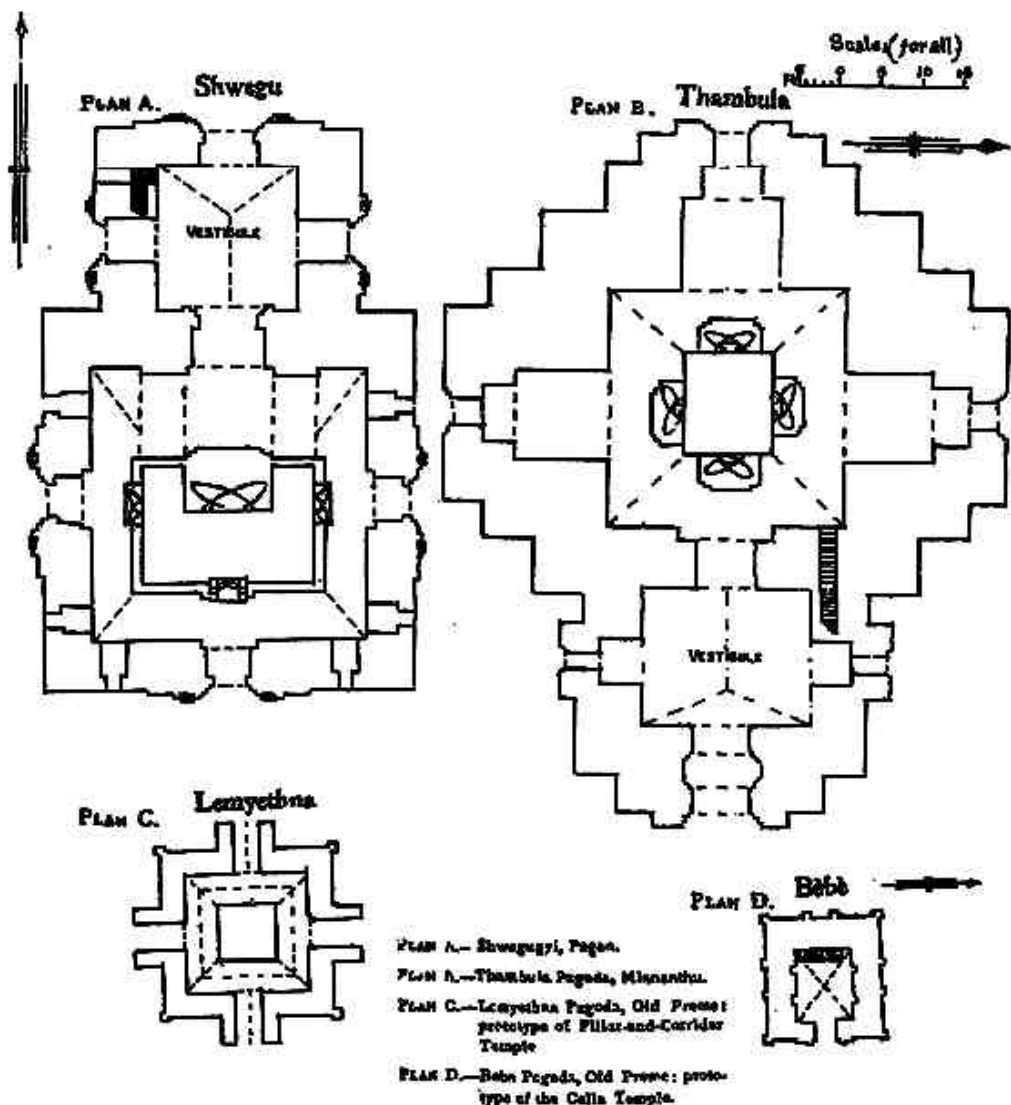


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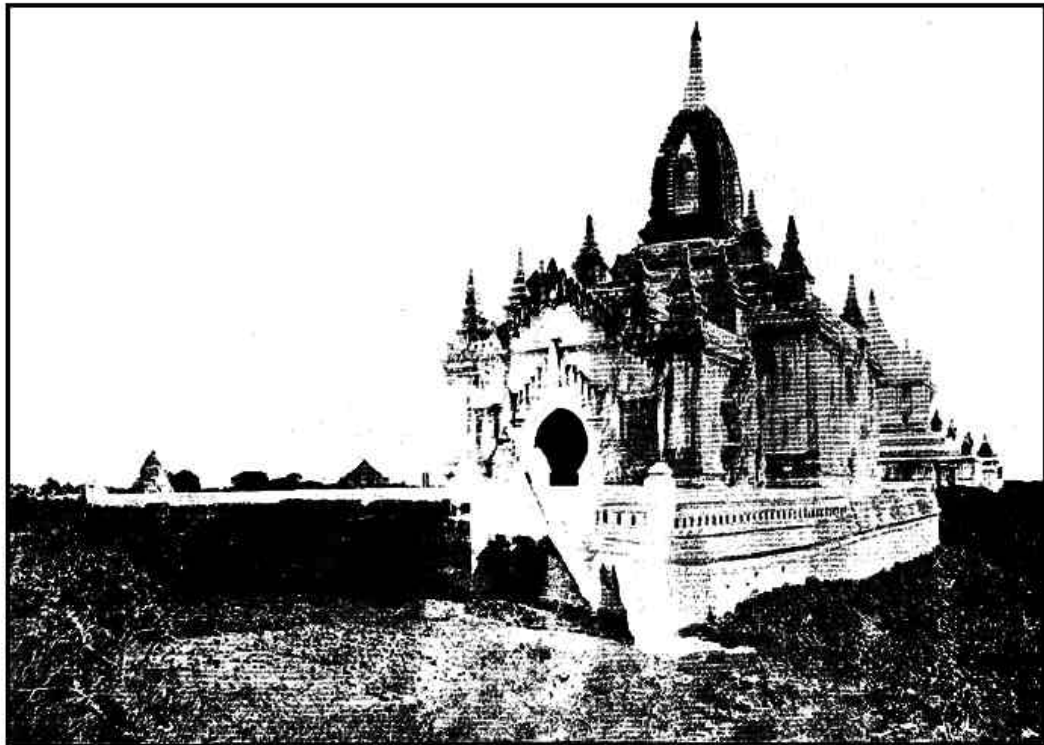


PLATE II.

SHWEGUGYI PAGODA, PAGAN.

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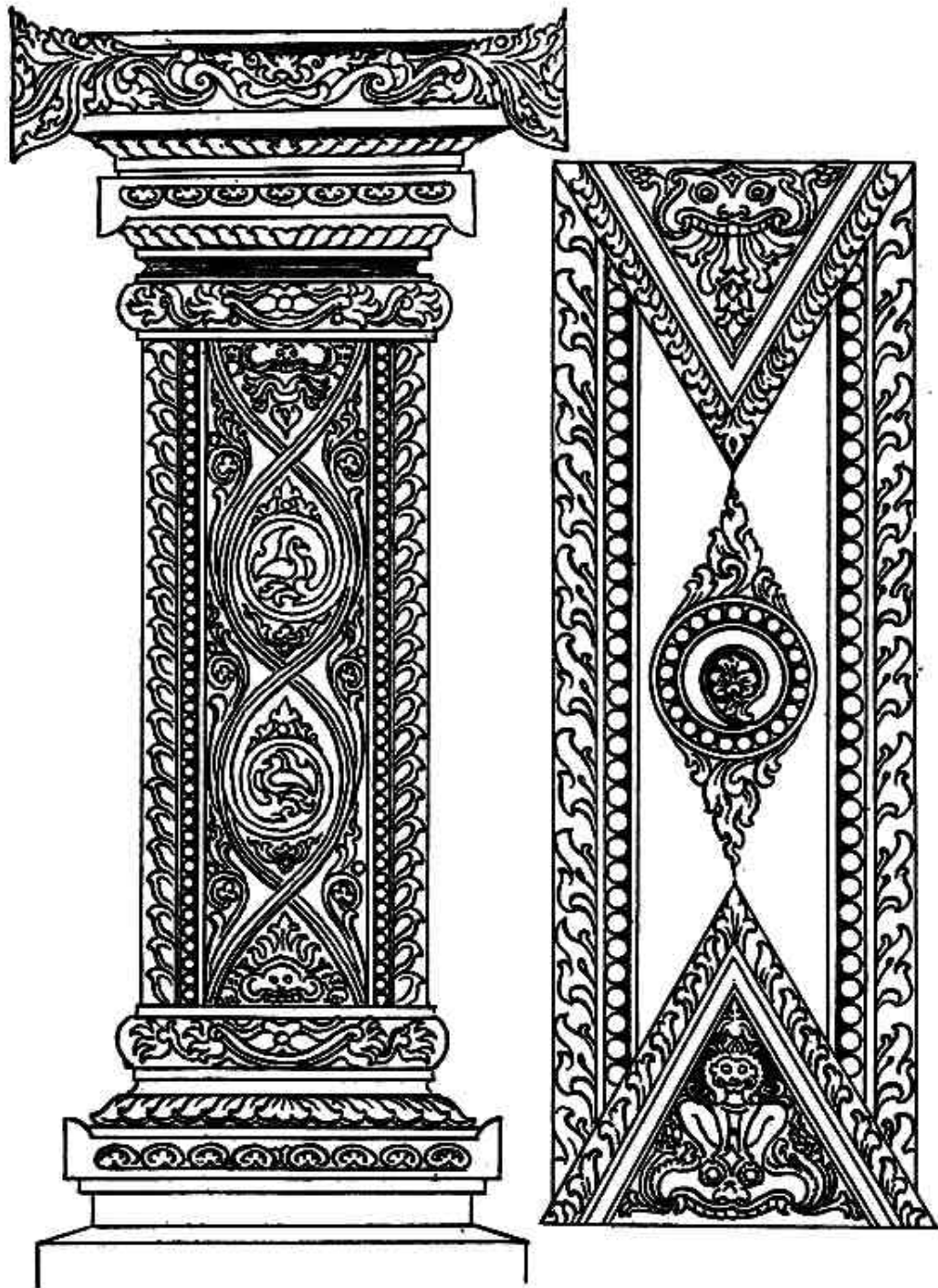
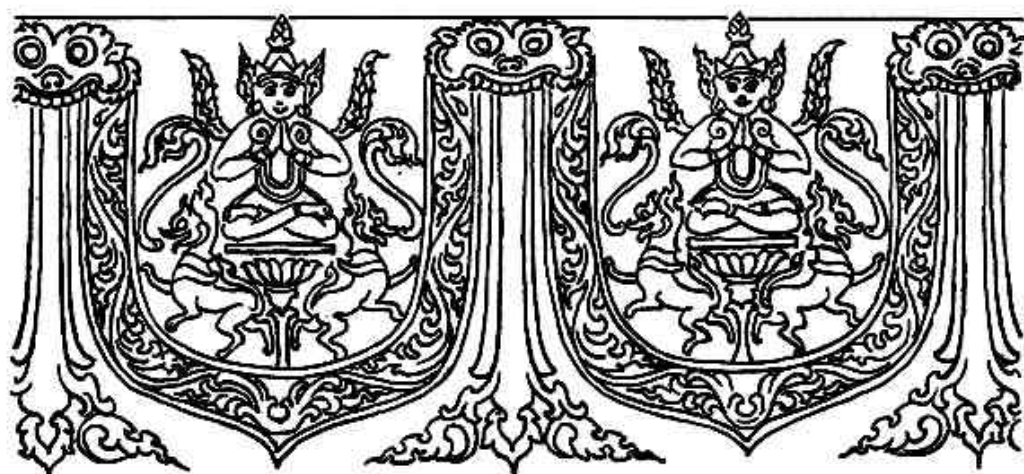
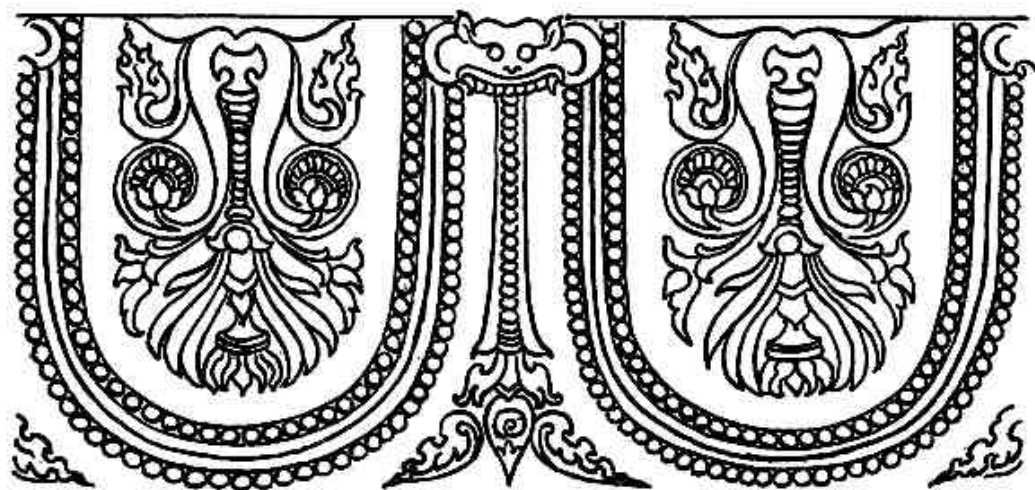


PLATE III

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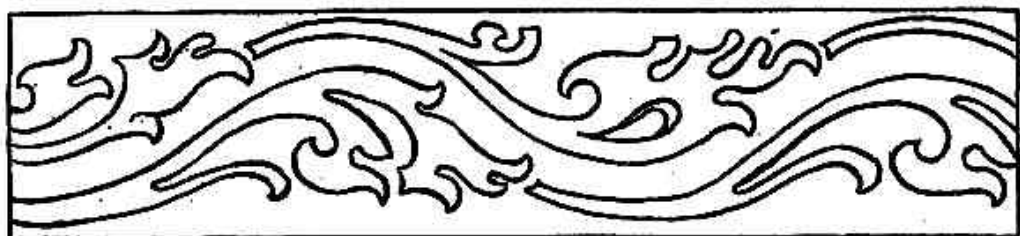
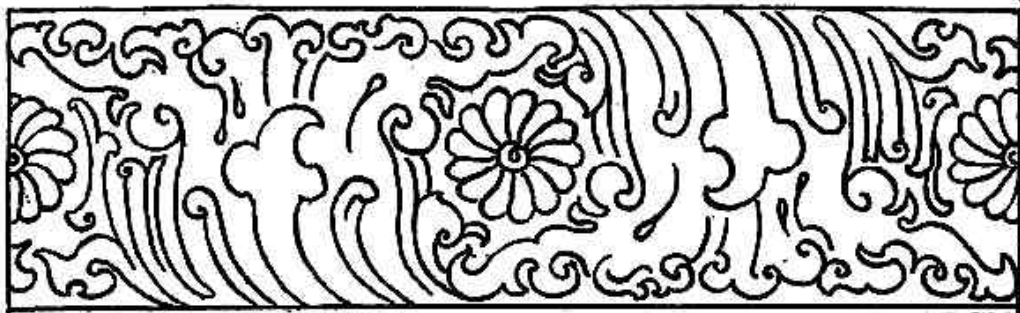


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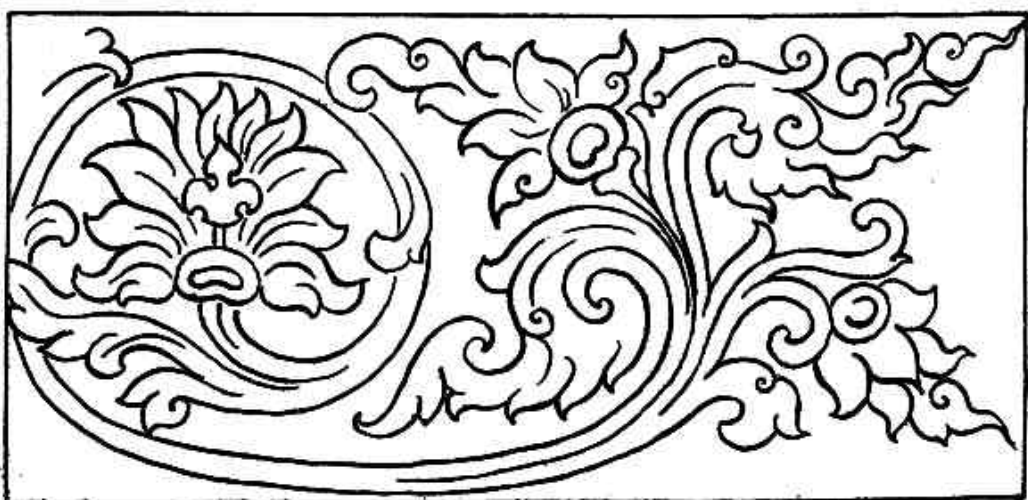
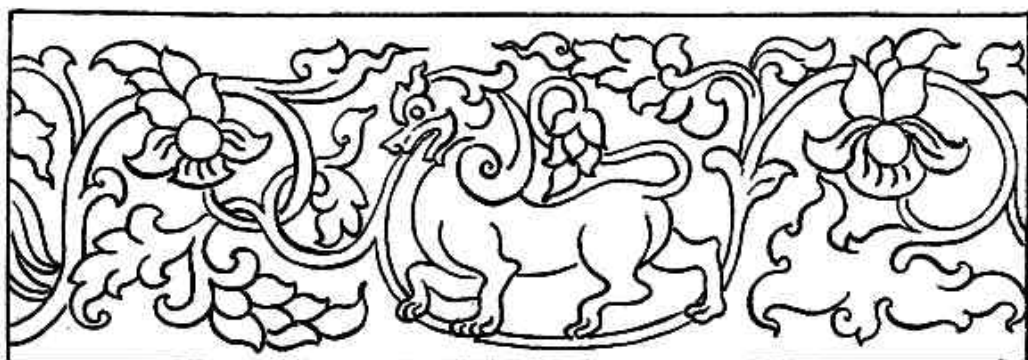
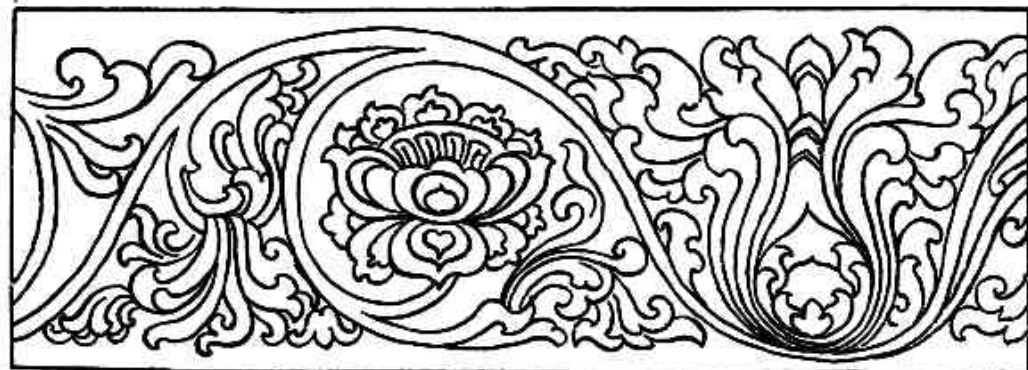








PLATE IX

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