



A Lecture in the Arts, Histories,
Literatures, and Religions of Burma

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CENTRE FOR SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES
CENTRE FOR SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES



LILIAN HANDLIN (HARVARD UNIVERSITY)

MAHOSADHA'S CUNNING AND THE CRETAN LABYRINTH



FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2018

4:00 – 6.00 pm

**Munk School of Global Affairs
1 Devonshire Place Room 208N**



One of the Buddha Gotama's numerous epithets was opamma kusalo muni - sage skilled in parables, exemplified in his life as Mahosadha. The remains of an early second millennium Burmese kingdom, named after its ceremonial center, Pagan, preserve several visual narratives of the story. They incorporate a labyrinth image to represent the setting where medicine curing human ailments was dispensed, and riddles and judicial problems were resolved - antecedent of the Bodhimanda - site of Gotama's Awakening. Sometime in the late 11th century an unknown artisan, guided by a learned though anonymous Buddhist monk, selected the labyrinth image to reference his society's conception of the human predicament. That monk's vastly better known Christian counterparts, a millennium earlier and in another part of the world, chose likewise. The lecture speculates on the reasons and significance of the monk's choice in the Pagan context.

LILIAN HANDLIN is a historian. She received her doctorate from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where she taught until 1977. She is the author and co-author of several books, including the four volume *Liberty in America, 1600 to the Present* (New York, 1986 - 1995) as well as articles and reviews in American history. More recently, she began to publish articles concerned with Myanmar's early history, grounded in the material culture surviving the kingdom of Pagan. One of her publications compares two Pagan era narratives of the Vessantara with its first Burmese vernacular version composed by an influential 18th century Burmese monk and commentator. The article was published in Steven Collins, ed., *Readings in the Vessantara Jataka* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2016). An examination of the myth of the Buddha's eye teeth, in the Pagan context, appeared this summer in Cristophe Munier Gaillard, ed., *Mural Art, Studies on Paintings in Asia* (Bangkok 2018).

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