

# THE THIRTY-SEVEN LORDS <sup>1</sup>

by

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In my paper on *The Lord of the Great Mountain* <sup>3</sup> read to the Society at the Annual Conference of last year, I explained how Anawrahta was constrained to give some royal recognition to the existing cult of the "Thirty-six Lords" with the "Lord of the Great Mountain" as the chief *nat*. Anawrahta added the guardian-god of Buddhism, whose name was *Sakra* in Pali and *Tha-gya* in Burmese, to the list, thus making it the cult of "Thirty-seven Lords" instead of "Thirty-six Lords". In addition, he set up their images on the platform of the Shwezi-gone pagoda that he built. The list had closed at thirty-six before Anawrahta, and it needed Anawrahta's prestige and power to change the number from thirty-six to thirty-seven. After Anawrahta, no one dared to assume authority to change the number. However, with the passing of time, the list varied, for some old *nats* were displaced by new *nats*, and the personalities of later personages became merged with those of earlier personages. This has misled some European scholars to scoff at the number thirty-seven and to proceed to point out the existence of the "Thirty-eighth", "thirty-ninth" and the "fortieth" *nats*. In actual fact, the number of *nats* worshipped in Burma amounts to well over a hundred, but the number of *nats* associated with the cult of the Thirty-seven Lords number at one time no more and no less than thirty-seven. From time to time, official lists of the thirty-seven *nats* were drawn up by royal authority, and under King Bodawpaya, such a list was compiled by the Minister Myawaddi. Because of the historical accident of the fall of the Burmese kingdom in 1885, Myawaddi's list, reproduced below, became the final official list:—

1. Thagya Min (The King of the Gods)
2. The Lord of the Great Mountain
3. Princess Golden Face
4. Lady Golden Sides
5. Lady Three Times Beautiful
6. The Little Lady with the Flute
7. The Brown Lord of Due South

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2. Rector of the University of Rangoon.

3. Journ. Burma Research Soc. 38:75. June, 1955.

8. The White Lord of the North
9. The Lord with the White Umbrella
10. The Royal Mother (of No. 9)
11. The Sole Lord of Pareim-ma
12. The Elder Inferior Gold
13. The Younger Inferior Gold
14. The Lord Grandfather of Mandalay
15. The Lady Bandy-Legs
16. The Old Man by the Solitary Banyan Tree
17. Lord Sithu
18. The Young Lord of the Swing
19. The Valiant Lord Kyawswa
20. Captain of the Main Army Aungswa
21. The Royal Cadet
22. His Mother, the Lady Golden Words
23. The Lord of Five Elephants
24. The Lord King, Master of Justice
25. Maung Po Tu
26. The Queen of the Western Palace
27. The Lord of Aungpinle, Master of White Elephants
28. The Lady Bent
29. Golden Nawrahta
30. The Valiant Lord Aung Din
31. The Young Lord White
32. The Lord Novice
33. Tabinshwehti
34. The Lady of the North
35. The Lord Minhkaung of Taungoo
36. The Royal Secretary
37. The King of Chiangmai

According to Minister Myawaddi and the devotees of the cult at the present day, the *nats* numbered 1 to 22 belonged to the pre-Pagan and Pagan periods, and the rest to Ava and Toungoo periods of Burmese history. However, according to the list recognized by the hereditary attendants of the *nat* images at the Shwezigon pagoda, we find that (i) numbers 1 to 17, 19 & 20 are included; (ii) Nos. 18 the Young Lord of the Swing, 21, the Royal Cadet and 22, the Lady Golden Words are *not* included; (iii) Nos. 23, Lord of the Five Elephants, 25, Maung Po Tu, 26, The Queen of the Western Palace,

27, The Master of White Elephants from Aungpinle Lake, 34, The Lady of the North, and 36, The Royal Secretary are included as belonging to the Pagan period, for the attendants do not recognize any *nat* who belongs to a later period than Pagan, as one of their Thirty-seven.

(iv) The following twelve *nats* complete the list of Thirty-seven:

- (1) Master Aung Pyi
- (2) The Lord of the White Elephant
- (3) The Lord of the White Horse
- (4) The Lord of the Nine Towns
- (5) The Lord of the Four Islands
- (6) The Lord of the Five Villages
- (7) The Lord of the Ten Villages
- (8) The Great Physician
- (9) The Lord of the Ninety-nine Shan States
- (10) The Lady of the Tame Waters (i.e. Inland Waters)
- (11) The Lord of the Salt Water Lands (i.e. the Irrawaddy Delta)
- (12) The Lord of the Open Ocean

With regard to the list recognized by the hereditary attendants at Shwezigon also, it became fixed and finalized only by the fall of the kingdom of Pagan. That it had varied from time to time even during the Pagan period can be seen from the fact that some of the *nats* mentioned in the list appeared after Anawrahta had set up the images of the *nats* on the platform of the Pagoda. The images are crude and primitive, and they were gathered from the various *nat*-shrines in various parts of the country and set up at the Pagoda. The King's architects and sculptors whose handiwork still adorns the Pagoda, were never allowed to touch them. Thus the images have stood throughout the centuries fixed and unchanged, although some of their identities and some of their names have changed from time to time. Thus, for example, Lord Sithu, who was yet unborn at the time the images were first set up, is now taken as represented by one of the images, and he therefore has replaced an older Sithu.

I have already given in the paper on *The Lord of the Great Mountain* an account of the King of the Gods, the Lord of the Great Mountain and Lady Golden Face. I shall now give an account of the remaining Thirty Four Lords.

The Lady Golden Sides, Lady Three Times Beautiful, The Little Lady with the Flute, Lord Brown of Due South, and Lord White of the North, are *Pyu* gods who were worshipped at Prome.

and were later worshipped at Pagan. The Lady Golden Sides obtained her name from the special robe she was entitled to wear, a robe with trimmings of gold. She was from Mindon a town behind Thayetmyo on the Irrawaddy River, and opposite Prome. According to legend, she was either the *Naga*-King's daughter, who was forsaken by her human husband, or a human woman who was forsaken by her *Naga* lover, and as a result, she died of grief. Our family has belonged to Mindon since the Prome period of Burmese history, and until the First Anglo-Burmese War of 1824, Mindon was the capital of the "Seven Hills District" which lay between Arakan and the Irrawaddy River.

The Lady Golden Sides was one of our family ancestors, and according to tradition in our family, she was appointed to succeed her husband as the king's representative at Mindon, as both her sons were in the service of the king at Prome. It may be mentioned that under the Burmese kings, no office was hereditary, but other things being equal, the son or the brother or occasionally the widow of a deceased official was usually chosen by the king as the successor in office. After her death, Lady Golden Sides was worshipped as a *nat*-goddess by the people of Mindon. When Prome fell some time later, the king and his people escaped across the Irrawaddy, and remained as wandering refugees for some twelve years, spending three years at Mindon.<sup>4</sup> When the king and his followers migrated north to the region which was to become the kingdom of Pagan, they had added Lady Golden Sides to their list of Pyu gods and goddesses. Lady Golden Sides is still worshipped at Mindon at the present day, but she is so worshipped in her own right as the guardian goddess of the town, and not as one of the Thirty-seven Lords. It may be mentioned that in our family, she is remembered but never worshipped, and according to our family tradition she died of grief when her two sons were executed by the king. Neither the local tradition at Mindon nor our family tradition makes her a *naga*. Yet the very old ritual song relating to her as one of the Thirty-seven begins with the words:—

“For the golden *Naga* to wear,  
Bring we a robe of satin-velvet.”

The song seems so appropriate as it gives the emphasis to the robe of satin-velvet—the robe trimmed with gold, but it is difficult to understand how the goddess became associated with the cult of *naga* worship.

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4. Tin and Luce. *The Glass Palace Chronicle*. Page 28.

Her image at the Shwezigone Pagoda shows no trace of her connexion with the *naga*. It is true that later figures found in various *nat*-shrines all over the country show the goddess wearing a head-dress with the *naga* hood, but the Goddess Golden Face is also shown in later wooden figures wearing the same type of head-dress, and she has never been associated with the *naga* in any way. It may be that the Lady Golden Sides became merged with a *naga*-goddess, for the worship of the *naga*-dragon was prevalent in Tagaung on the upper Irrawaddy and the cult of the *naga* still exists at Tagaung at the present day in the worship of "Bo Bo Gyi of Tagaung", "The Great Grandfather of Tagaung". The cult spread to Pagan, and the chronicles mention a king of Pagan before Anawrahta setting up a great image of the *naga* in his garden for worship.<sup>5</sup> Before Pagan, the *naga* is mentioned as one of the builders of the city of Prome. His tail was held by the King of the Gods while he moved round in a circle, thus marking the circumference of the city. Before the advent of Buddhism, an image of the *naga* was set up with those of the village gods and goddesses outside the eastern gate of a village. The mud volcanoes of Minbu still have a tradition that *nagas* live beneath, and there still exist many villages whose names refer to *nagas*, as for example, "The *Naga*-Hole", "The Male *Naga*", "When the *Naga* Descends (into the earth)", "When the *Naga* is Angry". In the Popa Hills, and in some parts of the Shan States there remain still traces of a snake-cult. It may well be that there was a *naga* god or goddess among the Thirty-Six gods, or even the Tagaung Dragon was one of the Thirty-Six, whom Anawrahta replaced with the *nat*-spirit of one of his own heroes. The second Pyu Goddess, the Lady Three Times Beautiful was a village maiden whose beauty surpassed man's imagination. She was beautiful "in the morning, at mid-day, and at night", and her fame reached the ears of her king, the great Duttabaung. He sent a nobleman to fetch her to be crowned queen of Prome. But like Tristian and Inseult of Ireland, and like Kyansittha and the Peguan princess of Pagan, the nobleman and Three-times Beautiful fell in love on the way. When they reached the gates of Prome, the nobleman went in alone and announced to the King, "Great King, her face is beautiful, but her body is so monstrously fat that she cannot enter the gates of the city". Duttabaung believed him and ordered that she be abandoned. A hut was built for her outside the city gates, and she dwelt there, forgotten by the king and forsaken by her lover. She earned her living as a weaver. In course of time she gave birth to a

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5. Tin and Luce *ibid.* Page 59.

little girl and then died of grief, and became a *nat*. Her daughter is the third Pyu goddess, "The Little Lady", and her name originally meant "The Little Lady with the Flute". However, the image at Pagan and later wooden images do not show her playing a flute. As Hindu gods, especially Krishna, a re-incarnation of Vishnu, are often shown playing on a flute, it seems logical to assume that "The Little Lady" of Prome became merged with an earlier Hindu goddess. Among the Thirty-Seven *nats*, "The Little Lady" is most charming, and she is the guardian goddess of little children and schoolboys and girls. When a Burmese child smiles in her sleep, it is believed that "The Little Lady" is playing with him, and boys and girls on the eve of their annual examinations make offerings of toys and tiny jackets and skirts to the little goddess. Whereas Golden Face, Golden Sides, and Three Times Beautiful are shown in the later wooden figures in the conventional attitude depicting grief viz., right hand on the left breast, the Little Lady is depicted as a plump little child, with her chubby hands hanging free in the conventional attitude of joy, and with long necklaces and large bracelets of solid gold.

Lord of due South and Lord of the North were brothers and they held high office under King Duttabaung at Prome. They were tax officials, and the kingdom was divided into two main tax regions, the north and the south. The term "due south" is used to distinguish this god from the Lord of the Great Mountain, for the Burmese word for "south" and the Burmese word for "mountain" are the same. They are also known as the Brown Lord and the White Lord from the colour of the official robes they wore. They became so powerful and so popular with the people that the king thought that they might rebel. According to the chronicles,<sup>6</sup> they were put to death (by the king, but according to the tradition of the *nat*-worshippers, they lost their lives through the guile of the king. They were great pugilists, and the king made them box and wrestle with each other, until both died through exhaustion. An old tradition makes them the sons of the Lady Golden Sides, but neither the local tradition at Mindon nor our own family tradition remembers them. The Lady Golden Sides did have two sons serving the King at Prome, who were later executed but no details of these sons are remembered.

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6. Tin and Luce *ibid.* Page 18.

Just as the Lady Golden Sides is worshipped by herself, and not as a member of the pantheon of Thirty-Seven, the Lords Brown and White were worshipped separately from the others at Prome until recent years. Apart from their usual names, they were in the Prome area referred to as "The Lords of the Royal Cave", probably because their images were placed in a cave for worship. (These two gods are unique among the Thirty-Seven, because whereas the other gods are shown with the usual physical features of human beings, they are always shown with six hands each. Two of the hands are folded in an attitude of worship, and the other four hands are shown holding various weapons of war.) They are dressed in the ancient uniform of Burmese army commanders, with war helmets on their heads. Obviously the *nat* spirits of the Lords Brown and White had merged with some six-handed Hindu gods who were known to the Pyus at Prome. The worship of these five Pyu gods and goddesses was already in existence when the cult of the Lord of the Great Mountain came into being, but there were attempts made to link these five with the Lord of the Great Mountain and his sister, Golden Face. Some spirit-worshippers insisted that the Lady Golden Sides became the lover of Master Handsome while he was a fugitive at Mindon from Tagaung, and therefore the Lords Brown and White were the sons of Master Handsome. Moreover, in the Popa region, the younger sister of Master Handsome and Golden Face, known as Youngest-Beautiful, has always been worshipped along with the Brother and Sister, although she has never been submitted to the circle of the Thirty-seven, and as a result, some spirit worshippers merged Three Times Beautiful with Youngest Beautiful, which would also bring her daughter, the Little Lady, into the family of the Lord of the Great Mountain.

(The Lord with the White Umbrella, his Mother, and the Sole Lord of Preimma were the father, grandmother and step-brother of Anawrahta himself.) In the year 906, as a usurper seized the throne of Pagan, after killing the king, one of his queens fled the palace, with the dead king's child in her womb. She stayed in hiding in a small village and gave birth to Kunhsaw. While the child was growing up, the usurper had died, and the throne passed to his son. The usurper's son himself was killed by Nyaung-u Sawrahan. (Later Kunhsaw became king of Pagan by popular acclaim, and Nyaung-u Sawrahan was killed, leaving three queens, two of whom were already with child. (Kunhsaw raised all three to be his queens, and the dead king's sons, Kyizo and

Sokkate, were born. The third queen later gave birth to Kunhsaw's own son, Anawrahta. Kunhsaw treated Kyizo and Sokkate as if they were his own sons, and Kyizo was given the title of "Sole Lord" with the village of Preimma as his fief. However, the two brothers, when they came of age, plotted together and deposed Kunhsaw by forcing him to become a monk. The new King Kyizo was accidentally killed near Popa Hill during a deer hunt by a hunter who was shooting at a deer. Sokkate then became king, and Anawrahta had to wait some twenty-five years before he could rebel. He killed Sokkate in single combat, and then offered the throne to his father, now an aged monk. On his father refusing, Anawrahta became king in 1017. Kunhsaw's Mother is shown in later wooden images in the conventional attitude of grief, but there is no tradition of her dying of grief, as in the case of Golden Sides and Three Times Beautiful, but she did see her husband the king dethroned and killed, and she lived to see her son also dethroned. Kunhsaw is worshipped as the Lord with the White Umbrella, but he is so worshipped not as King Kunhsaw, but as Monk Kunhsaw. Thus, his images show him wearing the yellow robes of a monk. A king on becoming a monk would lose the insignias of kingship, but Anawrahta, on becoming king, "arrayed his father in all the articles of pomp and use, and the five symbols of royalty", <sup>7</sup> and the White Umbrella was the most important of these symbols of royalty. Kyizo is worshipped not as king, but as the popular young lord of the village of Preimma, but his images show him wearing the full regalia of a king. It should be noted that when Anawrahta came to the throne, his royal father was still living, but by the time Buddhism was made the official religion of the country, he was dead and was being worshipped as a god.

The Elder Inferior Gold and the Younger Inferior Gold, the Royal Grandfather of Mandalay, the Lady Bandy-Legs and the Old Man by the Solitary Banyan Tree were contemporaries of Anawrahta himself, and to this list I would also add the Lady Hunch-Back. The Elder and Younger Inferior Gold were famous sons of a famous father, Byat-ta, who was from the kingdom of Thaton which Anawrahta destroyed. Byat-ta was a special runner to the king, and his duty was to bring fresh flowers from Mount Popa every morning. He married a "flower-eating ogress" from Popa, and two sons were born. He was later executed for neglect of duty, but his sons were given presents of

7. Tin and Lucs *ibid.* Page 64.



gold by the King. To be given presents of gold by the King was a mark of special favour for a child, but as presents of pure gold could be given only to princes of blood, the gold given to the two young boys was deliberately made a little impure. Elder and Younger Inferior Gold were placed under a tutor (who was also a minister) at Mandalay, and when they were fifteen years of age, they joined the army. They gained great distinction in Anawrahta's "Chinese Campaign".<sup>8</sup> but when the army returned, they were executed at the village of Taung-byon near Mandalay for a minor breach of discipline. Anawrahta had to be a stern disciplinarian, and he had to be ruthless whenever there was a possibility of a rebellion or mutiny. In the case of the two brothers, their disobedience was considered specially dangerous because the cult of superman could have been revived round the two brothers. They were the sons of a "mighty-man of valour" and a "flower-eating ogress", and their exploits during the campaign had spread rumours of their supernatural powers. However, the execution of the young heroes must have caused great dissatisfaction among the people. As a result, Anawrahta was constrained to declare that they had become gods, and to appoint them as "The Lords of Taug-byon". Just as the Popa Village was given as fief to the Lord of the Great Mountain, the village of Taung-byon was given as a fief to the two brothers. Their tutor was also executed, and he died with great dignity, protesting that his guilt did not amount even to a "finger-joint". His images show him in the robes of a minister of state, with his right hand stretched out, with the thumb placed on the top joint of the fore finger. This gesture and the phrase "not as big as a finger-joint" go together, and are used even at the present day in ordinary conversation. The ogress-mother of the two heroes died of grief, and although she has been worshipped at Taung-byon since Anawrahta's days, she is not included among the Thirty-Seven. The tutor's sister Lady Bandy-Legs was executed along with him. Lady Hunch-Back is grouped among the Ava gods and goddesses because the Lady Hunch-Back of the Ava period merged with the Lady Hunch-Back of the Pagan period. This can be known (i) from the fact that she is listed among the Thirty-Seven by the Attendants at the Shwezigone Pagoda, and (ii) from the ritual song connected with the Royal Tutor :-

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8. Tin and Luce. *ibid.* Page 81.

“I am the brother of two sisters,  
The Ladies Bandy-Legs and Hunch-Back”.

The Old Lord of the Solitary Banyan Tree was one of the Mon princes who were taken captive to Pagan from the city of Thaton together with their king, and he died of leprosy. Again, this god obviously merged with an older god associated with the worship of the banyan tree. The Burmese believed in tree gods and worshipped large trees as the abode of these gods even before the coming of Buddhism. The banyan tree was worshipped and water was poured on it as an offering in the parched months of summer. With the coming of Buddhism, this ceremony of offering water to the Banyan Tree became a Buddhist ceremony, because the banyan tree is closely associated with the Buddha. Perhaps the Lord of the Banyan Tree, Lady Bandy-Legs and Lady Hunch-Back merged with earlier gods associated with some deformity of body. Just as some primitive peoples considered deformed persons as evil and sinister, others considered them to be occult and sacred.

Lord Sithu, the Young Lord of the Swing, the Valiant Lord Kyawswa, Captain of the Main Army Aung-Swa, the Royal Cadet and the Lady Golden Words may be grouped together as they lived in the later Pagan period. Lord Sithu was the great king Alaungsithu 1112-67, who followed his grandfather Kyansittha on the throne. As he lay sick and dying in extreme old age, he was killed by his son, Narathu 1167-70. He merged with an earlier Sithu, who was a son of an early king of Pagan, Theinsun 734-744. This earlier Sithu and his brother Kyawswa were the sons of the northern queen, and they were suspected of plotting to do away with the heir to the throne, the son of the senior or southern queen. Accordingly, they were exiled, and they wandered all over the country meeting various adventures, until they settled down at Myaung-tu village, and started to dig irrigation canals. But the two brothers began to suspect each other, and in a fight with bare hands, each killed the other. Thus, the image of Lord Sithu, when Anawrahta set it up, represented the earlier Sithu, but the greater personality of King Alaungsithu obliterated the personality of the earlier Sithu. The Young Lord of the Swing was the grandson of Alaungsithu. His father was the crown prince Minshinsaw, who became king after Alaungsithu's assassination, but only for a day, as he was imprisoned by his brother the murderer of Alaungsithu. The Young Lord of the Swing, after the usual initiation ceremony of a Burmese boy, was spending a period of time at a monastery as a novice, but boys being boys, he went and played on a swing in the monastery grounds, fell down from the swing and was killed instantaneously. The

Valiant Lord Kyawswa was originally the brother of the earlier Sithu, and the image at the Shwezigone Pagoda represented this Kyawswa, but his personality has been merged with three later Kyawswas. One of the ministers of Alaungsithu had four sons, all in the King's service, but whereas the elder three were serious and well-behaved, the youngest Kyawswa was a wild young man, who married the daughter of the manufacturer of toddy-wine from Popa village, for the girl was so beautiful and the father so skilful as a maker of toddy. He spent his time in cock-fighting, setting off fireworks and drinking and he finally died of drink. This was the second Kyawswa. The last King of Pagan, Narathihapate 1254-87, had three sons, Uzana, Governor of Bassein, Thihathu, Governor of Prome, and Kyawswa, Governor of Dalla. After the fall of Pagan to the Tartars, Thihathu forced the king, his father, who had come to Prome, to swallow poison, on threat of death by the sword, and then went to Bassein, found Uzana ill in bed, and promptly hacked him to death. Thihathu then turned his attention to Kyawswa, but he accidentally shot himself with an arrow as he was setting his crossbow, and Kyawswa returned to Pagan as the surviving heir. But soon he was strangled to death by some of his governors who wanted to seize the throne. This was the third Kyawswa. After the fall of Pagan, the kingdom broke up into various petty kingdoms, until two new kingdoms emerged, namely Ava in Upper Burma and Pegu in Lower Burma. Minhkaung (1401-1422) of Ava and Razadarit (1385-1423) of Pegu then struggled for supremacy. Minhkaung's son, Minye Kyawswa, born in 1391 was a brilliant soldier, and he took part in a campaign at the early age of thirteen. He led the life of a professional soldier and was a hard drinker. He became the commander-in-chief of the Burmese Army in 1409 and won a series of brilliant victories, but in 1417, he was taken prisoner after being severely wounded and died shouting defiance with his last breath. This was the fourth Kyawswa. However, it is the personality of the second Kyawswa which has dominated the personalities of the others, as the following extract from the ritual song connected with the Valiant Lord Kyawswa will show:—

“Do you not know me? Have you not seen me at cock-fights? Have you not seen me letting off fireworks? Many times have I fallen prostrate in the gutter, drunken with my wife's wine, and many times I have been picked up by the loving hands of pretty village maidens.

“Do you not know me, the god with the wine bottle, the famous Lord Kyawswa? If you don't like me, avoid me. I admit I am a

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drunkard. My neighbours despise me, but do I care for public opinion? If they don't like me, they can avoid me."

It is not surprising that Lord Kyawswa is considered the guardian god of rogues and vagabonds.

Captain Aungswa was in the First Army of the Kingdom, whose commander-in-chief was the Crown Prince who later became king as Narapatisithu 1173-1200. His elder brother the King Naratheinhka 1170-1173 fell in love with Narapatisithu's wife and sent him and his army to the frontier after falsely announcing that a rebellion had broken out there. The Crown Prince had to go, but he had a suspicion that there was something wrong, and left his own horse and his trusted officer Nga Aung Pyi at Pagan to wait and watch. After a few days, the King seized the Crown Princess and made her his fourth queen. Nga Pyi rode post haste in the wake of the army, but when he reached a river, he mistook a sand-bank glittering in the moonlight for water, and thought the river too wide to cross safely at night. So he slept whilst waiting for day light to appear. The Crown Prince was only a little distance away on the other side of the river, and he became full of forebodings as he heard the neighing of his horse. When morning dawned Nga Aung Pyi swiftly crossed the river, caught up with the army, and broke the news to the Crown Prince, who was at first grateful to his officer, but later asked: "Where did you sleep last night?" "On the other side of the river", was the reply. The Crown Prince regretted the unnecessary delay, and in his anger, executed Nga Aung Pyi for neglect of duty. But as the dead body floated downstream, he was full of remorse, and ordered that the spirit of Nga Aung Pyi be worshipped as one of the Thirty-Seven, thus replacing an earlier god. But although Master Aung Pyi is included in the list of the attendants at Shwezigone Pagoda, he is dropped in the later lists. The Crown Prince then selected his best Captain, Aungswa, and ordered him to lead an advance party to Pagan. "I will give you one of his queens if you can kill the king", promised the Crown Prince. So, as the army turned back and marched towards Pagan, Captain Aungswa and his men went ahead, raided the palace and killed the king. When the Crown Prince arrived on the scene, and was on the point of asking his gallant captain to make his choice among the three queens, the women wept and pleaded, "We are your cousins, we are queens. Surely you would not give one of us to an ordinary army captain?" The king relented, and said to Aungswa "I did make you the promise to give you a queen, but would you not be satisfied with the daughter of a minister?" The Captain said "Pish!" in contempt. For this act of

insubordination, which angered the king, Aungswa was executed. Later, in view of his past services, Aungswa was raised to the status of a god and added to the list of Thirty-Seven, thus replacing an earlier god. The Royal Cadet was the son of Sawmun-hnit, the son of Kyawswa, who was put on the throne of Pagan by the usurpers who killed Kyawswa. But by that time, Pagan had merely become a province, and, so Sawmun-hnit was not really the king, but the governor of Pagan although because of the fact that he was a direct descendant of the dynasty of Anawrahta, he was given the regalia and the rank of a king. The young cadet spent his time cock-fighting instead of marching with the army. So he was put in stocks by the order of his father, but the punishment was too heavy for the frail lad, and he died. His mother the queen, Lady Golden Words died of grief on learning that her son had died in these tragic circumstances. Of these later Pagan gods, the non-inclusion of the Royal Cadet and his Mother in the list of the attendants at the Shwezigone Pagoda can be explained by the fact that the kingdom of Pagan ended with the death of Kyawswa, and Sawmun-hnit, as has been stated above, was a king merely in name, and the chronicles correctly consider Kyawswa to be the last king of Pagan. With regard to the non-inclusion of the Little Lord of the Swing, it seems that he was replaced by Master Aung Pyi, but this substitution was probably not accepted generally. Nga Pyi is worshipped in the region where he was executed and elsewhere at the present day, but he is worshipped on his own, and not as one of the Thirty-Seven Lords.

Of the remaining Eleven Lords who are included only in the Shwezigone Attendants' list, the Lord of the White Elephant must have been a king and the Lord of the White Horse must have been an official or a soldier. Sometimes he is merged with others, and thus the Royal Cadet and Master Aung Pyi are often identified as the Lord of the White Horse. In any case, the Lord of the White Horse has always been associated with the Burmese Army and in the dark days of 1824 when the Burmese Army was retreating before the British, often regiments stood firm and fought rearguard actions, as men said the god on his white horse had been seen fighting against the enemy. Pagan started as a cluster of nineteen villages, and the Lord of the Four Islands (i.e. island-villages in the Irrawaddy), the Lord of the Five Villages, and the Lord of the Ten Villages were all king's deputies who built up the new kingdom. The Lord of the Nine Towns is the guardian god

of the irrigated region around Kyaukse, known as the "Nine-Districts" and he is worshipped in the region even at the present day on his own and not as one of the Thirty-Seven. The great Physician was probably the king's physician and the Lord of the Ninety-nine Shan States must have been the king's minister for the Shan States who had their own chieftains, or the chief of all the Shan Chieftains. The waters of the country were divided into three kinds by the Burmese into "Tame Waters" or inland waters, "Salt Waters" or the Deltaic waters or tidal waters, and "Open Ocean" or the waters of the open sea. Probably the Lords of the Salt Water and the Open Ocean and the Lady of the Tame Waters were officials of the king controlling navigation in the various kinds of "waters". The Lady of the Tame Waters is still worshipped on her own in the districts in the vicinity of the Chindwin River, the large tributary of the Irrawaddy. The Lord of the Salt Waters, with the title of the "Foremost Great Lord," became so popular in the Deltaic Region that around him a separate cult arose, and thus at the present day in Lower Burma, the cult of the "Foremost Great Lord" is more important than that of the cult of the Thirty-Seven. Anawrahta and Alaungsithu continued the tradition of the Pyu kings in making sea voyages to nearby lands, and merchants and monks of Pagan travelled to Bengal and Ceylon. So during the period, the Lord of the Open Sea was of great importance, but after the fall of Pagan, the tradition of sea travel died out, and with it, the worship of the Lord of the Open Sea.

The Lord of the Five Elephants, the first in point of time among the gods of the post-Pagan period, was king of the new kingdom of Pinya which flourished from 1298 to 1364, when the capital shifted to Ava. He was the son of one of the three usurping brothers who murdered Kyawswa, the last king of Pagan. He reigned from 1343 to 1350, when he died of a sudden fever. Probably he replaced the Lord of the White Elephant of the Shwezigone Attendants' list. The Lord King, Master of Justice, was Tarabya who was king of Ava in 1401 for seven months only. As he hunted in the forest, he had an adventure with an alchemist and a goddess, lost his reason and was assassinated by an attendant. Maung Po Tu was a merchant from the Pinya region, who was killed and eaten by a tiger at the foot of the Shan Plateau, as he was returning from the Shan States with a cartload of tea. This poor merchant stands alone in the august assembly of kings and

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officials who constitute the Thirty-Seven. It seems that he has been placed in the post-Pagan period because he belonged to Pinya, which became a royal city only after the fall of Pagan. But in point of time, he must have belonged to the Pagan period, and he must have come not from the royal city of Pinya, but from the small village which later became Pinya city, because his image riding astride a tiger is among the the *nat* images at the Shwezigone Pagoda. He is the guardian god of traders and small merchants. The Queen of the Western Palace was the queen of Minhkaung the First, king of Ava from 1401 to 1422. As she played with her maids-of-honour in a cotton plantation, she saw the apparition of the Valiant Lord Kyawswa, and she fainted and died. She merged with an earlier Queen of the Western Palace, probably the mother of Lord Sithu, who was originally included among the Thirty-Seven at the Shwezigone Pagoda.

Aungpinle or "The Sea of Victory" was an ancient natural lake near Ava, which had served as a reservoir of water for irrigation since primitive times and the Lord of Aungpinle was an ancient god who was included in the original Thirty-Seven. He was replaced by Ava Thihathu, the son of Minhkaung the First. Ava Thihathu became king in 1422. He neglected his erstwhile favourite queen, and at the queen's instigation in 1426 he was shot with an arrow and killed by one of his Shan Chiefs as he was superintending the construction of a canal at Aungpinle on elephant-back. As he was killed at Aungpinle and on an elephant, he came to be known as "Lord of Aungpinle, Master of the White Elephant". Lady Bent, one of the concubines of the Lord of Aungpinle, died of grief, and she became merged with the Lady Bent, who was one of the two sisters of the Royal Tutor executed along with the Brothers Inferior Gold. Golden Nawratha was a grandson of Minhkaung the Second 1481-1502 and as he plotted against the new king, his uncle Shwenankyawshin, he was executed by drowning in 1502. The Valiant Lord Aung Din was a son of Anaukpetlun 1605-1628. He was very fond of opium and toddy-wine and died through an over-dose of opium and wine. The Young Lord White was the son of an unidentified king of Ava who also died through an overdose of opium and wine. The Royal Novice was the son of an unidentified king of Ava, and like the earlier god, the Young Lord of the Swing, he was spending a period of time in a monastery, after the usual initiation ceremonies of a Burmese boy. The monastery was

the Nget-pyit-taung Monastery (The monastery on the Bird-Shot Hill), which was famous throughout the Ava period, and the young novice died of snake-bite while playing in the monastery compound.

Tabinshwehti 1531-50 is one of the hero-kings of Burma, and he united Burma into one kingdom again as in the days of Pagan. Coming to the throne of the small kingdom of Toungoo at the early age of fifteen, he soon showed his ability as commander and king. But success came too early for him, and without fresh fields to conquer, he took to drink, and he was assassinated by one of his bodyguards at the age of thirty-four. The Lady from the North was the wife of Tabinshwehti's tutor and as the time for the birth of her child approached, she journeyed back to her village to be with her mother, but she gave birth to a child prematurely while on the way, and she died. She merged with an earlier Lady of the North belonging to the Pagan period. Her child survived and later became the Lord Minhkaung of Toungoo, and was given the rank of king, although in actual fact he was the Governor of Toungoo, after it had ceased to be the capital on Tabinshwehti making Pegu the capital of his kingdom which now comprised the whole of Burma. He was stricken with dysentery, and to get relief he left the city for the countryside, but while travelling across an onion field, he was overcome by the smell of onions and died suddenly. The King's Secretary was secretary to the Lord Minhkaung of Toungoo; according to one version, he was sent by his lord to the forest to gather rare flowers, and died of malaria; according to another version, he was sent by his lord to pick some flowers from the palace-garden at night and was fatally bitten by a snake. He merged with an earlier King's Secretary of the Pagan period. The King of Chiangmai was brought to Pegu as a prisoner of war by Bayinnaung 1551-81, the great king who followed his brother-in-law Tabinshwehti on the throne. Although a prisoner, he was treated with consideration and courtesy, but he died of dysentery soon after. He was the last to be added to the pantheon of the Thirty-Seven.

It has often been stated that the cult of the Thirty-Seven Lords is merely a worship of dead heroes, but in actual fact, only a few of them are heroes. Of the hero kings, only Alaungsithu and Tabinshwehti are included, and Anawrahta himself and the great Kyansitha are not included. Of the eight "mighty men of valour" who adorned the pages of Burmese history of the Pagan period, only two, the Brothers Inferior Gold are worshipped. Moreover, ten women and three



children are included. Leaving aside the King of the Gods, the remaining Thirty-six can be analysed into the following tables :

9 kings, including the fallen king of Chiengmai, a prisoner of war at Pagan.

4 queens

8 princes of the blood, including one from the fallen house of Thaton, a prisoner of war at Pagan.

11 in the service of the king, including 4 women, Golden sides, an official in her own right, Lady Bandy-Legs, Lady Bent, and the Lady of the North, who belonged to families of officials in the service of the king.

4 commoners. The Lord of the Great Mountain, Three Times Beautiful, the Little Lady and Master Po Tu. The first three fell into the orbit of the great with dire consequences, but Master Po Tu was a real commoner.

Total	<hr/> 36 <hr/>
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26 male, including ( a ) one monk ( the Lord with the White Umbrella and two novices. ) ( b ) Two children ( namely, the two novices ).

10 Women, including one child, the Little Lady.

Total	<hr/> 36 <hr/>
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10 executed. If we include the earlier Lady Bent,  
it will be 11

11 violent deaths. If we exclude the Second  
Valient Lord Kyawswa, who died of an  
"overdose of wine" it will be 10

#### *Details :*

Murdered 5. It will be 6, if we  
include the First Kyawswa.

Died of wounds 1 ( the Fourth  
Kyawswa ).

Suicide 1 ( the Lady Golden Face ).

Snake bite 2.

Eaten by tiger 1.  
Accidental 1 (Fell down from swing).

8 deaths brought about by "sudden" illness  
or dreaded disease. (If we include  
the Second Kyawswa who died of an  
"overdose of wine" it will be 9

*Details :*

Old Man of the Banyan Tree, leprosy.  
The Lord of the Five Elephants,  
sudden fever.

Queen of the Western Palace, death  
through fright.

Valient Lord Aung Din and the  
Young Lord White, "overdose of  
opium".

The Lady of the North, died of  
childbirth.

Minhkaung of Toungoo, smell of  
onions and desentry.

King of Chiengmai, dysentry.

5 died of grief. If we exclude the Lady Bent  
as belonging to Pagan. 4

34	34
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2 Plus the Lord with the White  
Umbrella and the Royal Mother.  
The Royal Mother might have died  
of grief, but certainly not the Lord,  
who lived on to see his son  
Anawrahta restored to the throne. 2

Total 36	Total 36
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It will be seen that out of the Thirty-six, Thirty-five died tragic  
and violent deaths. Even the exception, the Lord with the White  
Umbrella was a tragic figure – a king who regained his father's throne

from the usurpers, only to lose it again; a king who ascended the throne amidst popular acclaim, only to be deposed with no hand lifted to defend him; a king who started his reign with such rich promise of achievement and glory, only to find that his hopes came to naught, and who waited and waited for years after being deposed for someone to come to his aid; we could glimpse a broken heart behind these words to his son Anawrahta, "I am old to look upon, old in years. Be thou king thyself." It was the tragedy of their lives and the manner of their deaths which roused feelings of horror and pity in the mind of the people, and it was a gesture of defiance against Fate and Death on the part of the common people that they were worshipped as gods and goddesses after their death. It was not terror of their supernatural power that caused the people to worship them, for who could be afraid of the Little Lord of the Swing, of the Little Novice who in his helplessness and inexperience was killed by a snake, of the Little Lady with the Flute whose melodies cheered a sleeping babe? For that matter, who could be afraid of the Royal Tutor who died protesting his innocence, of the Ladies Bent and Bandy-Legs, of the poor prisoner—the Leper Prince? Or, of the Lady with the Gold Trimmings on her robes of velvet, who ruled over Mindon village with such grace and kindness, of the poor Drunken Lord whom his fellows despised but the village maidens loved, of poor Master Po Tu with his cartload of tea? The term "Thirty-Seven *Nats*" is never used by their devotees, and their proper term is "Thirty-Seven Lords", and Lords they were. The Lord of the Great Mountain gained Popa village as his fief from King Thilikyaung, the Brothers Inferior Gold obtained the village of Taungbyon as their fief from Anawrahta, Captain Aung Pyi obtained a village near the scene of his death as his fief from Narapitisithu, and so they were royal lords, but all the others were also lords by popular consent. It was for protection that the people made their offerings to them, and they never interfered with the lives of those who were not their devotees. Their overlordship was both territorial and personal. In the vicinity of their shrines, all must show their respect. But outside the territorial limits of their shrines, they would demand respect from their devotees and they would afford protection and favour in return. At the present day, the idea of overlordship has disappeared, for when the Burmese King fell in 1885, all his lords, including the Thirty-Seven, fell with him. However, the devotees of the cult still turn to them for protection and assistance. The cult of the Thirty-Seven Lords is

anthropomorphic, and offerings of food, pickled tea, toddy-wine, and clothes are made, and some gods have special likes and dislikes. Thus the Old Man by the Banyan Tree dislikes meat and drink, the Brothers Inferior Gold, being the sons of a Muslim, do not like pork. The Lord of the Mountain dislikes offerings of *saga* flowers for he was tied to a *saga* tree when he was burnt to death, and the Lord Minhkaung of Toungoo dislikes food flavoured with onions, for did he not die of a strong smell of onions? In other words, to their devotees the Lords are real persons. This anthropomorphic cult has effected Burmese Buddhism, for since the days of Pagan up to the present day, offerings of food and even robes are made to the images of the Buddha both in private houses and at the pagodas. In time of national danger and disaster, the people believe that the Thirty-Seven Lords are always with them. Men said that when the Tartar army invaded the country, the Lords fought side by side with the soldiers, and some of them were wounded by the Tartar arrows; that the Lord of the White Horse and the Brothers Inferior Gold shared the sorrow and the shame and the glory of the Burmese soldier retreating from the British; that the gilded images of the Thirty-Seven Lords at the King's Palace shed human tears when Theebaw, the last king of Burma, was taken away a prisoner in the hands of the British army; and that when great fires broke out in the golden city of Mandalay after an air-raid in April 1943, the Brothers Inferior Gold were seen fighting the fires shoulder to shoulder with the stricken people. The great king Anawrahta might destroy their shrines and remove their images to his Shwezigone Pagoda, the great king Bayinnaung might issue edict after edict constraining their worship, but the gods and goddesses have remained ever enshrined in the hearts of their people.

*Maung Htin Aung*