

The British
Museum

Journey of Body & Soul!



Ideals and realities in Burmese silver



Thursday 15 August 2019

Supported by
The Sino-British Fellowship Trust

Journey of Body & Soul : Ideals and Realities in Burmese silver

Burma was part of the British Empire from 1826-1947. Colonial officials maintained many British social conventions in Burma, including the use of silver utensils.

Silver was important socially to the British as it represented status. Due to its lower cost in Burma, the British acquired it enthusiastically. Different types of silver were used, and patrons

would bring silver coins minted by the British Indian Raj to be melted down for reuse.



Although the Burmese silversmiths made objects in European forms, they decorated the pieces with local stories and imagery. An important story illustrated on silver was the Ramayana, an epic poem that was rewritten for Burmese society. It became popular in court performances starting in the late 18th century. The effort, ascetic lifestyle, and heroism displayed by Rama was considered a social ideal.



The coffee-pot travelled back to Britain in the early 20th century with its owner, who had received it as a token of thanks. It represents many types of journey—mythical, economic, political, and personal.

Silver Coffee-pot

This coffee-pot was made for colonial officials in Burma. Despite the traditional European shape, the imagery probably shows scenes from the Burmese Ramayana, an epic that tells of Prince Rama's search for his wife Sita, who was kidnapped by the demon Ravana. On the lid is a chinthe, a mythical lion, and the handle is a demon. The patterning is typical, drawing on Indian, Chinese, and European designs to create a Burmese style.

Inscription: PRESENTED TO N.M. CARNELL ESQR FROM T.I.P.Z & Native staff

Burma, 1912-1913

Silver, Ivory

Donated by Simon Digby in memory of Mrs Enid Kidd

2002,1008.1



Coffee Pot

British Museum Collection Online:

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_2002-1008-1

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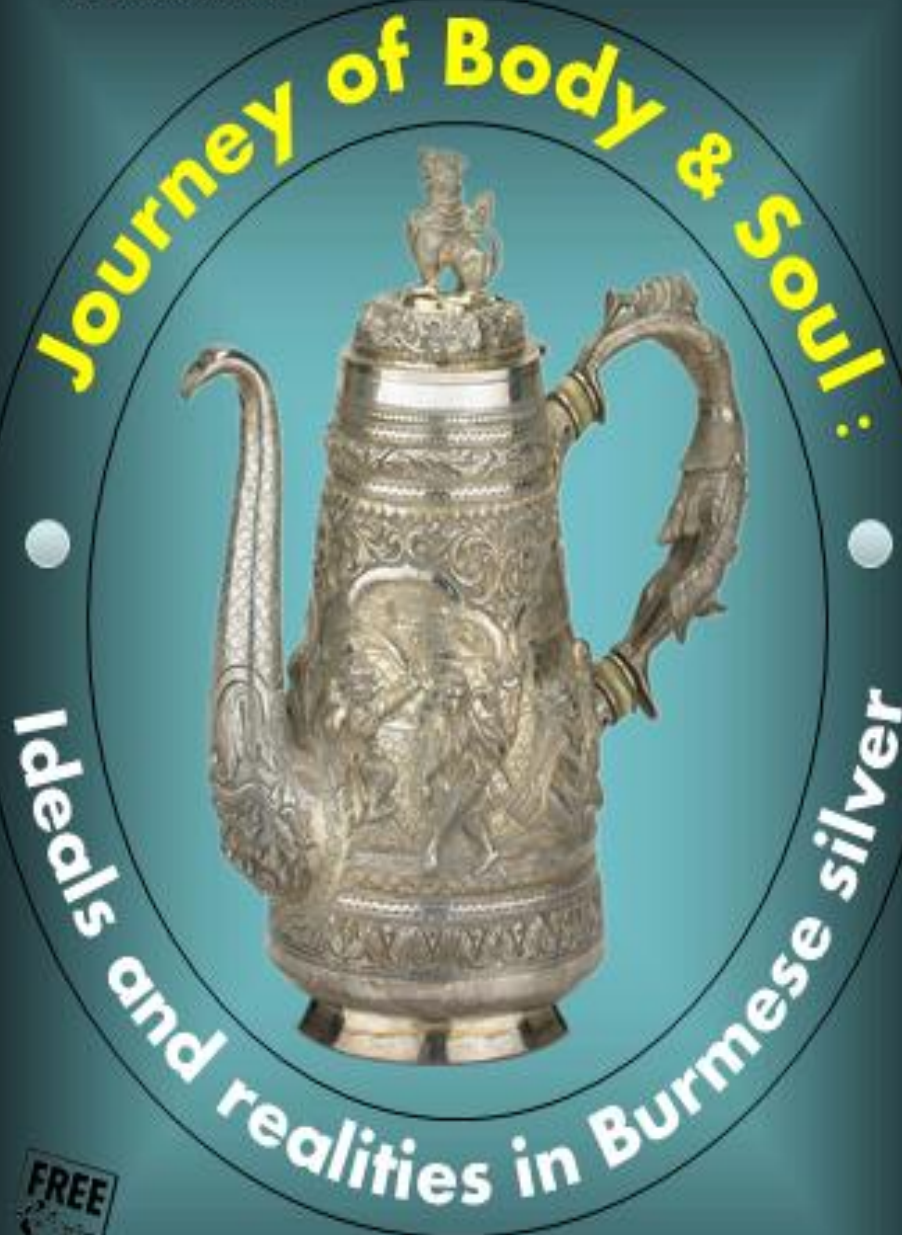
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