

Uncredited Photographs of India and Burma

by F. Beato

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Signor Beato or F. Beato, as he was generally called by contemporaries in India and Burma, is the best known 19th century photographer of "the East", and yet a mystery when it comes to pin down details about his biography. Born in Italy about 1825 or later, he died about 1907, perhaps in Burma (present-day Myanmar). Already the title of his most useful and updated biographical reference *A revised chronology of Felice (Felix) Beato (1825/34?-1908?)*¹⁾ demonstrates the amount of uncertainty about the career of this outstanding artist. This article considers some evidence in the shape of woodcuts, lithographed picture postcards and photographs, so far not taken into consideration by published sources on his Indian and more particularly Burmese photographs.

With the aim to photograph events of the "Mutiny" or Indian uprising against colonial rule, F. Beato arrived in India in February 1858. In early October 1858, 63 of Beato's photographs were shown by Major Crealock, A.D.C. to General Mansfield, in Allahabad, to Egon Sellif Lundgren (1815-1875), the probably only non-British artist in India during the "Mutiny". Lundgren in his diary records the meeting with Crealock: "He also had a large collection of superb photographs, taken by Signor Beato who had accompanied the troops for some time, and who had his tent and his gear in Sir Colin Campbell's garden. As I looked at these photographs, I was struck by the thought that they might spare me much of the work I had come to India to do [...]. At my request, Major Crealock had gone to Beato and selected such photographs as might be suitable for sending to England; they were sixty-three in number."²⁾ This amount of photographs roughly corresponds to

1) CLARK, John (editor): *Japanese Exchanges in Art 1850s to 1930s with Britain, continental Europe, and the USA. Papers and Research Materials*. Sidney: Power Publications, 2001, pp. 89-120. In the directory of the sixth edition of *Murray's Handbook*, published in 1907, "Signor Beato" is still mentioned as photographer in Mandalay, cf. *A Handbook for Travellers in India, Burma and Ceylon*, London: John Murray / Calcutta: Thacker, Spink, & Co., 1907, p.516. According to evidence cited by Sebastian DOBSON, Beato gave his age as 24 and his birthplace as Corfu when at Fort William, Calcutta, on March 16th, 1858, cf. *Reflecting Truth, Japanese Photography in the 19th Century*, Amsterdam: Hotel Publishing, 2004, p.31 and endnote 2, p.38.

2) NILSSON, Sten / GUPTA, Narayani: *The Painter's Eye: Egon Lundgren and India*. Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 1992. pp. 93, 94

the number of views given in *Hering's list* of Beato's photographs of 1862 for "Lucknow and Cawnpore".³⁾ Lundgren, it should be remembered, also provided the "Mutiny Diary" of William Howard Russel, *Times* correspondent in India, with illustrations, and on the 18th of the same month, Russel records his meeting with Beato: "To-night, after dinner, we proceed to the nautch, which is given at the house of a Mahajun in the city. Mr. Sherer and his assistant; Mr. Beato, well-known as a photographer, formerly with Robertson, of Constantinople, and myself, proceeded, in an open carriage, with a cavalry escort, in very great state, into the city of Cawnpore."⁴⁾

Some of these 63 photographs were engraved and consequently printed in *The Illustrated London News* (London, 1842ff.). We quote here a few examples which offer comparison with published photographs: "The Great Gateway of the Kaiserbagh ...", no. 22 in *Hering's list*, was published as cover-page-illustration of No. 965, Volume XXXIV, March 19th, 1859; Beato's photograph, on which this engraving is based, was published recently.⁵⁾ No. 23 of *Hering's list*, "The King's Palace in the Kaiserbagh ..." appears on p. 385 of the issue for April 16th, 1859.⁶⁾ "The Secundra Bagh, showing the breach and gateway ...", no. 12 in *Hering's list*, is printed on p. 396 in the issue for April 23rd, 1859.⁷⁾

On the same page appears "The Bailey Guard Gate" (Fig. 1), which corresponds to no. 38 in *Hering's list*. The related unmounted photograph by Beato (Fig. 2) is inscribed on the back in pencil: "Bailee guard gate taken from the inside showing the Clock Tower" and, below, in larger handwriting: "38 Lucknow". As in all cases quoted above, the engraver has introduced more figures in the composition when compared to the actual photograph, while the man standing in the doorway and the groom with the horse were not copied for the version of *The Illustrated London News*. The engraving is thus described: "The Bailey Guard. The position occupied by the besieged at Lucknow, which was called the Bailey Guard, was part of the defenses of the Residency. It has been described as a continuation of the hospital, but built on ground which descended considerably. Part of it was used as a treasury, part as an office, and the remainder as barracks for the native soldiers who

3) HERING, H.: *A Magnificent Collection of Photographic Views and Panoramas, taken by Signor F. Beato, During the Indian Mutiny in 1857-58, and the late War in China, of Lucknow, Cawnpore, Delhi, Agra, Benares, & Punjab, Hong-Kong, The Peiho Forts, Peking, The Summer Palace, And Canton, Also, Portraits of the Celebrities Engaged During the Mutiny in India and the Late War in China*. London: H. Hering, Photographer, Printseller, and Publisher to the Queen, n.d. [1862]. Quoted after the facsimile edition published in HARRIS, David: *Of Battle and Beauty. Felice Beato's Photographs of China*. Santa Barbara, CA: Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1999, Appendix B.

4) RUSSEL, William Howard: *My Diary in India, in the Year 1858-9*. 2 Volumes. London: Routledge, Warne, and Routledge, 1860. Vol. II, p. 274.

5) HARRIS, David: Topography and Memory: Felice Beato's Photographs of India, 1858-1859. In: DEHEJIA, Vidya [ed.]: *India through the lens. Photography 1840-1911*. Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery in association with Mapin Publishing, Ahmedabad and Prestel, Munich, London, New York, 2000, pp. 118-147, illustration p. 138.

6) For the actual photograph see again HARRIS 2000 (note 5 *supra*), illustration p. 139

7) For the photograph cf. HARRIS 2000 (note 5 *supra*), p. 125, fig. 1, or HARRIS 1999 (note 3 *supra*), p. 23, fig. 7.

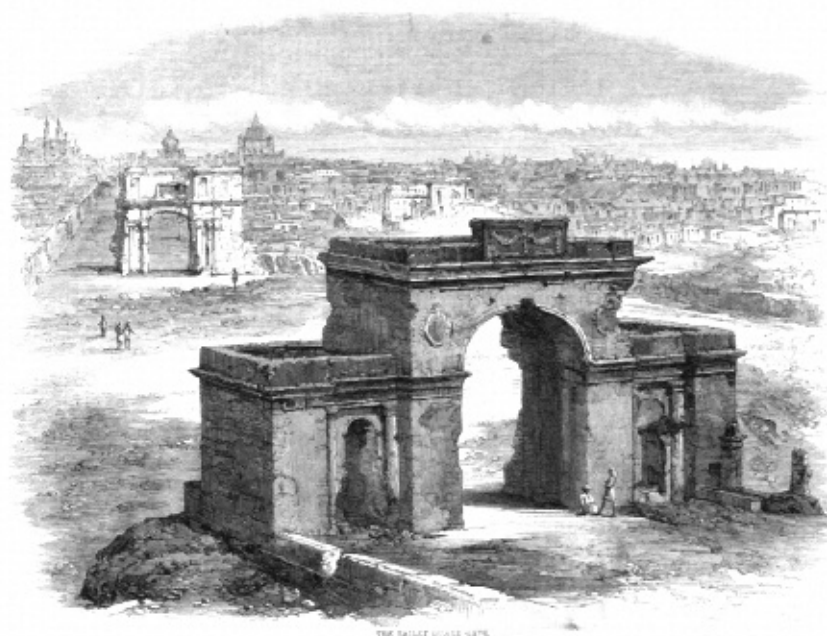


Fig. 1
 "The Bailey
 Guard Gate",
 engraving from
 'The Illustrated
 London News',
 April 23, 1859,
 p. 396, based on
 Fig. 2, overall size
 of engraved area:
 17.4 x 23.5 cm

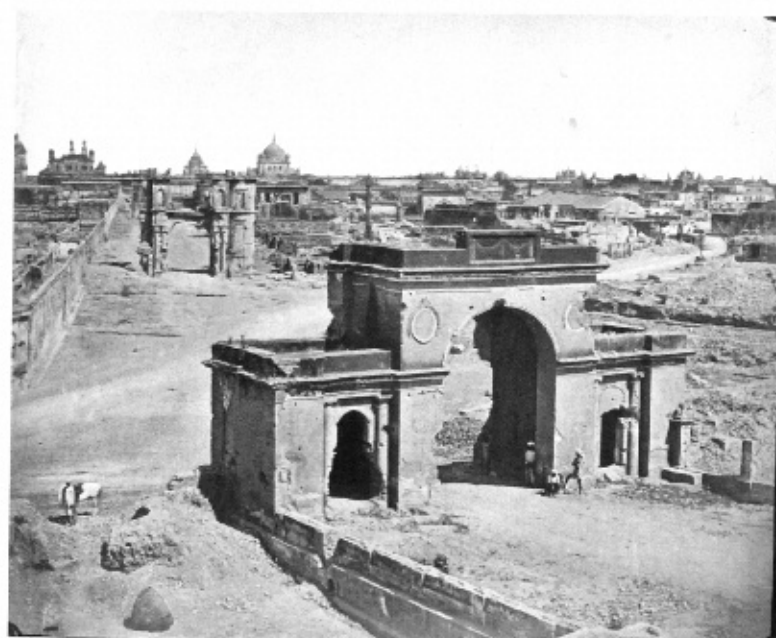
composed the guard. It is stated to have been by no means a strong position. The gateway was lofty, but was blocked up with earth, and, in the event of its being forced, was commanded by two nine-pounder guns and an eight-inch howitzer. It was at this point that the troops assembled on the day on which they marched out on that expedition which resulted in the unfortunate battle of Chinhutt. The Bailey Guard was, of course, the object of continual attacks by the mutineers, one of the severest of which took place on the 20th of July, the day on which Sir Henry Lawrence received the wound which ultimately proved mortal. The Illustration which we give presents a view of the Bailey Guard Gate showing the enemy's position facing it." By the time this engraving and description were published, Beato was still in India.

While very few of these engravings are signed (e.g. "Macquoid del.", i.e. Thomas Robert Macquoid, 1820-1912, for "The Great Gateway of the Kaiserbagh"), the photographer, F. Beato, remains anonymous: his name is never mentioned, a fate that he shares with several other photographers whose Indian views appeared in *The Illustrated London News*, such as Linnacus Tripe (1822-1902), Dr. John Murray (1809-1898) or Samuel Bourne (1834-1912).

Another important weekly, a kind of illustrated travel report with world news printed on the blue covers of each issue, was the French *Le Tour du Monde, Nouveau Journal des Voyages*, published under the direction of Edouard Charton in Paris since 1860. There were two "volumes" each year. Volume 44, issue 1667, published in the second half of 1892, contains an article by Monsieur E. Cavaglion, *Quinze Jours en Birmanie* (15 days in Burma). This article, covering pages 385 to 400, is accompanied by 17 engravings, most of which are based on photographs.

Cavaglion arrived in Rangoon on the 11th February, 1886. George W. Bird, who interviewed

Fig. 2
"Bailee guard
gate taken from
the inside showing
the Clock Tower",
unmounted albumen
silver print, F. Beato,
late spring, 1858,
24.4 x 29.7 cm



F. Beato in Mandalay, says that Beato arrived in Burma in 1886.⁸⁾ By the time Cavaglioni arrived in Burma, however, F. Beato is said to have given a lecture to the London and Provincial Photo-

8) BIRD, George W.: *Wanderings in Burma*. Bournemouth: F.J. Bright & Son / London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., 1897, pp. 291f. As this is the most important and debated source on Beato's life, we quote its relevant passages here: "Visitors to Upper Burma should not fail to pay a visit to Signor Beato's studio in C road, Mandalay. He arrived in Mandalay in 1886, at the time of the annexation of Upper Burma, and has succeeded in establishing an excellent business as a dealer in Burmese curios. Originally a photographer, he was present throughout the Crimean war, the Indian Mutiny, General Sir Hope Grant's Campaign to China in 1860, Admiral Hooper's Naval Campaign in Japan in 1864, the United States Expedition to Corea in 1870, the Soudan Campaigns, including the Nile and Suakim Expeditions, and the Expedition to Upper Burma in 1885-86. Soon after his arrival in Mandalay, he established his present flourishing business. His long residence in Japan of 24 years, gave him the experience necessary for successfully conducting such an undertaking. Here can be obtained, besides photographs of all places and peoples of Upper Burma, and the countries adjacent to it; works of art in wood, metal (especially old and modern Shan silver work), ivory, silk goods (both printed and embroidered), images of Buddha, costumes and arms of indigenous races, and quantities of other curios and objects suitable as mementos of a visit of this interesting country. Signor Beato undertakes the packing and despatch of all articles purchased from his studio, and has for a number of years carried on a large export trade with Europe, America, and other parts of the world. Employing as he does a large number of workers (over 800 in number) in the different art industries, he is able to command the best specimens, and hence those who patronize his studio, may rest assured that they will get the real article, at a reasonable price, and of the very best workmanship. Most of the articles hawked about the streets, and offered for sale at the doiors of the hotels and private bungalows, are articles rejected by him as being of inferior workmanship, or having flaws or blemishes. As Signor Beato has been connected with Mandalay for a number of years, he is naturally in a position to render willing help to the tourist. A visit to the Studio, therefore, and an interesting chat with its genial and courteous proprietor, will put the traveller on the right road to obtaining all he wants in the way of curios, and getting information and 'tips' as to the sights of the city."

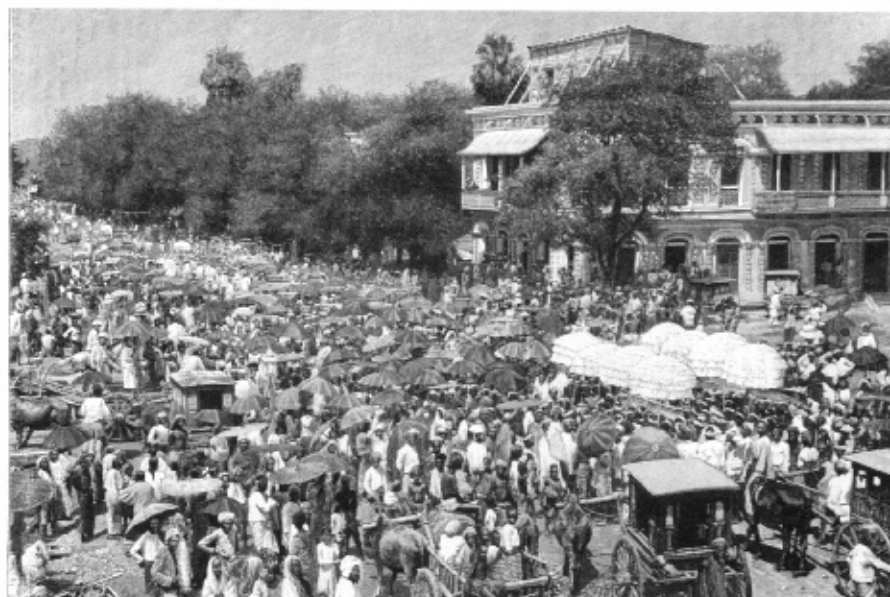


Fig. 3
"Une rue
de Mandalay",
engraving by
Th. Girardet
from 'Le Tour
du Monde,
Nouveau Journal
des Voyages',
Volume LXIV,
livraison 1667,
1892, p. 393

graphic Society.⁹⁾ Be that as it may, Cavaglioni is silent about Beato, but reproduces some of his photographs in fine, often full-page, engravings. The perhaps most revealing engraving covers p. 393: "Une rue de Mandalay ... Gravure de Th. Girardet, d'après une photographie" (a street in Mandalay ... engraving by Th. Girardet, after a photograph) (Fig. 3). The actual photograph¹⁰⁾ shows C-road in Mandalay, where, following George W. Bird, F. Beato had his studio. This studio can in fact even be located in the engraving, of which Fig. 4 offers a detail in which the name BEATO, written on a signboard, can clearly be read.



Fig. 4 Detail from Fig. 3: Beato's studio

Apart from the photograph of the C-road, a number of other photographs published by Cavaglioni can be attributed to Beato. The photographs of "Une partie de l'incomparable Pagode ... d'après une photographie", engraved on p. 390 and the "Danseuses ... d'après une photographie", on p. 394 can both be ascribed to the same photographer.¹¹⁾ The full-page engraving on p. 391, titled "L'incomparable pagode de Mandalay - Dessin de Taylor, d'après une photographie" (Fig. 5), is almost as large as the original photograph (Fig. 6), which was later (in 1897) also reproduced in Bird's *Wanderings in Burma*, with the caption: "Photo

9) CLARK 2001 (note 1 *supra*), p. 112.

10) For which see CLARK 2001 (note 1 *supra*), illustration 58.

11) Cf. SINGER, Noel F.: *Burmah. A Photographic Journey 1855-1925*. Gartmore, Stirling: Paul Strachan - Kiscadale, 1993, illustrations p. 80 and p. 63.

Fig. 5
"L'Incomparable
Pagode de
Mandalay", drawn
by Taylor, engraved
by Maynard,
based on Fig. 6,
from the same
journal as Fig. 3,
p. 391.
15.9 x 23.5 cm



Fig. 6
"Incomparable
Pagoda, near
Mandalay"
(so titled on mount),
albumen print,
F. Beato, 1886-1892,
19.4 x 26.5 cm



by Signor Beato, Mandalay". Since the white rectangular pyramidal structure at the right hand side of the photograph, the Atu-ma-shi or "incomparable" monastery, was destroyed by fire in 1892, this view must have been taken in or more likely before that year.

Cavaglioni's full-page woodcut "Palais de la reine Sopia-Lat dans la cité royale de Mandalay. - Gravure de Kohl, d'après une photographie" (palace of queen Sopia-Lat in the royal city of Mandalay - engraving by Kohl, after a photograph) reproduced on p. 389 of his article, is based on another



Fig. 7
"The Queens
Silver Pagoda.
Burnt by fire 1892"
(so titled on mount),
albumen print,
F. Beato,
1886-1892,
20.1 x 27.0 cm

photograph by Beato (Fig. 7). This "palais", actually a monastery, was built between 1881-85 for queen Su-hpaya-lat, consort of king Thibaw (b. 1858, r. 1878-1885, d. 1916). The contemporary caption below the photograph informs that it was "burnt by fire 1892", whereas Sylvia Fraser-Lu claims it was only destroyed during the second World War.¹²⁾

As Cavaglioni cannot have met F. Beato or his representative in Burma, from where did he obtain the photographs to illustrate his article? It seems evident that he acquired them later, but in any case in or before 1892. A very possible source were the French missionaries. In Mandalay, to give an example, the "Collège des Frères" founded a leprosy hospital in 1891. Pater Wehinger soon managed that about 20 nuns of the "Soeurs Franciscaines Missionnaires de Marie" (Franciscan Missionaries of Mary in the World) settled south of Mandalay in order to sustain those who suffer from leprosy. The "Franciscan Missionaries of Mary in the World" were founded by a lady by name of Hélène de Chapottin (1839-1904), who, in 1877, founded a mission in Madurai, South India. Later, she became known as "Marie de la Passion". On June 13th, 1891, the "Soeurs Franciscaines Missionnaires de Marie" opened an establishment at Vanves, Paris.

By around 1905 this branch of the Franciscan Missionaries started to produce a series of picture postcards on Burma, which were mostly based on F. Beato's photographs. Although the title of each postcard is in French, the credit line is in English. It reads: "Phot[ograph] Francisc[an] Missio[naries], Vanves, Seine."

12) FRASER-LU, Sylvia: Problems and prospects for the preservation of wooden monasteries in Burma. In: *Burma. Art and Archaeology*. Edited by Alexandra Green and T. Richard Blurton. London: The British Museum Press, 2002, pp. 107-118; p. 110.



Fig. 8 "Jeune Fille Birmane", picture postcard based on Fig. 9, published by the Franciscan Missionaries, Vanves, Seine, postally used in 1906, 13.7 x 8.5 cm



Fig. 9 Cabinet card of a "Shan Beauty", intended for use to convey Christmas and New Year's greetings. F. Beato, Mandalay, photographed 1886-1892, mounting a few years later, 16.3 x 10.6 cm

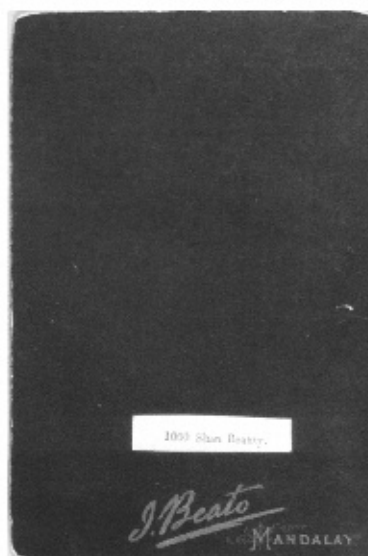


Fig. 10 Reverse of Fig. 9

A typical card from this series is illustrated here by Fig. 8, "Jeune Fille Birmane" (young Burmese girl). On the back it bears a clear postal rubber stamp impression with the date of April 8th, 1906, sent from "Nice, Alpes Maritimes", in France, to Paris. This photograph is undoubtedly by Beato, as it is one of about a dozen known, cabinet sized cards with a gold-embossed inscription: "With Best Wishes For A Happy Christmas / And A Bright New Year" (Fig. 9). On the back of the same (Fig. 10) is a printed paper label, numbering and identifying the subject as "1000 Shan Beauty". Below, in golden script partly in imitating handwriting is printed: "J. Beato / Mandalay". This misprint, "J" instead of "F", is also recorded in the 1902 edition of the *Rangoon Commercial Directory*: "This was an error on the part of the printers, for the 'F' (Felice) often looked like a 'J'."¹³ A comparison reveals that the postcard based on this albumen print or its original, larger version (25.1 x 19.9 cm, not reproduced here), is mirror-reversed. When a lithographed print after this photograph was included in the *Typical Photographs of Burma*, it was, however, correctly reproduced.¹⁴

13) SINGER, Noel F.: Felice Beato's "Burmese Days". In: *Arts of Asia*, Vol. 28, No. 5, September-October 1998, pp. 96-106; p. 106. On the back of those cabinet cards which bear a shorter embossed inscription ("Wishing you a Merry Christmas"), the initial that precedes "Beato" still resembles the letter "F", as a related photograph in a private collection, titled "1241 A windy day in Mandalay", demonstrates.

14) *Typical Photographs of Burma. Burmese Life and Scenes*. Rangoon: Rowe & Co. Ltd., n.d. [about 1915], p. 64, no. 92, "Shan Girl".



Fig. 11 "Petite Princesse Birmane", picture postcard from the same series as Fig. 8, based on Fig. 12



Fig. 12 Portrait of a girl photographed in Beato's studio, numbered "217", unmounted silver gelatin print, F. Beato, 1886-1892, this print from about 1900, 27.4 x 21.8 cm



Fig. 13 "Petite Princesse Birmane", picture postcard based on Fig. 12, produced by an unspecified French company, postally used in 1908, 13.7 x 8.9 cm



Fig. 14 "Princesses Birmanes", picture postcard from the same series as Fig. 8, based on a photograph taken in Beato's studio

Another postcard from this series shows a "Petite Princesse Birmane" (Fig. 11). This card was postally used in France on July 8, 1911. The corresponding original photograph is illustrated here as well (Fig. 12). This fuller view shows one of the typical backdrops of Beato's studio, known from several published photographs¹⁵⁾ and Fig. 18. It seems that the postcard based on Fig. 12 was quite successful, as a mirror-reversed version (Fig. 13) was issued by some unspecified French company, and was postally used in 1908. It is also labelled "Petite Princesse Birmane". While it is not clear as to why the girl is called a "princess", another picture postcard from the same series is captioned "Princesses Birmanes" (Fig. 14). Based on a photograph of Beato's studio for the said reasons,¹⁶⁾ it shows the same young girl leaning against a kind of covered armchair known from the previous figures together with an adult woman, probably her mother.

15) Cf. e.g. SINGER 1993 (note 11 *supra*), illustrations p. 87 and p. 103; SINGER 1998 (note 13 *supra*), full-page plates p. 104 and 105.

16) For a copy of the actual photograph in the Oriental and India Office Collection of the British Library, London, see Photo 15/6(38), 15638, size: 28.4 x 20.6 centimetres.

The series of picture postcards issued by the "Franciscan Missionaries of Mary in the World" not only included girls and young women. One card in the series is labelled: "Ancien Général Birman" (Fig. 15). The actual photograph (Fig. 16) demonstrates again, to which extent the motif was cut in order to fulfil the requirements of a picture postcard. Another print from the same negative in the British Library is titled "Commander in Chief of King Theebaw's Army in Court dress" (Photo 296/1 (25)). Beato's authorship for Fig. 15 was seriously questioned in the *History of Photography in India*.¹⁷ There can, however, be little doubt about the fact that Beato took this photograph as it is part of the Vanves series issued by the Franciscan Missionaries.

Apart from the Franciscan Missionaries in France, Beato's photographs were also used in Burma itself. Fig. 17, "A Shan beauty", is a hand-coloured, uncredited version of Beato's "Shan Sawbwa's daughter" (Fig. 18). The picture postcard (Fig. 17) was postally used on August 8th, 1909, when it was



Fig. 15 "Ancien Général Birman", picture postcard from the same series as Fig. 8, based on Fig. 16



Fig. 16 "Burmese Commander-in-Chief" (so titled on mount), albumen print, F. Beato, 1886-1892, 24.7 x 19.4 cm



Fig. 17 "A Shan beauty", coloured picture postcard by an unidentified Burmese publisher, based on Fig. 18, 14.0 x 9.0 cm



Fig. 18 "Shan Sawbwa's daughter" (so titled on mount), numbered "396", albumen print, F. Beato, Mandalay, 1886-1892, 27.0 x 18.5 cm

17) THOMAS, G.: *History of Photography* [-] *India*. [Hyderabad:] Andhra Pradesh State Akademi of Photography, 1981, Figure 36: "Photographer not known, but possibly Col. R.B. Graham".

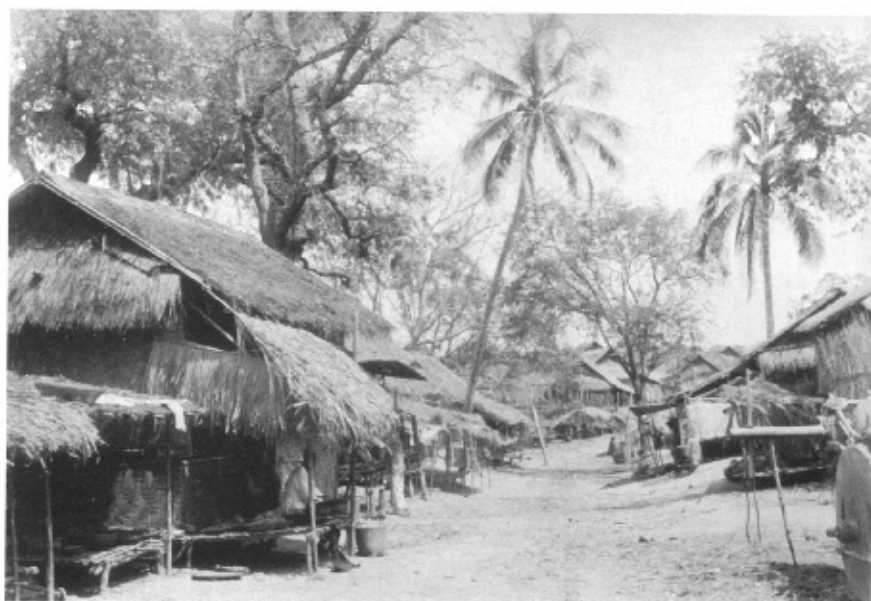


Fig. 19
 "Street view
 in Wuntho"
 (so titled
 on mount),
 albumen print,
 F. Beato,
 1891-1892,
 19.0 x 27.4 cm

sent from "Rangoon". It was already observed that: "From 1900 onwards, although other photographic companies were now producing postcards, Beato does not appear to have expanded in this direction as examples are unknown."¹⁸⁾ Beato, it seems, did not actively produce picture postcards, which, however, does not mean that Beato's photographs were not turned into picture postcards. As these examples have shown, quite the contrary was the case.

Perhaps the most lavishly produced early 20th century album of lithographed photographs on Burma is *Typical Photographs of Burma*, published around 1915 by the then well-known Burmese company of Rowe & Co.¹⁹⁾ Although most of the photographs published in this album seem to be by Philip Adolphe Klier (1845-1911) of Rangoon, there are also several uncredited photographs by F. Beato. The "Shan Beauty" (Fig. 9) was already mentioned,²⁰⁾ another example is "A Typical Burmese Village Scene" (Fig. 19).²¹⁾ This view was actually photographed by F. Beato at Wuntho, an area situated a few miles north of Kawlin, "one of the most unhealthy stations for Europeans in the whole of Upper Burma".²²⁾ The photograph was almost certainly taken on the occasion of the pacification of the area that rebelled in 1890-91.

In the light of the above, a good number of Beato's Burmese photographs, generally uncredited when reproduced, can be dated to 1892 or earlier.²³⁾

18) SINGER 1998 (note 13, *supra*), p. 106.

19) Not mentioned by SINGER 1983 (note 11, *supra*).

20) See note 14, *supra*.

21) *Typical Photographs of Burma* (note 14, *supra*), full-page plate p. 47, no. 68.

22) BIRD 1897 (note 8, *supra*), p. 392.

23) All illustrations are courtesy of private collectors. In the measurements given, height always precedes width.