Kings were to have as their prototype Indra, king of the gods. And the royal capitals were to be like the City of the Gods, with the royal palace being modeled after the palace of Indra, already in the (Jātaka) narratives about Buddha’s former lives and in the Chronicle of medieval Ceylon.1 “The king built a palace resembling that of Sakra [Indra],” was written about Bodawpaya in 1816.2 Through such identification with the mythical abode of Indra, the royal palace, even in nineteenth century Burma, was still identified with Mount Meru as its archetype.3 This mythical Mount Meru (Myin: mo) was for pre-modern Burma the centre of the universe, as conceived in Hindu-Buddhist cosmology.4 Around it were thought to be seven circular mountain ranges, separated from each other by seven annular seas.5
The whole circular universe was thought to be surrounded by an enormous rock wall 6 which enclosed an ocean with four insular continents, each of them set in cardinal directions.7 The continent of

1 Pañcagāra-Jātaka: Cowell, Jātaka ... , Vol. I (1895), p. 289; Cūlavamsa, LXXII, 328–329; LXXXV, 110; LXXXVIII, 116, 121: transl. W. Geiger, Part I (Colombo, 1953), p. 348; Part II, pp. 169, 191 -with regard to Parakkamabāhu I and Parakkamabāhu II (1153–1186, respectively 1236–1271) and Vijayabāhu IV (1271–1273). Beliefs in earthly paralleis to heavenly prototypes, ideas of the Earth as image of Heaven, with lands, towns and rivers having celestial prototypes, are traced to ancient Mesopotamia and may have entered Indic traditions through the pre-Aryan Indus Valley Civilization since the third millennium B.C.
4 Vinaya Pitaka: Ma U: Sayadaw Paya: Gyi:, Pāramitā Atakata (Mandalay, no date), p. 100
6 Ma U: Sayadaw Paya: Gyi:, Pāramitā Atakata, p. 112.
Mount Meru was called Jambudvipa and considered the abode of men. On the smaller islands around it were supposed to dwell the English and other non-Indic peoples. There, just as in the countries of barbarians (ignorant of Buddhism) and in the three other island continents (including the otherwise blissful Uttarakuru – cf. p. 89), Merit could not be obtained, it was thought, not even by good works, because of the absence of Buddhist Enlightenment. Such enlightenment about causation was thought possible only in Jambudvipa, the abode of men, the continent of Buddhism: Only in this continent of Bodhisattvas and universal monarchs (cf. p. 91) were Buddhas said to have been ever born.

Only from our wonderful sphere [Jambudvipa] did lord Buddha deign to be exaltedly born. Also [it was] in our wonderful sphere [that he] meditated. In the other three islands, the Western Island, the Northern Island, the Eastern Island, lord Buddha does not deign to have his exalted birth. In our Jambudvipa, the Southern Island only, did lord Buddha exaltedly deign to be born. On the Southern Island Jambudvipa’s middle and circular center, grows the Bodhi Tree. Near this Bodhi Tree lord Buddha deigned to have his exalted birth . . . [There] through Merit and virtue, the [pious] lords of the worldly state [for the sake of] freedom from all kamma travel slowly [towards] the Resting Place of Nirban [Nirvana]. [There, in Jambudvipa only] can they go to this crowning victory.

As it was on the insular continent of Jambudvipa that Gautama Buddha found his Enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree, its site became the center of the human earth, according to Buddhist cosmology. And Jambudvipa the continent of man was sometimes poetically called “Nirvana’s Ferry,” while in Burmese sources it often designates Burma.

1 Main: hkain: Sayadaw, Witi poun, hpoun sin, hsan: poun thein poun (Rangoon, 1290/1928), pp. 52f., 68.
3 Saya U Tein: Han, Lei: cun: zaca pakka-dein (Mandalay, 1320/1959), no pagination, second page.
4 Ibid., fifth and sixth page.
6 Sangermano, A description of the Burmese Empire, p. 9; Shway Yoe, The Burman, his life and notions, p. 93.
7 M. Bode, The Pāli Literature of Burma, pp. 16f. “Bhāratā [India] is... the best of the divisions of Jambudvipa, because it is the land of works. The others are places of enjoyment alone. It is only after many thousands of births and the aggregation of much merit, that living beings are sometimes born in Bhāratā, as men. The gods themselves exclaim: ‘Happy are those who are born, even from the conditions of gods, as men in Bhārata-varsha, as that is the way to the pleasures of paradise or of final liberation. Happy are they who... obtain existence in that land of works...’”; Viṣṇu Purāṇa, II, iii: The Viṣṇu Purāṇa, a systematic Hindu mythology and tradition, translated by H. H. Wilson, Vol. II (London, 1865), pp. 136f.