

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This is a study of the attempt of the famous Minister Poet Letwe Nawrahta of Myanmar to describe the scenes of the war between Myanmar and Siam in 1767, having chanced to portray this Great War. It questions whether his endeavor of weaving intricate but vivid episodes carrying the reflection of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Myanmar-Thai relations especially activities of war between the two countries was successful and how it contributes to the histories of both countries.

Relations between the two countries date back to the reign of Queen Chammadevi of Haripunjaya (Lamphun) during which Theravada Buddhism was imported first from Lopburi and later Thaton\*. The old Chammadevi chronicle mentions that when a cholera epidemic broke out, people of Haripunjaya were evacuated and temporarily retreated to Thaton. Relations continued throughout the Mangrai dynasty starting from the King Mangrai of Chiang Mai, founder of the Lanna Kingdom.

Many arts of the region remarkably resemble those that are indigenous to Myanmar.<sup>1</sup> One example is the architecture of the great seven spires chedi at Wat Maha Photaram, built by King Tilokarat in 1998 B.E. It was influenced by the chedi in Bagan called "Maha Bhothi" the proto type of which was "the Maha Bodh Gaya" in India.<sup>2</sup> In latter periods, owing to rivalry over control of the lower part of Myanmar including Tenasserim and the wars of territorial expansion, long drawn conflicts between Myanmar and Siam continued for more than four centuries from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century.

If we narrow down the scope and time for the convenience of this thesis, only one big event can be highlighted as most important. This is the last fall of Ayutthaya in 1767

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\* Pa. Sudhamapura in Ramanya Desa (Lower Myanmar)

<sup>1</sup> Aroonrut Wichienkeeo, "Lan Na Relations with Myanmar", **Comparative Studies on Literature and history of Thailand and Myanmar**, (Yangon, 1997). Page 56.

<sup>2</sup> University of Rangoon, **Glimpses of Glorious Bagan**, (Rangoon: The University Press, 1986). Page 31.

during the reign of King Hsinphyushin also known as Myedumin (1763-1776), second son of King Alaungpaya. It abruptly ended the long line of thirty three Ayutthaya kings covering the period of 417 years. This led to the emergence of Thonburi-Bangkok dynasties.

The Myanmar term for “Yodayar” means Ayutthaya. “Naing” in Myanmar language carries the meaning of victory and “Mawgun” is an epic poem immortalizing memorable events or things. Thus, the literal meaning of “Yodayar Naing Mawgun” implies “record on victory over Ayutthaya”.

This Mawgun is about the war of 1767 between Myanmar and Siam. It was written by the contemporary minister-writer Letwe Nawrahta, who grasped the opportunity to portray the campaign, using his outstanding talent observantly to paint a remarkable picture of that unforgettable war.

In finding the Mawgun which seemed to be lost, I have encountered many difficulties. First of all, it was not in book form. Secondly, though different in times and events, there was another Mawgun bearing the same title written by court lyricist Sale U Pon Nya in the late Konboun period. Moreover, Letwe Nawrahta's Mawgun was overshadowed by this work of Sale U Pon Nya. And thirdly, the author's works were mixed up with that of Letwe Thondra, another contemporary minister-writer belonging to the same reign.

At first, the Mawgun remained hidden at the various libraries in Yangon, Mandalay and Nay Pyi Taw for many months. Fortuitously, I was able to trace back the full text of Mawgun in the National Library of Myanmar. It was in the form of palm leaf manuscript and the verses in it were often unintelligible if they were not translated into prose.

In searching for the Mawgun, I had to use the reference Tin-38 made in the Myanmar scholar Dr. Daw Ye Ye Khin's "Sit-naung Mawgun (3) saung hnint A-phwint kyan" (Treatise on the analysis and explanations of three war victory Mawguns; Yodayar Naing Mawgun, Dhanyawadi Naing Mawgun and Assam Naing Mawgun) submitted for



the Degree of PhD in Myanmar literature at the University of Yangon in 2007. There are four classifications of documents in the National Library of Myanmar, Yangon namely collections of U Tin (Tin group), Kinwon Mingyi (Kin group), Taung Twingyi monastery (Taung group) and others (A ma ta group, an abbreviation of the word 'Amyothar' meaning national). So much gratitude is owed to Dr. Ye Ye Khin for her keen interest in the life and works of Letwe Nawrahta, and particularly in this Mawgun.

In Myanmar, these kinds of documents are not scanty. I suppose I should mention now that Myanmar is rich in historical evidence: for example, Kyauk sa (stone inscriptions), Yazwin (Chronicles), Eigyin (a kind of royal lullaby), Mawguns (record of important events), various types of poems, Ayedawbon Kyan (record of struggle by the king in his quest for the throne) and so on, which describe the important events of particular times in history.)

Throughout history, they are written in prose or in verse. I would like to present sources of Myanmar history in order to get the general understanding of Myanmar historiography which can be classified into four categories: Kyauk sa (stone inscription), Chronicles, Thamaing and Ayedawbon, a variety of verse and treatises and royal edicts and official records.

### 1.1 Kyauk sa (stone inscriptions)

The Myanmar alphabet is developed from that of old Brahmi, dating back to the eighth and seventh centuries BC and flowering in ancient India during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. As time passed, a large number of Pali and a few Sanskrit words were adopted into Myanmar language through Mons.<sup>3</sup>

The earliest form of writing, stone inscriptions date back to the eleventh century in Bagan period and nearly 625 inscriptions attest to its greatness<sup>4</sup>. This art of writing flourished between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century and declined from fifteen century until 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Myanmar *Abidan*, Union of Burma, "Introduction" Ministry of Education, Myanmar Language Commission, part 1, (Published in No 27, Pyi Road, Yangon, 1978), Page 1.

<sup>4</sup> U Myo Myint, "Problems in Myanmar Historiography", *Comparative studies on literature, history of Thailand and Myanmar*, (Bangkok, 1997), Page 104.

century. Only 100 stone inscriptions are found in Konboun period. They were mostly written in prose. Kyauk sa is the most important primary source of Myanmar history. Thanks to these valuable sources, historian can construct Myanmar history in a more reliable manner except pre Bagan period.

The earliest stone inscription by Prince Yazakumar of 1113 AD, also known as Myazeidi Inscription, has become famous as the Rosetta Stone of Myanmar. The four faces of the stone has Myanmar inscription on the front, with the same text in Pyu, Mon and Pali on its sides and back. We have found that the expressions of Myanmar language on Myazeidi inscription are in a rudimentary stage. The Myanmar language greatly improved towards the end of Bagan period.

Many of them are dedicatory in nature as the authors of these stone inscriptions were kings, members of the royal families and court officials. The theme is almost entirely limited to religion and royalty, thus the scope is relatively restricted.

Typically, inscriptions duly record the erection of pagoda and the sacred edifices, dedication of glebe land and pagoda slaves, a prayer to attain merit or award, the bitter denunciation of would be spoilers of the offerings and the blessing and rewards to those who bountifully support their work of merit and so on.

## **1. 2 Yazawin (Chronicles), Thamaing and Ayedawbon**

There are two kinds of Myanmar historiography; history writing in prose and in verse. Historical writing in prose includes Chronicles, Thamaing and Ayedawbon. Myanmar chronicles are also primary sources. We have witnessed a continuous history of Myanmar in chronicles. Chronicles known to have been written since sixteenth century can be divided into two; old and standard chronicles.

Some of the old chronicles are Bagan Yazawin, Tagaung Yazawin, Hynet Pyit Taung Yazawin, etc. The standard chronicles are U Kala's Mahayazawindawgyi, Hmanan Yazawindawgyi (the Glass Palace Chronicle), Wetmasutt Nawaday's Maha Yazawin Thit, Monywa abbot's Yazawin Kyaw, The Second Maha Yazawindawgyi and



U Maung Maung Tin's Koungboungset Mahayazawindawgyi. The distinction between the two is that the former is limited in scope but the other is more extensive.

In addition to these chronicles, many regional and racial chronicles such as Taungoo Yazawin, Talaing Yazawin Choke, Zatadawbon Yazawin, U Uttama's Chin chronicle, U Tha Tun Aung's Rakhine chronicle, U Naw's Mon chronicle, U Saw's Kayin (Karen) chronicle exist. There were also religious chronicles compiled in the nineteenth century, giving an account of the history of Buddhism and of its establishment in Myanmar.

Thamaing are accounts of the foundation of pagodas and monasteries and local histories of towns and districts. It is of little value as historical sources because many of them are legends of kings, cities, lakes or pagodas. Ayedawbon Kyans can be classified as subsidiary sources for the historiography of Myanmar. They are royal biographies or memoirs of the struggle of an individual ruler and his military campaigns.

### 1.3 Literature and treatises

Myanmar literature is mostly comprised of poems. Apart from stone inscriptions, they dominate the scene from 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most of them can be classified as subsidiary sources for Myanmar historiography. Myanmar term for poetry is Kabya linga which derived from the two Sanskrit words Kavya, a name for a certain kind of poetry, and alamkara, an ornament of the sound or the sense.<sup>5</sup>

Historical writing in poetic forms include a variety of verse such as Mawgun, Eigyin, Pyo, Igyin, Kar gyin, Yadu, Yagan, Taw la, Baw-le, etc. There are over 50 genres of poems in Myanmar literature. Above all these Poems, Yadu, Pyo, Mawgun and Eigyin are oldest poems dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century and carry a bulk of historical values.

A large number of Treatises are written on various subjects – history, spelling, orthography, carpentry, astrology, medicine, culinary, etiquette, cremation, coronation,

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<sup>5</sup> U Hla Pe, **Burma: Literature, Historiography, Scholarship, Language, Life and Buddhism**. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Heng Mui Keng Terrace, Pasir Panjang, Singapore 0511, © (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1985), Page 4

ect. They can be written both in prose and in verse. Some of the important treatises are Dharmathat (law books), Jetapon (the work on royal horoscopes), Yazawada (morals for kings), Hlyauk htone (a compilation of discourses presented to the king), A-mei-daw-phyay kyan (a compilation of questions and answers on religious or secular matters) and so on.

#### 1.4 Royal Edicts and Official Records

Royal Orders or ameindaws is an important source for Myanmar historical writings. Royal orders deal with appointments of important central and provincial officials, laws of taxation, salaries, trade, coinage, customs duties, continuation of land titles, mobilization of war, etc. Dr. Than Tun's massive ten volume work on royal orders is a mine of information for the study of pre-colonial Myanmar administration.

Official records may be divided into different subjects. They are written on court ceremonies, investiture of rank and insignias, administration, foreign relations, revenue inquest (sittan) which is like the English Domesday Book of 1086 and so on. There are also journals, diaries (accounts of the arrival of foreign emissaries and Myanmar envoys to foreign lands) and pictorial records.

Apart from these Myanmar historiographies, many Europeans from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards have left eye-witness accounts of Myanmar. Not only local and vernacular writers but also these writers play an important role in constructing Myanmar history. To name a few there are the Venetians Marco Polo and Nicolo de Conti, the Portuguese adventurer Mendes Pinto, the Italian Father Sangermano, the English envoys Michael Symes, Hiram Cox and John Crawfurd, the English merchant Henry Gouger, the American missionary Adoniram Judson, the English scholar-administrators Henry Burney and Sir Arthur Phayre.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Thaung Blackmore, "Burmese Historical Literature and Native and Foreign Scholarship: A Few Observations" *Historical Archaeological and Linguistic Studies*, ed. F.S.Drak (Hongkong, 1967), Page 319.



Near the end of the Monarchical period, a great number of Myanmar literary works were in the form of palm leaf manuscripts and Parabaiks\* kept in the royal library of King Mindon and King Thibaw, the last two kings of Konboun<sup>\*</sup>g dynasty. The Keeper or librarian was then U Yan. His bibliography entitled "Pitakat-taw Thamaing" has become the main reference source for scholars of Myanmar literature. When the British troops occupied the King's palace, many books of literary merit were vandalized, looted or lost.

Furthermore, these documents had been sent to three places: The British Oriental and India Office in London, to the Palace of the King of Siam and Sir Charles Bernard's Free Library in Yangon.<sup>7</sup> Later, the merger of the Bernard Free Library with the private collections of Kinwun Mingyi and U Maung Maung Tin (1) K.S.M, A.T.M\* brought forth the National Library of Myanmar in 1952.<sup>8</sup> It is now under the Historical and Archeological Research Department, Ministry of Culture.

A sizeable number of these documents can also be found in some private collections and in a number of monasteries. All these historical evidences proved to be reliable sources or treasure troves for the researchers on Myanmar literature as well as on history.

Before we delve into Yodayar Naing Mawgun, I would like to mention four genres of Myanmar literature which possess historical value: namely Yazawin, Ayedawbon, Eigyin and Mawgun in order to have a bird's eye view on Myanmar literature. Then we will be able to appreciate the Mawgun in a more extensive way.

\* White or black folded book made of paper, gold, bamboo, silver, bronze, copper, hides, wood, straw, etc.

\* The word "Konboun<sup>\*</sup>g" came from the high ridge of land (levee) running north to south constructed by King Alaung Sithu (1112-1167) to the east of Shwebo.

<sup>7</sup> "sixty four types of temporal and spiritual documents sent to the king of Siam as a Dharma present include (6) volumes of Vinya, (19) Suttan (discourse), Yodayar Queen Eigyin, Mahosadha jataka, Vessantara jataka, Paleiksa Eegyin, Zinatthapakasani treatise (the life of Buddha) , Swe Son Kyaw Htin Kyan (Treatise which contains 1115 mundane and religious questions and answers) and so on", Ma Kyan, a famous historian, **Thamaing shar-pon taw hnint a char sartan myar**(A journey to search out history and other papers), (Kyauktadar Yangon, Myanmar Yadanar sarpay, 2002.)

\* Khetthayay Saung Shwe Salwe Ya Min, Amuhtan Kaung Min (bearer of the gracious gold sash, outstanding government official)

<sup>8</sup> **Lecture notes of the course on basic skills in library work**, (Yangon, National Library, 2009)

These genres of literature have distinct characteristics and historical value in their own right, which are useful for historians. I will explain what they are all about, the origin and their development throughout history. It is required of us to study them thoroughly to check and verify the dates and authenticity of the events in history besides other sources. And we should also appreciate them since most of them are great works of high literary merit by numerous poets and writers from ancient times to the end of Myanmar Monarchical system in 1885.

### 1.5 Yazawin\* (Chronicles)

Myanmar started compiling chronicles in the sixteenth century. The chronicles duly recorded the affairs of the state, the royal family, religion, economy, wars, royal ceremonies, foreign relations and so on.

The oldest extant chronicle is “Maha Samata Wuntha Kyan” which means a work on descendants of Mahasamata, the first king on earth. It was written in 1520 by a monk, Thilawuntha, a great Myanmar poet and a learned Pali scholar. It can be divided into 3 parts; Majjhima Yazawin from Maha Sammata to King Asoka of India, Ceylon Yazawin from King Wizaya to King Maha Nan and Myanmar Yazawin from King Duttabaung to Innwa King Maha Thiha Thura.<sup>9</sup> The main part concerns the translation of Mahavamsa\* or Mahawin, a history of Buddhist kings in Pali. Only one fourth of information is about Sri Lanka and the line of Myanmar kings. It was modeled on the Mahavamsa (of the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD), the great chronicle of Ceylon. Later, the name Yazawin gyaw was applied to his work by the admirers.

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\* Myanmar adaptation from Pali rajavamsa, meaning lineage of the king.

<sup>9</sup> U Pe Maung Tin, **Myanmar sarpay thamaing (History of Burmese Literature)** . (No. 122, 31 street Yangon, U Mya Thaung (01784) Khittayar publishing house, 1987), Page 77.

\* Pa. great lineage



The significance of this work lies in the fact that for the first time the Myanmar kings were linked up with those of India and Ceylon, thereby establishing a tradition which was to be developed further by later chroniclers.<sup>10</sup>

The first full scale Myanmar Yazawin or Chronicle (Maha Yazawindaw-gyi) was written by U Kala, scion of a man of wealth (Dewa Tha Htay\*) and mother Mani Awga who was of noble lineage, during the reign of Tanninganwe min (1714-33) in the late Nyaungyan dynasty.<sup>11</sup> At that particular point of time in history, a schism developed in Buddhist ecumenism in Myanmar. The problems included confrontation between forest and town dwelling monks and disputes over the draping of monks' upper robes to cover both shoulders and only one shoulder (Arone sect and Atin sect).<sup>12</sup> The country was also in turmoil due to scarcity of food caused by famine and frequent invasions of foreign tribes. Thinking that invaluable historical evidences would soon be lost under these circumstances, U Kala compiled the chronicle with the interest of saving the priceless historical facts and figures. It covers the period of the Buddhist kings in ancient India to the reign of Tanninganwe min. There are three versions of U Kala's Magnum Opus; Maha Yazawin Gyi (the great chronicle in twenty one volumes), Yazawin Lat (the shorter version in ten volumes) and Yazawin Choke (the brief chronicle in one volume).<sup>13</sup>

In the reign of King Bodawpaya (1782-1819), Court Minister Twin Thin Taik Wun Mahasithu, when he was assigned to inspect the stone inscriptions in order to draw clear lines of demarcation between glebe and taxable lands, came across some errors in U Kala's Chronicle. He then made the strenuous effort to correct these errors to

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<sup>10</sup> U Tin Ohn, "Modern Historical Writing in Burmese 1724-1942", **Historians of South East Asia**, D.G.E. Hall London, editor, (Oxford University press, 1961), Page 86.

\* Myanmar corruption of the Pali Setthi, rich man or banker. In the year 1661, when King Pyi ascended the throne, he gave Tha Htay titles to many men.

<sup>11</sup> U Tin Ohn, "Modern Historical Writing in Burmese 1724-1942", **Historians of South East Asia**, D.G.E. Hall, editor, (London: Oxford University press, 1961), Page 86.

<sup>12</sup> Michael W. Charney, **POWERFUL LEARNING, Buddhist Literati and the Throne in Burma's Last Dynasty, 1752-1885**, (Centers for South and Southeast Asian Studies, The University of Michigan, 2006). Page 20.

<sup>13</sup> U Tin Ohn, "Modern Historical Writing in Burmese 1724-1942", **Historians of South East Asia**, D.G.E. Hall London, editor, (Oxford University press, 1961), Page 87.

synchronize with the stone inscriptions. Having easy access to all stone inscriptions, he wrote Yazawin-thit (New Chronicle) with the sanction and approval of the King in 1798.

With the intention of keeping an official record of events, King Bagyidaw (1819-37) ordered the formation of a royal historical commission of thirteen learned scholars to assign them the task of compiling an official Chronicle in the year 1829. This chronicle is called "Hmannan Yazawindawgyi or Glass Palace Chronicle" because compilation work was done in the front chamber of the Palace of Glass. It begins with the first king of the world Mahasamata and ends with the early reign of King Bagyidaw. It was published in book form, volume 1 in 1883 and vol.2 in 1884 by the order of King Thibaw at the Royal Palace Press and has been reprinted several times.

While the process of compiling the Glass Palace Chronicle was underway, the head of the royal historical commission Monywa abbot (second) was in disagreement with the other members of the commission on interpreting and recording some place names, events, dates, etc. Moreover, the Monywa abbot did not accept the Mahasamata theory.<sup>14</sup> He must have noted down the differences because after completion of Hmannan Yazawin, he wrote another version of his own called "Maha Yazawin-Kyaw".

By the order of King Mindon (1853-78), a group of scholars was formed to write on the events from the reign of King Bagyidaw to the early reign of King Mindon. They were added to the Hmannan Yazawindawgyi and this chronicle is called "the Second Yazawindawgyi".

During the British colonial period, U Maung Maung Tin (1) completed the eras of the last two kings of Konboun period in his chronicle called "Konbounset Mahayazawindawgyi". It covers the period from King Alaungpaya to the last king Thibaw.

U Kala's Great Chronicle (1724), Hmannan Yazawindawgyi (Glass Palace Chronicle) (1829) and U Maung Maung Tin's Konbounset Mahayazawindawgyi (1905)

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<sup>14</sup>U Hla Pe, *Burma: Literature, Historiography, Scholarship, Language, Life and Buddhism*, (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1985). Page 50.



are standard chronicles. There are many other regional and racial chronicles such as Bagan Yazawin, Tagaung Yazawin, Portugi Yazawin, Chin Yazawin and so on. They cannot be classified as standard chronicles because most of them are either too brief or mainly focusing on a particular place or region.

### 1.6 Ayedawbon kyan

Another important Myanmar literary genre is Ayedawbon kyan. It is a form of “Mein Kampf” - a historical account of a military campaign, or struggle for power or a cause.<sup>15</sup> There are about 8 to 10 Ayedawbon Kyans but only five can be classified as most prominent.

*Dhanyawadi Ayedawbon Kyan* covers the period from the reign of King Kanrajagyi (c.825 AD) to AD 1784 when Rakhine was incorporated into Myanmar by King Bodawpaya. Emphasis is not given to the life of a particular king but on events in Rakhine region. It is written by a Rakhine abbot whose religious title was “Kawitharabi Thiri-Pawa Egga-Maha Dharma-Razadi-Razagura”.<sup>16</sup> Since time immemorial, Rakhine has been called Dhanyawadi – the land of Bounteous Rice. There are five periods in Rakhine history; Dhanyawadi period (3325 BC to 327 AD), Vesali period (350 to 776 AD), Lemro period (818 to 1250 AD), Laungret period (1250 to 1420 AD) and Mrauk-U period (1430 to 1785 AD).<sup>17</sup>

*Rajadirit Ayedawbon* was written and translated into Myanmar by Banya Dala, Mon minister and general under King Bayinnaung. The text begins with Magadu also known as King Wareru\* (AD 1287-1296) and ends with the death of King Rajadirit in 1423. The focus is on King Rajadirit's wars against King Min Gaung in the First Innwa

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<sup>15</sup> U Hla Pe, **Burma: Literature , Historiography, Scholarship, Language, Life and Buddhism**, (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1985), Page 42.

<sup>16</sup> U Thaw Kaung, “Ayedawbon Kyan, an Important Myanmar Literary Genre Recording Historical Events,” in **Aspects of Myanmar History and Culture**, (Kyauktadar Township, Yangon, First Edition, March 2010). Page 25.

<sup>17</sup> U Shwe Zan, **The Golden Mrauk-U; An ancient Capital of Rakhine**, (Yangon, Second Edition 1997), Pages 149-152.

\* The name signifies the founder of the Mon Kingdom of Pegu or Hanthawaddy.

period. To observe old Myanmar military strategies and tactics, This Ayedawbon was translated into Siamese during the reign of King Rama I.

*Hanthawaddy\* Hsinphyumyashin Ayedawbon* describes the life and the military campaigns of King Bayintnaung (Braginoco) (1551-1581). It is a detailed record of his military campaigns both at home and abroad during his lifetime. In the history of Myanmar, this energetic King Bayintnaung is variously named as "A king without a kingdom", "The conqueror of ten directions" and "Emperor without empire". He died at the age of 66. The authorship has been attributed to Yazataman, a minister in the court of Hanthawaddy, and the date of compilation was in ME 926 (AD. 1564).<sup>18</sup>

*Alaung Mintaya\* Ayedawbon* (3 different texts) covers Alaungpaya's struggle for the reunification of the country and the establishment of the Konboun dynasty after crushing the Mon power. It ends with Alaungpaya's death on his return journey after a failed campaign against Ayutthaya in 1760. Myanmar historians attributed the authorship of two different texts to Letwe Nawrahta and the other to Twin Thin Taik Wun Maha sithu.<sup>19</sup>

*Nyaungyan Mintaya Ayedawbon* gives an historical account of the life of King Nyaungyan and his military campaigns. He established the dynasty after Hanthawaddy was destroyed by Taungoo and Rakhine forces. He was a son of King Bayintnaung and Khin Pyi Sone, a country girl from Nyaungyan (near Tharsi in Mandalay Division)<sup>20</sup>. Thus, many western scholars named the dynasty founded by him as the restored Taungoo dynasty.

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\* The word Hanthawaddy means the pleasant place where Hamsa or Brahminy ducks inhabit happily.

<sup>18</sup> U Thaw Kaung, "Ayedawbon Kyan, an Important Myanmar Literary Genre Recording Historical Events", in *Aspects of Myanmar History and Culture*, (Kyauktadar Township, Yangon. March 2010), Page 21.

\* Dharmaraja or King of the Law

<sup>19</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, "Ayedawbon Kyan, an Important Myanmar Literary Genre Recording Historical Events", in *Aspects of Myanmar History and Culture*, (Kyauktadar Township, Yangon. March 2010), Page 23.

<sup>20</sup> *Myanmar Sweson Kyan*, Vol. IV, (Encyclopedia Myanmarica, IV) (Great Britain, 1960), Pages 379-380.



Those are collectively known as "Ayedawbon Nga Saung Dwe" meaning five volumes of Ayedawbon as they were first printed in one single volume by the Thudharmawadi press under this title in 1923.<sup>21</sup> The other two are Majjhima detha\* Ayedawbon and Hsinphyushin Ayedawbon. Majjhima means middle and detha is region so its meaning implies "middle country" in central India. It includes events in Rakhine region and one Myanmar mission led by author Zeya Kyaw Htin to India during the reign of king Bodawpaya. Hsinphyushin Ayedawbon is on the early reign of King Bodaw written by Letwe Nawrahta.

The word "Ayedawbon" is still widely used in modern times. There are books called "Thakhin Nu Ayedawbon," "Peasant Ayedawbon" , "Student Ayedawbon" etc.

### 1.7 Eigyin

A special type of cradle song for royal children or ballad was known as Eigyin. They were written in verse form glorifying the military achievements of the ruling family to instil pride of family and race in the royal children.

An Eigyin may be as long as twenty to forty pages.<sup>22</sup> These kinds of poems were written only by courtiers. A poem by Adu Min Nyo, a Rakhine courtier of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, known as "Rakhine Princess Eigyin" is the oldest extant Eigyin.

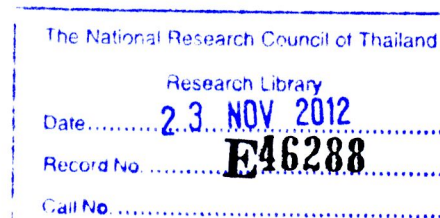
Originally, Eigyin was meant for royal infants, but some were written for adult princes or kings, in which case they are known as Shwenadawthwin Eigyin (songs worthy of the golden ears of royalty).<sup>23</sup> One example of them is Paleiksa Eigyin also known as Nga Singumin Eigyin which described successive dynasties of kings from Mahasamada, the first king of the world, to the Konboun Hsinphyushin. It is synonymous with a shortened form of U Kala's Yazawin given in verses. Further

<sup>21</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, "Ayedawbon Kyan, an Important Myanmar Literary Genre Recording Historical Events", in **Aspects of Myanmar History and Culture**, (Kyauktadar Township, Yangon. March 2010), Page 14.

\* In Sanskrit-Pali desa or desh

<sup>22</sup> U Hla Pe, **Burma: Literature , Historiography, Scholarship, Language, Life and Buddhism**, (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1985), Page 9.

<sup>23</sup> Thaung Blackmore. "Burmese Historical Literature and Native And Foreign Scholarship: A Few Observations," **Historical Archaeological and Linguistic Studies**, (Hongkong, 1967), Page 312.



abridged forms of it are "Minset Linka"\* by Monywa abbot and "Yazawin Thanpauk"\* by U Aw in the late Konbaung period.

There are over forty Eigyins in Myanmar literature. The oldest known eigyin in Myanmar proper is "Thakinhtwe eigyin" by soldier-poet Shinthuye in 1476. I will depict this eigyin as an example to understand what an eigyin is like;

*"In times long gone by, and in a distant country, Duttabaung, the great grandfather of your grandfather, by the power of Saka from the heavens above and of Naga and Garuda (Mythical beasts), enslaved all who dwell on earth, in water and in the sky. Men of this generation, who see it not, cherish the memory and repeat the story. But O how your father surpasses this! For him the lord of the Raksa, the celestial ogre, came gliding down with rushing roaring, and said, "If you need help to fight, I am your Lordship's slave, bold and defiant". Both spirits and men have seen this, and his renown reverberates with wondrous clamour far and wide over the entire face of the earth. And you little (Princess) Htwe, great and noble blessing ----- sleep, softly, sleep."*<sup>24</sup>

(Translated by J. Okell)

Another fascinating eigyin was composed for the Bayin Hna Ma Daw (sister of the King) by Pyi Nawadaygyi in 1478 AD (BE 940). The recipient of the eigyin was the daughter to the second son of King Bayintnaung, Nawrahta Saw, and King of Chiang Mai. She had three brothers and the eigyin was so named when her eldest brother received the crown of Chiang Mai.<sup>25</sup> She and one of her brothers grew up as hostages in King Naresuan's court and was later married to the king. Thus, it is also called "Yodayar queen eigyin."

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\* Epigram on dynastic history

\* Historical epigram

<sup>24</sup> Shin Thuye, **Thakin Htwe Eigyin**, AD 1476, (Rangoon, 1900), Page 13.

<sup>25</sup> U Pe Maung Tin, **Myanmar sarpay thamaing (History of Myanmar literature)**, U Mya Thauung (01784) (Yangon, Khittayar Publishing house, 1987), Pages 120-122.



A further interesting one is an Eigyin by Agga Maha Panita U Lin composed during the visit of the future king Edward VIII to Myanmar as Prince of Wales in 1921. The poet received Rs. 1000 as a prize for the Eigyin.<sup>26</sup>

### 1.8 Mawgun

The term 'Mawgun' is derived from an archaic Myanmar word which is to be found on stone inscriptions from the Bagan period as 'amu kun', 'mau kun' or 'maw kun'.<sup>27</sup> Literally, it means keeping some kind of lasting record of a memorable event. Earliest examples of its usage appear in connexion with the building of religious edifices, dedication of goods, chattels and even persons to religious service. Then later its usage was extended to record successful military campaigns, acquiring of a royal elephant, a noble steed, completion of a pagoda, royal lake, palace, etc.

Mawgun has all the embellishment - literary devices such as similes, metaphors, tropes, allusions and synonyms. They were written by monks and laymen alike. The monks, however, generally confined the subject of their Mawgun to the building of religious edifices and other events of religious significance, while the laymen wrote on secular subjects.

Although the nature and characteristic of Mawgun and Eigyin are different from one another, both are the oldest and most reliable sources for the historians after stone inscriptions. And at the same time, they can be considered panegyric epic poems to some extent. Myanmar still uses the word Mawgun frequently in everyday life whereas Eigyin has become a rarely used word. There are many applications of Mawgun such as "Mawgunwin" (historical event, thing or person), "Mawgun film" (documentary film), "Mawgun Htain" (keeper of documents or registrar in the University) and so on.

To differentiate between Yazawin or Chronicle and Ayedawbon kyan, a chronicle is the generalization of lives of all kings and happenings in every dynasty treated in

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<sup>26</sup> U Hla Pe, **Burma: Literature , Historiography, Scholarship, Language, Life and Buddhism**, (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1985), Page 50.

<sup>27</sup> U Po Latt, **Treaties on the Explanation of Burmese Language**, vol.1 , (Yangon, Pyin-nyar Nanda Offset, 1962), Pages 218-220.

chronological order. Ayedawbon kyan is only meant for a certain king and his struggle in a particular period of time in history.

We can conclude that a variety of Myanmar literature indicates the historical accounts of a certain period of a king in history. Apart from these genres, over fifty forms of verses can be distinguished as Pyo, Taw-la, Yadu, Yagan, Folk songs, Drama, and so on. Each one of them has its own rules and regulations to compose it. Let me skip all these things as they are very wide subjects and impossible to touch upon every one of them in this thesis.

### **1.8.1 Yodayar Naing Mawgun**

Regarding the Yodaya Naing Mawgun, I have found two Mawguns bearing the same title written by two learned court officials, one in the era of early Konboun period and the other in the late Konboun period. These two lyricists were Letwe Nawrahta and Sale U Pon Nya.

The author Letwe Nawrahta served under six successive kings starting from the last king of Innwa in Nyaungyan period to the early kings of Konboun dynasties. His Mawgun was about the conquest of Lan Na, Lan Xing and Ayutthaya, the capital of Siam from 1764 to 1767 AD.

The other Mawgun was an account of the war which occurred during the reign of King Mindon in the late Konboun period. According to the Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan states and the Keng Tung annals, a series of Thai military campaigns were made during the early reign of King Mindon, in 1849, 1853 and 1854. All these incursions were successfully repulsed. I have given the biography of Sale U Pon Nya and his works in chapter two of this thesis.

The Yodayar Naing Mawgun by Letwe Nawrahta is composed of five parts, which, in turn, consists of 46 stanzas. Part I from stanzas 1 to 9 mentions that the unstable situation in Chiang Mai supported to ensure what King Alaungpaya enjoined his sons, before his death, to spark an invasion into Siam. It was King Hsinphyushin, second son of Alaungpaya, who fulfilled his father's dream. The strategy of this warrior king in



investing Siam was to conquer 57 provinces of the Shan-Yun (Chiang Mai) and Lan Xang (Laos) first before Ayutthaya was beleaguered.

Part II from stanzas 10 to 18 is a description of the marching of two Myanmar armies, one from the north and the other from the south, to lay siege on Ayutthaya. The accounts of the Siamese attacks on both armies, the heavy rains and the ensuing flood during the monsoon and details of naval battles were given in verses. As Ayutthaya was a city surrounded by rivers and well defended from the attack, it was no easy feat for the Myanmar army to invest such a seemingly impregnable city.

Part III from stanzas 19 to 26 is related to the long siege of the city. It reveals Myanmar strategies to build a number of small out-lying forts outside the city wall that confront Ayutthaya bastions and the surreptitious digging of 5 underground tunnels which led to the base of the city wall of Ayutthaya.

Part IV from stanzas 28 to 35 concerns the sending of emissaries by the Siamese king to sue for peace but the offer was turned down on the grounds that it was not an unconditional surrender. It was followed by the breach of the wall, fierce battles and blood curdling scenes from the fall of Ayutthaya. In this episode, how captives and properties were managed was also mentioned.

And in Part V, a comparison was made between the invading armies of King Bayintnaung which had strength of 5 lakh troops in 1568 and the present Hsinphyushin's army of forty thousand. Hsinphushin's army was lauded for the victory over Lanna, Lan Xang and Ayutthaya with a relatively few forces led by mere generals in much shorter time span.

The backdrop of the Mawgun is Myanmar, which, after conquering Mon and Shan tribes became a powerful kingdom. At the peak of its height, Myanmar was strong enough to repel the four Chinese military advances under the Emperor Chien Lung the Great while conquering Manipur, Northern Thailand and Tenasserim. The Myanmar king was a great warrior who fought many battles during his father's wars of unification of Myanmar as well as foreign wars.

On the other hand, Siam was in disarray due to division, hatred and rivalry between the two groups of mandarins in Ayutthaya court. One of the groups favored King Ekathat and the other was in support of King Uthumphon. Though King Uthumphon had successfully thwarted King Alaungpaya's attempt to conquer Ayutthaya, he entered priesthood again to stay aloof from court affairs. Moreover, according to Siamese history, King Ekathat was said to be devoid of foresight and diligence.<sup>28</sup> Siam under him was weak and vulnerable. Taking all these into consideration, the stage was then set for the final fall of Ayutthaya.

However, according to the modern scholars, the main cause of the Myanmar-Siam wars was due to the rivalry for firm control over the lower part of Myanmar, including Tenasserim, for seaports there were important for foreign trades. The new kings of Konboun dynasty, apart from taking control over Mon Kingdom, thought Ayutthaya should be neutralized or crushed, because they deliberately played Mon politics as a defense strategy.

### 1.9 Objectives

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the value of Mawgun is immeasurable. One obvious advantage of the Mawgun is that it is written by the perception of a contemporary writer to this war in 1767.

I wrote this thesis only from the academic point of view. It is my sincere hope that this thesis will not reopen the old wounds but explore below the surface of things and to analyze it in a constructive manner.

Since it plays an important role in the histories of both countries, it is my immense pleasure to translate it into English for the benefit of a wider circle of scholars and the general readership.

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<sup>28</sup> Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, *The Chronicle Of Our Wars With The Burmese; Hostilities Between Siamese And Burmese When Ayutthaya was the Capital of Siam*, (White Lotus Co.Ltd, 2001), Pages 297-314.



This Mawgun is useful not only for the scholars of Myanmar literature but also for the researchers of histories of both countries. Some bias may be found in the Mawgun, but we can safely make an assertion that it holds the truth to a great extent. Even the respectable compilers of famous Hman Nan Yazawin had to refer to this Mawgun in describing the episodes of the war. The author gives each and every episode of the Mawgun in detailed accounts.

In the thesis, Chapter II gives an emphasis on Mawgun out of these 4 genres of Myanmar literature to be more explicit as this thesis is directly related to this kind. It covers origin, development, the importance of Mawguns, and its role in history.

Next, the other “Yodayar Naing Mawgun” written by Sale U Pon Nya, a great poet writer during the reign of King Mindon will be discussed. This is also called “Zinmme Naing Mawgun” mainly because the attackers were from Chiang Mai, Lanna and others from the northern part of Thailand.

As I have stated before, three successive Thai military campaigns were launched during the reign of King Mindon in attempts to invest Keng Tung. All these incursions met with failure. Though these wars were not comparable to the battle of Ayutthaya, one can easily imagine how sweet the victories must have been for the Myanmar people who suffered humiliation after humiliation at the hands of the British in the 19th century.

Then the life of U Pon Nya and his various works will be touched on. Because of his consummate skill in composing poems and writing prose that in modern times, he was named the “Shakespeare of Myanmar.”

Chapter III studies the life of Letwe Nawrahta, a long serving Minister under six kings of Nyaung Yan and early Konboun periods from his teens until his death and his other works in detail.

Chapter IV examines the full text of Mawgun. Explanations and comments will be given whenever necessary. In Chapter V, further analysis on the physical aspects of the war such as background of Mawgun, cause of war, battles, strategy, tactics and so forth and the psychological aspects of the war like Cakravartin theory (King of Kings)

will be pursued. It also provide the Myanmar economy in brief and the economic explanations for the war.

Chapter VI offers the conclusion, followed by recommendations for further research.

### **1.10 Methodology**

The methodology applied in this thesis comprises a detailed study on the Mawgun, a research on Myanmar literature, and personal observation.

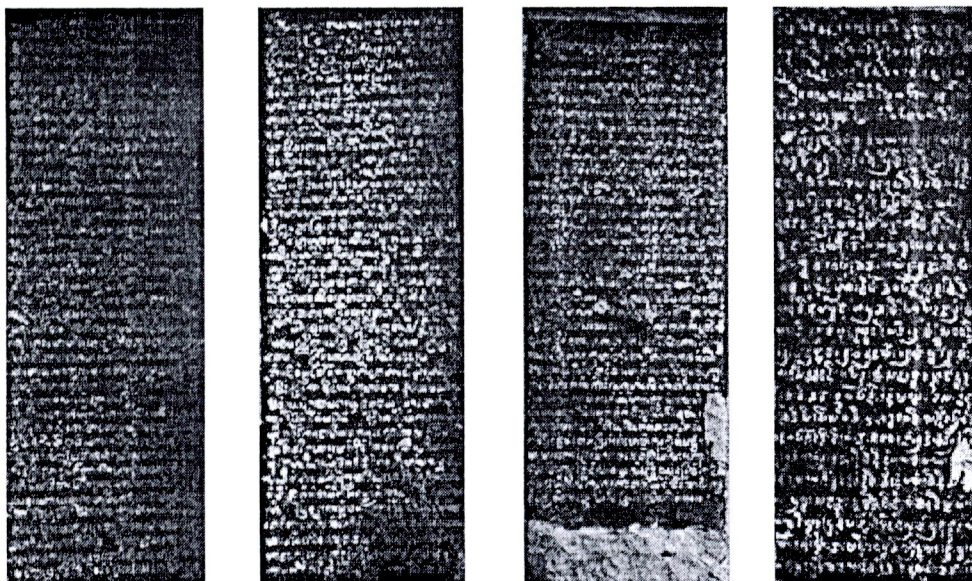
A detailed study on the Mawgun includes a verbatim translation of the Mawgun, making comparisons and conclusions with historical writings including Myanmar and Thai chronicles, and analyzing aspects of political, economic and social conditions of the Myanmar-Thai relations in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Research on Myanmar literature is an integral part in the study of history. There are many kinds of Myanmar literature which contain historical facts and figures in a host of ways. As such, this thesis probably represents one of these sources for the first time; Mawgun has been used in Thai Studies.

For personal observation, a visit to historical sites in Ayutthaya was made to glean as much information on the ground as possible. Then I journeyed to Chiang Mai, Phitsanulok and Sukothai in the north of Thailand. Personal observations on all these historical sites enhanced my geographical knowledge and it contributes to the writing of this thesis.



### 1.1 Myazeidi Stone Inscription



**Four languages of the inscription: Pali, Myanmar,  
Mon and Pyu**

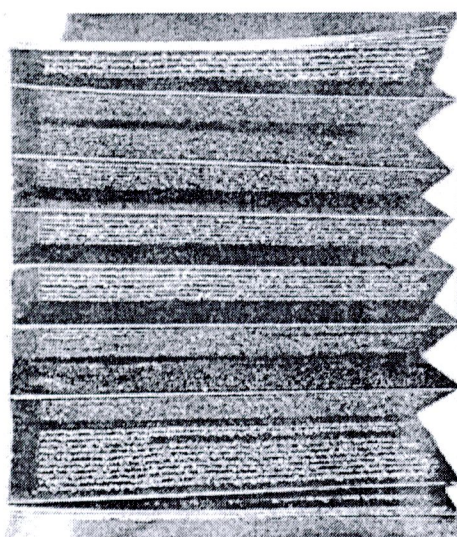


Figure. 1.2 Myanmar Folded Parabaik , reproduced from Myanmar Encyclopaedia CD-Rom.

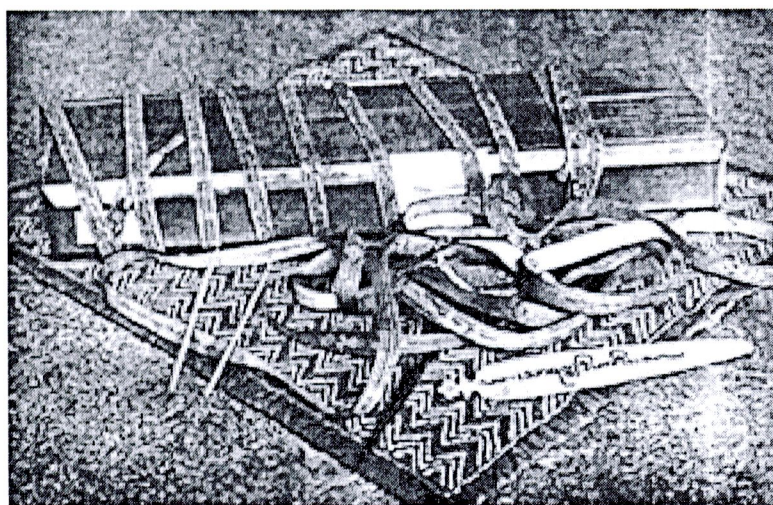


Figure. 1.3 Myanmar Palm-leaf Manuscript , reproduced from Myanmar Encyclopaedia CD-Rom.