

Letwe Nawrahta (1723-1791), Recorder of Myanmar History

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Introduction

Myanmar historians have high respect for Letwe Nawrahta (U Nay) (b. 1723- d.1791) as a recorder of contemporary historical events from the last forty years of the Nyaung-yan Dynasty (1597-1752) to the early years of the Konbaung Period (1752-1885). He lived in momentous times when great Myanmar kings like Alaungpaya (1752-60), Hsinbyu-shin (1763-76) and Bodawpaya (1782-1819) crushed the ancient Mon and Rakhine (Arakanese) Kingdoms and incorporated them into a unified Myanmar Kingdom under Bama (Burmese) dominance. Hsinbyu-shin was also the destroyer, who annihilated the Siamese capital Ayutthaya and ended the long line of Thai kings of the Ayutthaya Period (AD 1350-1767).¹

Unfortunately, Letwe Nawrahta's life and works had been overshadowed and became mixed-up with that of his contemporary minister-writer Letwe Thondara (1727-c.1799)², who was born in the same region of upper Myanmar, some say even in the same year. Letwe Nawrahta had received the title Letwe Thondara before he was given the title Letwe Nawrahta on 29 June 1757 by King Alaungpaya himself, at the end of the campaign to crush the Mon power.

Many of Letwe Nawrahta's writings have been lost and his two important Ayedawbon Kyan³, *viz.* the *Alaung-min-taya-gyi Ayedawbon*, on the founder of the Konbaung Dynasty, and the *Hsinbyu-shin Ayedawbon* on the campaigns and achievements of King Bodawpaya (recording the first five years of this King's long reign, explaining in detail the various

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1. King Taksin (1767-1782) moved the capital to Thonburi and later King Rama I (1782-1809) established the present capital Bangkok, across the river.
2. Some Myanmar scholars still use Letwe Nawrahta's year of birth, 1723, as the year of birth of Letwe Thondara also. I prefer the year of birth given in the *Myanmar Encyclopaedia*, vol.12. Yangon: Burma Translation Society, 1972. p.169.
3. For an explanation of *Ayedawbon Kyan* historical writings see the author's "Ayedawbon Kyan, an important Myanmar Literary Genre Recording Historical Events", *The Journal of the Siam Society*, vol. 88, pts. 1&2 (2000) p. 21-33.

coronation ceremonies with a contemporary account of the conquest of Rakhine), had remained "lost" on palm-leaf manuscripts. Only now some scholars of the Myanmar Historical Commission have been able to recover these texts and are editing them with introductions, footnotes and references to publish in book form for the first time.¹

Letwe Nawrahta and Letwe Thondara

Both Letwe Nawrahta (from now on abbreviated as LN) and Letwe Thondara (abbreviated as LT) were born in the 1720s, in the same region (around Monywa and Shwebo, Sagaing Division), and they served as court officials and ministers under the same kings. Both were distinguished writers, and some of the earlier writings of LN had as its author LT because LN had received the title LT before he was awarded the higher title of LN. So the confusion of their two lives and their writings got more and more confounded as the years passed, so much so that even during the time of the Myanmar kings, scholars were wrongly attributing some of LN's works to LT.²

LT became famous for his *yadu* poem "Meza Taung-che", written in banishment in a remote jungle at the foot of Meza Hill. His writings have the full force of his strong emotions; he was a better poet than LN. LN was more of an unemotional court recorder and compiler, and therefore, much more important to historians. Confusion between LN and LT came about because of (4) main reasons:-

- (1) Confusion over the same title LT, which both of them received under the same king (Alaungpaya), though not simultaneously, LT receiving his title only after LN had relinquished this title on his promotion as LN.
- (2) Confusion over their real names; LN had a rather long personal name, U Myat Thar Nay which was often shortened in references to him as U Nay, or U Myat Thar which

1. Member of M.H.C., Daw Ohn Kyi, is editing the *Alaung-min-taya-gyi Ayedawbon*, after the text was recovered from Mandalay by U Thaw Kaung, who has also, with the help of U Htun Yee, found the text of the *Hsinbyu-shin Ayedawbon*, popularly known as *Muddha Bithayka Mawgun*, or *Min-khan-daw Sardan*.

2. The confusion had started about eight decades after the death of Letwe Nawrahta in 1791, and Letwe Thondara around 1799. We have proof of this in a record of an important discussion on orthography held at the Myanmar Royal Palace, South Garden Meeting Hall in Yadanabon, Mandalay, during King Thibaw's reign (1878-1885). It was held on 6th December 1878, where the assembled scholars misattributed LN's *Myanmar Than-yaw-ga Dipani* to LT (U Myat San).

degenerated through mispronunciation to U Myat Sar and became confused with U Myat San, the personal name of LT.

- (3) They were about the same age, came from the same region and served under the same kings, rising to high positions of ministerial rank under the early kings of the Konbaung Dynasty. LN's career had actually started earlier during the reign of the last king of the Nyaung-yan Dynasty, Maha Damma Yaza Dipati (1733-52), the King who is known as Hanthawaddy-yauk-min because he was captured by the Mons and taken to their capital Hanthawaddy.
- (4) Both were contemporary court writers. But we now know that LN was the better, more trusted minister who ended his career in glory, going into old age semi-retirement under King Bodawpaya. LT was the better poet whose court career practically ended when he was exiled to the Meza area, probably during the reign of Hsinbyu-shin. Though his famous yadu poem saved his life and he was recalled and reinstated at the court, he was no longer given any responsible duties again.

Recovering LN's Writings and Reconstructing his Biography

Several prominent Myanmar scholars from the early 1960s rescued LN's biographical data and recovered some of his important writings from palm-leaf manuscripts scattered in various monastic libraries and private collections.

In Yangon under the auspices of the Burma Research Society,¹ the most prestigious learned society in Myanmar for seven decades (1910-1980), we were able to publish Letwe Nawrahta's *Myanmar Than-yaw-ga Dipani*, carefully collated from four palm-leaf manuscript texts, edited by U Tin Hla (Senior Editor of the Myanmar Dictionary Section of the Universities Translation and Publication Department) under the meticulous guidance of Professor of Myanmar Language and Literature (Rangoon University), U Wun (prominent lexicographer and poet using the pen-name Minthuwan).

1. The author of this paper was the Honorary Librarian and Publisher of this important Society whose head-quarters were located in the Rangoon University Library, which became in 1964 the Universities Central Library. The society was dissolved by the socialist military government in Dec. 1980.

The text clearly stated in the colophon that this important work on Myanmar spelling of *ya-pint* and *ya-yit* was by LN.¹ U Tin Hla, the editor included a brief biography of LN in his informative "Introduction", citing the (17) references he used.²

In Mandalay, Professor of Myanmar Language and Literature U Chan Mya (pen-name Mya Ketu)(1908-1997)³, played a leading role in rescuing biographical data of LN by carrying out research and writing an important article on differentiating the works of LN from those of LT, and also disentangling their biographies. Fortuitously LN himself played an important role in this disentanglement because he left an important lithic stone inscription at a pagoda he built as a work of merit between AD 1761 and 1764 at his birthplace Mon-ywei (in earlier times known as Badon). This pagoda is called Tilawka Cedi. There is also another important inscription on a bronze bell donated by LN at the same pagoda. This is not an original inscription by LN himself, but inscribed later by the Mon-ywei Sayadaw, Ariya-wuntha Adicca-yanthi, the well-known compiler of the *Maha Yazawin Kyaw*, the Mon-ywei Chronicle, and head of the Committee appointed by King Bagyidaw in 1829 to compile the *Hman-nan* (Glass Palace) *Yazawin* (Chronicle). These inscriptions were found by archaeologists and duly interpreted by them with the help of Myanmar language and literature scholars. U Po Kyaw Myint (1934-1973), Senior Lecturer of Yangon University went to study them at Mon-ywei and wrote three scholarly articles on these two inscriptions.⁴

Myanmar scholars in the 1960s and early 1970s were also able to glean many important facets of LN's biographical information by painstakingly scrutinizing his writings to find his different titles at various years of his life. His work, *Letwe Nawrahta's Hlauk-htone*⁵, first published by the Hanthawaddy Press in 1925 provided a number of important data on his life; facts of his life story were extracted also from some of his still unpublished works on palm-leaf manuscripts.⁶

1. Min Letwe Nawrahta. *Myanmar Than-yaw-ga Dipani*; ed. by U Tin Hla. Yangon: Burma Research Society, 1962. p. 150.

2. *Ibid.* p. ga-nge (၈).

3. Mya Ketu. "Min Letwe Nawrahta hnint Min Letwe Thondara," *Myawaddy*, vol. 9. no. 3 (Jan. 1961) p. 12-21.

4. Myan-sar-gon Kyaw Myint. (a) "Tilawka Kyauksar", *Myawaddy*, vol. 8, no. 8 (June 1960) p. 59-62; (b) by same author "Tilawka Khaung-laung-sar", *Myawaddy*, vol. 9, no. 2 (Dec. 1960) p. 37-40. (c) by same author. "Mon-ywei Letwe Thondara i Khaung-laung-daw Mya", *Myawaddy*, vol. 8, no. 6 (Apr. 1960) p. 97-100.

5. Letwe Nawrahta. *Letwe Nawrahta Hlauk-htone*. 2nd ed. Yangon: Hanthawaddy Press, 1963. 1st pub. 1925.

6. Shay-haung Sarpay Thutaythi Ta-oo (pen-name of U Htun Yee). "Letwe Nawrahta i Bawa hnint Sarpay," *in* Myan-sar Pyant. *Min Letwe Nawrahta*. Yangon: Myan-sar Pyant, 1974. p.179-300.

References to LN and this works were searched for and found in the writings of other authors of the early Konbaung Period, and these were put together to get a fairly comprehensive picture of LN's biography and titles of his works, although some still remain lost.

Shwe Gaing Tha (1912-1987), pen-name of monk-author U Thawbita (former Archaeology Dept. Officer U Tun Hlaing), also wrote an important article to extricate the life of LN from that of LT.¹ This well-known author who later became a monk, with a background in archaeology and well versed in Myanmar literature, examined all available literary and historical evidences and proposed that Letwe Thondara (U Nay) of Mon-ywei should rightly be called Letwe Nawrahta (the title LN himself preferred) to differentiate him from Letwe Thondara (U Myat San) of Man-gyi-htone village.

In 1973, Myan-sa Pyant, the Society for the Propagation of Myanmar Literature celebrated 250 years of LN's birth by compiling and later publishing a comprehensive book about LN's life and works.² In this book U Htun Yee wrote excellent papers on LN using three pen-names: Shay-haung Sarpay Thutaythi Ta-oo, Min Mahaw and Maung Kauk-thin (p.179—324). Another author Maung Kyauk-taing (pen-name) also contributed an important paper entitled "Thukhamein U Nay i Sarpay Gita Thutaythana", (p. 40-178). These papers are indispensable for any scholar who wants to do research on LN's life and works, and did much to bring LN back into prominence.

From that time most Myanmar scholars have known about the important role LN played especially from the time of Alaungpaya, recording events at the Royal Court, and writing about the campaigns and achievements of some of the great Myanmar kings of that period. Only a few Myanmar readers still have problems distinguishing the life and work of LN from that of LT.³ The *Myanmar Encyclopaedia* has two well-researched articles on LN and LT which have incorporated the findings of the 1960s and early 1970s.⁴

1. Shwe Gaing Tha. "Letwe Thondara haint Letwe Nawrahta", *Myawaddy*, vol.9, no.6 (Apr. 1961) p. 69-73.

2. *Min Letwe Nawrahta (1085-1335)*. Yangon: Myanmar Naing-gan Sarpay Pyant-pwar-yei A-thin, 1974. 357 p.

3. Some foreign scholars still find it difficult to distinguish LN and LT. The author of this paper was unhappy to read in a good, ground-breaking, recent book by Dr. Michael Charney (*Powerful Learning: Buddhist Literati: and the Throne in Burma's Last Dynasty, 1752-1885*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies. 2006. p.136), that he has written U Myat San when he really meant LN (U Nay), and not LT (U Myat San).

4. *Myanmar Swe-sona Kyan*, vol.12. Yangon: Burma Translation Society, 1972. On Letwe Nawrahta, p.167-169; on Letwe Thondara, p. 169-171. Both are well-written, informative articles, with correct data. Unsigned.

Brief Life

Letwe Nawrahta was born at Mon-ywei Village, to the south-east of Monywa, (which is on the Chindwin River); his year of birth as recorded by the Mon-ywei Sayadaw¹ was in 1723, during the Myanmar month of Waso (i.e. May to July of that year), but up to now we do not know the exact day and month, or even who his parents were. He was a Saturday born, so he was named U Nay (Mr. Sun); his full-name was U Myat Thar Nay. LN grew up during a turbulent period of Myanmar history, when the Bama (Burmese) kings at first were weak and unable to control the Mon rebels from the southern coastal regions, but later fought and defeated the Mons under a new leader, Alaungpaya. This was also a time when Myanmar produced some great historians, starting with U Kala (c1678-c1738) and ending with the Mon-ywei Sayadaw (1766-1835), having Twin-thin Taik-wun Maha Sithu U Tun Nyo (1726-1806)² in-between.

LN like most boys and young men of the time must have studied at the local village monastery which were the schools for the male population. He had an aptitude for learning, reading and writing.³ In 1743 he went to Innwa (Ava), the capital of Myanmar, about seventy miles to the east, joining service at the Royal Court. He was only twenty at the time. The King, Maha Dhamma Yaza Dipati appointed him as *A-kyi-daw*, Comptroller of the Household of the Crown Prince, Thiri Maha Thudamma Yaza. He was given the title Yanda Kyaw Swa by the Crown Prince; later after the death of the Crown Prince, he received the title Pyan-chi Kyaw Htin from the King. During the time when there was no longer a king or a Royal Court at Innwa, he went back to his village for about a year in 1751.

Except for this break of less than a year, LN's long, distinguished career at the Myanmar Royal Court lasted altogether about (50) years; he was a court official from the last king of the Nyaung-yan Dynasty to Bodawpaya, the fifth king of the newly established Konbaung Dynasty.⁴

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1. Mon-ywei Sayadaw. *Maha Yazawin Kyaw*. Unpublished mss. Myanmar Historical Commission Library.
 2. For more information about the Mon-ywei Sayadaw and Twin-thin Taik-wun Maha Sithu see this author's "Two Compilers of Myanmar History", *Myanmar Historical Commission Golden Jubilee Conference Proceedings*. Yangon: M.H.C., 2006. p.372-387.
 3. Letwe Nawrahta's inscription at Tiloka Pagoda in Mon-ywei innumrated in detail his attributes, especially his love of learning and writing, see Myan-sa-gon Kyaw Myint. "Tiloka Kyauksa" . . . 1960. p. 60.
 4. For a good biography of Letwe Nawrahta see Maung Thuta (Bohmu Ba Thaug). *Sarsodaw mya Athtokepatti*; 5th ed. rev. by U Khin Aye [Prof. of Myanmar Language and Literature]. Yangon: Lawka Sarpay; printed and distributed by Yar-pyi Sar-oke Taik, 2002. p.138-141. (a) Fuller details are provided by Shay-haung Sarpay Thutaythi Ta-oo (U Htun Yee). "Letwe Nawrahta i Bawa hnint Sarpay" . . . 1974. p. 179-300.

From the time he was taken by Min Khaung Nawrahta (Bo Ton) to King Alaungpaya in Moksobo, in 1752 and met the new King he rose rapidly in the King's royal service, receiving his first title LT and later LN from Alaungpaya himself. The King on first meeting him asked what his name was, and he replied Nga Nay (Master Sun). The King was well pleased and remarked to all the assembled courtiers that the sun had arrived to brighten his court and dispel and darken all his enemies into submission.

Alaungpaya had, a little earlier, appointed (68) Commanders (Comrades-in-Arms) and he now added LN to make the number of his inner-most trusted men (69).¹

As one of the few learned officials who knew about the traditions and etiquette of the former dynasty, LN became indispensable to the new King. Alaungpaya kept LN constantly by his side on his very active life. The King liked LN's character as a loyal, trust-worthy minister who could give him sound counsel.² At the same time LN had the temperament of what we would, in modern times, call an archivist or librarian,³ noting down in detail contemporary events, asking erudite questions to famous monks and compiling anthologies of *yadu* poems.

LN probably accompanied Alaungpaya and Hsinbyu-shin on their campaigns to capture the Siamese capital Ayutthaya. He later composed a *mawgun* poem on the conquest of Ayutthaya in 1767, entitled *Yodaya Naing Mawgun*, but up to now only fragments of this important, eye-witness account has been recovered.

Under the reign of Alaungpaya's eldest son, Naungdawgyi (1760-63), he became an *A-twin-wun*, organizing important court ceremonies. He also received the titles Sithu Kyaw Htin, most probably on 4th February 1761 at the U-kin-daw-phyint Mingala Thabin. The bell inscription also stated that he also received the title Nanda Thura Kyaw Htin from the same king, though this is not shown in other sources.

LN continued as an *A-twin-wun* under the next king Hsinbyu-shin(1763-76), receiving the title Nay-myo Thiri Zeya Kyaw Htin. He was included in a select, trusted band of (24) *Thwe-thout*, blood-brothers, inner court officials, when Innwa (Ava) was reconstructed for the third time as a capital city in 1765. The new city plans were drawn up by LN, and the King being

1. Nan Nyunt Swe. "Min Letwe Nawrahta i Gon-myauk Sarpay mya," *in* Myan-sa Pyant. *Min Letwe Nawrahta*. . . 1974. p. 17-18.

2. Shay-haung Sarpay Thutaythi Ta-O (U Htun Yee). "Letwe Nawrahta i Bawa hnint Sarpay" . . . 1974. p. 221 and p. 251-52.

3. U Myat Soe (Librarian of Yangon University). "Letwe Nawrahta hnint Khin Maung Myint dô Lu-su" *in* *Letwe Nawrahta i Pyo Ni-gon-su A-phay Kyan*. Yangon: Hla Htay Sarpay, 1995. p. 2.

appreciative of his loyal service conferred on him the higher titles of Nay-myo Maha Kyaw Htin and Nay-myo Maha Thinkhaya Kyaw Htin.

LN did not mention in his writings about his service under King Singu (1776-82), though he continued his duties at the court, under the title Min-gyi Kyaw Htin. This grandson of King Alaungpaya might have doubted his loyalty, and therefore, did not give him responsible positions.

Finally, LN again rose into prominence during the early years of Bodawpaya's reign from 1782 to his death in 1791 at age 68. Bodawpaya, the sixth and last king that he served conferred on him the highest title he received, Min-gyi Maha Thiha Thura, and appointed him as the Mayor of the newly built capital, Amarapura. LN also wrote his second *Ayedawbon Kyan*, the *Hsinbyu-shin Ayedawbon*, to record the military campaigns and achievements during the first five years of Bodawpaya's long, 37 years' reign. LN probably lived, during his last years, in semi-retirement, before he passed away in the 9th year of this King's reign. LN's outstanding service for six Myanmar kings earned him (10) or (11) high ranking titles. (See Appendix I for a list of his titles).

Unmasking Details of LN's Life

In studying the life of LN the inscription that he left and the inscription made by the Mon-ywei Sayadaw on the bell that LN had donated, together with some of LN's own writings, are of course, the primary sources. There are many secondary sources. Among them the published *Hman-nan Maha Yazawin-daw-gyi*, (*The Glass Palace Chronicle*), and the *Konbaung-set Maha Yawawin-daw-gyi*, which incorporates the *Hman-nan* up to the time of King Mindon, are the most easily available reference works. But readers sometimes forget that the long court career of LN, for about half a century, had resulted in the use of a number of different rank titles for him during different periods, and reigns. For example, during King Alaungpaya's reign, only from 29 June 1757 when LN got his higher title from being LT, references to him can be found only under his earlier title LT. We can, therefore, read in *Konbaung-set* that LT (U Nay) and not LT (U Myat San) was appointed *Tat-yei* on 13th January 1755 when Alaungpaya's attack on the Mons in Lower Myanmar was launched.¹

1. U Maung Maung Tin (1), K.S.M., A.T.M. *Konbaung-set Maha Yawawin-daw-gyi*; ed. by the Universities Historical Research Centre. Yangon: Yar-pyi Sar-oke Taik, 2004, p. 115.

Another example, also from *Konbaung-set* is about how Alaungpaya, on the eve of his attack on Pyay (Prome), instructed LT (U Nay) to go amongst the populace noting down *tabaung*, cries and sayings portending something auspicious or ominous — in Myanmar *Sa-nei* (စနေညံး), *nar* (နာ). In *Konbaung-set*, volume one, we should note that the title LT refers to LT (U Nay) only and not to LT (U Myat San). U Myat San never received the title LN; because his rank was not a high one, only that of a judge for most of his life, LT (U Myat San) is only mentioned once in *Konbaung-set* amongst a list of several officials on whom the king conferred titles.

The key to unlocking which LT it was during Alaungpaya's time, that was promoted as LN in 1757, came from LN's own inscription at Tilawka Pagoda, where he himself stated that he received first the title LT and later LN from the great King Alaung-min-taya-gyi.¹ This is in conformity with the *Konbaung-set* account.² Once this key had been found all references to LT in volume (1) of *Konbaung-set* became part of the life-story of LN.³

We were thus able to unmask many details of LN's biography. He was the Minister whom Alaungpaya instructed to write the Royal Letter (*Yaza-than*) presented to the English Envoys on 8 May 1756.⁴ He had to arrange for the Grand Ceremonial Procession of King Alaungpaya to receive the Royal Princess, the daughter of the King of Hanthawaddy, after the conquest of the Mon Kingdom.⁵

Letwe Nawrahta's Writings

The main works of LN that have so far been identified are as follows:

(1) Historical Writings

(a) *Alaung-min-taya-gyi Ayedawbon* (c 1766)

Unpublished palm-leaf manuscript in Mandalay University Library, Mss. no. 327, now being edited for publication by the Myanmar Historical Commission. (See next section for more details).

1. Tilawka stone inscription, recto (front face), lines 32-33.

2. *Konbaung-set*; ed. by UHRC . . . 2004. p. 200.

3. *Ibid.* There are references to LT (U Nay) in vol. 1, pages 115, 121, 145, 146, 167, 170, 183, 184, 199, 200; fr. p. 200 onwards under LT, p. 200, 208, 211, 223. In editing this new edition of *Konbaung-set*, UHRC researchers have compiled and printed an Index for the first time. Under the entry for LN, the title LT, is given in parenthesis, but the entry under LT does not have in parenthesis LN, as both entries refer to the same person.

4. *Ibid.* p. 145-46. The text of the Royal Letter written by LN (at the time under his earlier title LT) is given in full.

5. *Ibid.* p. 183.

- (b) *Hsinbyu-shin Min-taya-gyi Phaya Ayedawbon Thamaing-daw, or Min-khan-daw Sar-dan-daw-gyi.* (c 1786)

Written around 1786 to 1790. The palm-leaf manuscript was originally found in Tha-khut-ta-nai Phaya-gyi Kyaung (Monastery of the Big Pagoda), and copied (by hand) by U Pyin-nya of Taung Lei-lon Monastery in Amarapura who completed copying on 23rd Nov. 1974. Later U Htun Yee made a few mimeographed copies in two volumes. I have now been able to get the full text and it is being edited for publication in printed book-form. (See next section for more details).

(2) **Mawgun**

Records of notable events in the public life of Myanmar kings. Of great value to historians. Usually in verse form. Those that have been identified as being written by LN are shown below. There are probably a few others not yet found.

- (a) *Dhanyawaddy-naing Mawgun* (1785)

On the conquest of Rakhine.

Only fragments seen so far.

Written soon after the 1784 conquest of Rakhine, and the end of the Rakhine Kingdom.

- (b) *Maha Wizaya-yan-thi Sigon-daw Mawgun* (1784)

Not found up to now.

- (c) *Mingun Cedi Mawgun*

Not found up to now.

- (d) *Muddhar Beiktheik Mawgun* (1784)

On the two coronations, and other royal ceremonies of Bodawpaya, including the consecration of the new Royal Capital Amarapura. LN completed this record on 30 August 1784.

Text on palm-leaf manuscript. Also mimeographed copies made by U Htun Yee in 1985.

(e) *Pyi-gyi-lar Mawgun* (c 1765)

On the shifting back of the capital to Innwa (Ava) in April 1765 by King Hsinbyu-shin.

Not found up to now.

(f) *Pyu Kan Bwè Mawgun* (c 1771)

On a visit made by Hsinbyu-shin on 12 February 1771 to this "Pyu Lake". LN accompanied the King and wrote this historical record after their return from Lawka Myitzu Pagoda.

Printed by Hanthawaddy Press.

(g) *Yodaya-naing Mawgun* (1767)

On the conquest of Ayutthaya

Only fragments and extracts seen so far. We still need to search extensively to recover the full text.

(See Appendix II for Synopsis.)

(h) *Zina Aung-cha Shwe-bon-tha Mawgun*

Not found up to now.

(3) **A-mei-daw-phyay Kyan**(a) *Letwe Nawrahta Hlauk-htone*

1st published by Hanthawaddy Press, Yangon, in 1925. 2nd ed. by the same press, 1963. There is also an edition published in Mandalay by Pitakat-daw Pyant-pwa-yei Press, [1959].

A collection of (79) questions on religious, cultural, geographical, historical, literary and other perplexing problems posed by LN and learned answers given by Taungdwin Sayadaw (Khin Gyi Phyaw) (1724-1762). It is not really a *hlauk-htone*, but an *a-mei-daw-phyay kyan*.¹ Also because LN only formulated the questions, Khin Gyi Phyaw could be regarded as the author for his long erudite answers; but like the *Questions of the King Milinda* scholars usually refer to this work by the questioner, i.e. LN.

1. *Hlauk-htone* is a compilation of learned discourses, or memorable sayings presented to the king by scholars, or ministers. *A-mei-daw-phyay kyan*, or *A-mei-daw-bon* is a compilation of questions and problems posed by the king, or learned ministers, and comprehensive answers given by venerable monks, or eminent scholars. LN had an enquiring mind. He posed questions to learned Sayadaws, sometimes on behalf of the king, especially under Alaungpaya, but most often for his own erudition.

(b) *A-mei-daw-phyay (Kyan)* (Maung Daung Sayadaw, 1st)

This questions and answers text has been printed in a thick volume.¹ The questions were raised by different high-ranking ministers, often on behalf of King Bodawpaya (1782-1819). The answers were all made by the First Maung Daung, Thathana-baing Sayadaw, Head of the Buddhist Sasana at the time. This printed book is the most comprehensive one in the category of questions and answers text. And there are many interesting answers about the Buddhist religion, about Myanmar Buddhist concepts, on Myanmar History and Culture, Customs and Beliefs and so on.

Out of the many questions posed by different officials there were only (8) by Letwe Nawrhta. They deal mainly with the Coronation Ceremonies for the Myanmar Royal Court and as the Maung Daung Sayadaw was learned in Sanskrit and had taken the lead in translating texts procured from Bengal, he gave references to these ancient Indian texts. Strictly speaking the author of this text was the First Maung Daung Sayadaw Shin Nyana (1755-1832) who replied at length for each of the (8) questions raised by LN, and numerous other questions by other officials, but scholars know this work as being written partly in reply to LN's insatiable quest for knowledge and information. Scholars should note that by the time of this *A-mei-daw-phyay kyan*, LN was known under his last and highest rank-title A-twin-wun Thet-taw-shay Min-gyi-Maha Thiha Thura. The questions from LN are from 1783, the year of Bodawpaya's Coronations. Other questions posed by various ministers are dated up to 1806, but LN had already passed away in 1791.

(c) Unpublished texts on palm-leaf manuscripts:

(1) *Letwe Nawrahta Hlauk-htone, Paline Sayadaw phyay*

1. Maung Daung Sayadaw, 1st. *A-mei-daw-phyay*. Mandalay: Zabu Meik-swe Pitakat Sar-oke Saing, 1961. 708p. 24 cm.

Answers by the Paline Sayadaw, Shin Thuzata, (probably from King Alaunpaya's reign)¹ to (5) questions posed by Letwe Nawrahta. Mainly on geography and cosmology and the answers were in accordance with Buddhist scriptures. Palm-leaf mss. no. 1942 in the National Library; a *myin-net* mss. comprising of (3) *anga* and (8) leaves (total 44 leaves). (8) lines on each face of palm-leaf. I had hand-written and type-script copies made for the Universities Central Library in Feb. 1981, from the palm-leaf mss. in the National library, originally copied on 31 Dec. 1838, about (47) years after LN passed away. The five questions were asked by LN all at the same time, unlike the (79) questions in *Letwe Nawrahta Hlauk-htone* (printed version), which were raised (supplanted) over a period of several years. These questions, posed to the Paline Sayadaw are interesting because they deal with non-religious matters mainly on traditional geography and cosmology, though the Sayadaw's answers were all according to the Buddhist concepts. There is an interesting question and answer about the Chinthe (mythical lion) which guards the Myanmar pagoda entrances; because of this, some scholars like U Po Kyaw Myint refer to this text as the *Chinthe A-phyay Kyan*.²

(2) *Sithu Kyaw Htin Hlauk-htone* (1761)

Sithu Kyaw Htin was one of the titles received by LD from King Alaungpaya. The questions were asked by LN in 1761 and the answers were given by Ashin Nanda Mala. Some refer to this mss. on palm leaves as *Kyaw Htin Nawrahta Hlauk-htone*

The mss. has never been printed. There is a mss. copy in Pakkoku, in the possession of U Nan Hline,³ who told me that the mss. begins with *ka* leaf and ends in *gi*. It contains knowledge of both religious and worldly matters.

(3) *Nay-myo Thiri Zeya Kyaw Htin Hlauk-Htone*

2. The Paline Sayadaw was one of the leading monks of the A-rone gaing

1. Maung Kyauk Taing. "Thu Khamain U Nay Sarpay Gita Thutay-thana," in *Min Letwe Nawrahta* ... 1974. p. 96.

2. U Nan Hline used to be a monk in Pakkoku; his religious name was Shin Ye-wa-ta (pen-name Seinda Kyaw Khaung). I met him in Pakkoku on 1st Mar. 2008, and he promised to bring me this mss. together with other mss. works of LN not yet printed. See Maung Kyauk Taing, "Thukhamein U Nay... 1974. p. 97.

Nay-myo Thiri Zeya Kyaw Htin was a title LN received under King Hsinbyu-shin (1763-76). The learned monk who gave answers and discourses to LN's nearly (50) queries was the First Nyaung-gan Sayadaw Shin Pon-nya Thei-la (1735-1810). A palm-leaf mss. copy entitled *Nyaung-gan Sayadaw A-phay* (The answer of the Nyaung-gan Sayadaw) is in the Library of the Department of Archaeology (now combined with the Culture Institute). It is a (9) line per leaf, palm-leaf mss. comprising of 6 *anga* and 10 leaves (i.e. 82 leaves).

LN asked the questions between 1765 and 1771; the queries consisted of (17) kinds, with three or four questions in each category. The queries are on religious as well as worldly affairs and about kings and court; contain many useful information, e.g. on monastic lands, on Dammathats and Hpyat-htone, about the White Elephant and about how Myanmar repulsed attacks by Chinese soldiers.

The Nyaung-gan Sayadaw who gave the answers was born in the old town of Pa-khan (near Pakkoku) and received the title Buddha Rek-khita Maha Tharmi.¹

(4) **Orthographic Work**

Myanmar Than-yaw-ga Dipani; ed. by U Tin Hla, Yangon: Burma Research Society, 1962. 180 p. (Text Publication New Series, no. 7). With good Introduction, life of Author, References, etc. Written in 1760. On Myanmar spelling of *pint-yit*.

(5) **Exegesis**

Pyo Ni-gone-su A-phyay Kyan; ed. by Maung Khin Min (Danuphyu) [pen-name of Professor of Myanmar Language and Literature U Khin Aye]. Yangon: Hla Htay Sarpay; distributed by Hinthata Sarpay, 1995.

Edited from an extremely rare palm-leaf manuscript collected by the Universities Central Library.²

Explanations of the concluding parts of *Pyo* poems.

1. Maung Kyauk Taing, "Thukhamein U Nay... 1974. p. 97-98.

2. *Letwe Nawrahta i Pyo Ni-gon-su A-phay Kyan*. Yangon: Hla Htay Sar-pay, 1995. Edited by Maung Khin Min (Danuphyu) pen-name of Prof. of Myanmar Literature Dr. Khin Aye.

(6) **Yadu poems**

- (a) LN is said to have written between 200-400 *Yadu* poems. Only about (16) poems have so far been found.
- (b) LN made an important "Anthology of Yadu" poems written from Pinya Period, beginning in 1322 to the end of Nyaung-yan Period in 1752. This compilation has been printed by the Hanthawaddy Press, from a palm-leaf manuscript collected by Ashin Warthawa (1917-1966) of A-nauk Khin-ma-kan Pali University in Mandalay. LN did invaluable service by assiduously collecting all *Yadu* poems by monks, royalty, ministers and lady poets (poetesses), altogether 174 poems by (60) writers. The editor U Ohn Shwe re-arranged some of the poems.¹ The original collection by LN can be seen on palm-leaf manuscripts, in various bundles. There are probably many other writings not yet recovered.²

(7) **Pyo poems**

LN is supposed to have written several *pyo* poems, but the only text found so far is the *Yaza Niti Pyo*; it is probably the earliest *Yaza* (Raja) *Niti* text in Myanmar *pyo* poetic form. U Nan Hline from Pakkoku found the text on a palm-leaf mss., and had a few copies printed in 1963.³ Even this printed copy is now extremely rare, because only a few copies were printed in a far-flung district town across the Ayeyawaddy River on her west bank.

Of the *Yaza Niti* texts, i.e. Code of Conduct for Rulers (Kings), the widely known text is the one written in Myanmar as *Yazaw Warda kyan*, by the Mon-ywei Zetawun Sayadaw in 1832. It was probably based on one of the texts procured from India at the behest of King Bodaw Paya.

LN's short *pyo* poem is 69 years earlier as it was completed in 1763. The peculiarity of this text is the comparison to special traits of (6) animals and birds, altogether (20) characteristics which kings and rulers should follow as an Ethical Code of Conduct. The text seems to be original and not based on Indian texts like later *Niti* texts. Perhaps LN himself observed or read

1 Letwe Nawrahta, compiler. *Sar-so-daw mya Yadu baung-choke*; ed. by U Ohn Shwe. Yangon: Hanthawaddy Press, 1966. 345 p. (Series no. 561).

2 Kyu Kyu Hla, Ma. *Letwe Nawrahta Bawa hmint Sar-pay*. Yangon: Arts and Science University, 1981. M. A. in Myanmar Literature thesis. 118 p. Typescript. Unpublished.

3 Letwe Nawrahta. *Yaza Niti Pyo*; ed. by Seinda Kyaw Khaung [pen name U Nan Hline]. Pakkoku: Thee-thant Myanmar Sar-pay Nhyun-kyar-yei Htar-na, 1963. 50 p.

about how certain animal and birds like the Lion (Chinthe), Paddy-bird, Chicken, Crows, Dogs and Mules have specific characteristics, eg a Crow has a peculiar trait of keen observation of its surroundings which kings should emulate in getting to know the social conditions of his own people; that he should share the food (and wealth) he accumulates with his fellow creatures like the Crow when it finds some food. But it is surprising that LN dares to mention certain traits of a dog (a lowly animal in Myanmar peoples' concept) that a king should copy in his daily conduct. Quoting Pali texts he cites the bravery and courage of dogs, of their eating whatever is available, not sleeping much, and being alert all the time. Like a dog, the king should be easily satisfied and not covet riches and live in luxury.

(8) Songs and Musical Compositions

LN also wrote a number of songs and musical compositions; they were at first lost for many years until two classical song anthologies¹ on palm-leaf mss. were found. At least (25) texts of songs written by LN are now recorded.² Some of the musical compositions are probably from the Nyaungyan Period which LN with his penchant for noting down old texts saved for posterity.

Two Important Historical Records

For the historian and scholar of Myanmar studies LN left two extremely valuable records on the campaigns and achievements of two great kings he served. In Myanmar this kind of historical record is called *Ayedawbon Kyan*. The two kings he chose to write about were Alaungpaya (1752-60) who raised his rank twice and first gave him important duties at the Royal Court during the early years of his long career, and Bodawpaya (1782-1819) the king he served towards the end of his life.

These two important historical records are known as the *Alaung-min-taya-gyi Ayedawbon* and *Hsin-byu-shin Ayedawbon*. Both remain on manuscripts and are not yet published in printed book form. These two texts are known only to a few scholars. At the Myanmar Historical Commission, the author of this paper has been able to recover both of these rare texts and we are

1 . (a) Mon-ywei Sayadaw (2nd). *Har-tha zawanika nyana myitzayi*. Hand written copy, copied from palm-leaf mss. Unpublished. In U Thaw Kaung's private collection

(b) Wutmasut Wundauk. *Thabba gi-tekkama pakarthane*. Yangon: Ministry of Culture, 199

2 . U Htun Yee (Using his pen-name Min Mahaw). "Letwe Nawrahta: gita the-chin Mya" in *Min Letwe Nawralta* ... 1974. p. 301-321. The full texts of the songs are given.

now editing them to publish as printed monographs and make them available to all scholars both from within Myanmar and abroad. Unfortunately, the two texts that have been recovered, up to now, cover only five years each of the two kings' reigns.

Some scholars are of the opinion that LN wrote a new chronicle like his contemporary Twin-thin Taik-wun Maha Sithu. LN's chronicle is often popularly known as *Letwe Nawrahta Yazawin*; some even giving it a confusing title *Yazawin Thit*, the title of Maha Sithu's work. This has come about because both continued U Kala's *Maha Yazawin Gyi* which ended around 1711, though Maha Sithu, like the Mon-ywei Sayadaw, incorporated in his work U Kala's writings on the earlier periods. LN on the other hand began from 1712 as U Kala ended his chronicle in 1711; he covered the last (40) years of the Nyaungyan Dynasty.

(a) Alaung-min-taya-gyi Ayedawbon (1766)

LN's *Alaung-min-taya-gyi Ayedawbon*¹, which Daw Ohn Kyi, Retired Professor of History and Member of the Myanmar Historical Commission, is editing to publish before the end of 2008, begins with the (40) years history before the reign of Alaungpaya, and the text so far recovered from a palm-leaf manuscript, ends abruptly, without a colophon, with the king's triumphal return to Shwebo, after the conquest of the Mon Kingdom of Hanthawaddy, and the start of the campaign to quell the Kwe Lawa rebels in January 1758. Obviously a number of palm-leaves at the end are lacking.

It was probably in December 1766, about six years after the great King's death that LN started writing this important eye-witness account of Alaungpaya's rise to power. At the time LN was in ill-health and resting from court duties for awhile. He wrote in the exordium that his intention was to write a chronicle from October 1711 where the *Maha Yazawin Gyi* had ended so that people can read continuously [the history of Myanmar]. He first related the forty years' history under the last two kings of the Nyaungyan Dynasty and only then began his record of King Alaungpaya's campaigns. He gave emphasis to the court ceremonies like the coronation, triumphal processions, the ceremonial welcoming of envoys from foreign countries, royal funeral ceremonies, and so on. LN became an expert in organizing these court ceremonies as he was one

1. U Htun Yee gives further details in his paper "Letwe Nawrahta; Bawa hnint Sarpay", *see* p. 248-250. *See also* Kyu Kyu Hla. *Letwe Nawrahta Bawa hnint Sarpay*. Yangon University. M. A. in Myanmar, 1981. Unpublished typescript. p. 37-44. Some scholars gave the date of composition as 1757 (Maung Thuta, *Sar-so-daw mya athtoke-patti*; 5th ed.; ed. by U Khin Aye ... 2002. p.140.

of the few officials who was at the court of the last king of the previous dynasty Maha Dhama Yaza Dipati, (1733-1752) and knew about the old royal traditions and customs.

There are also accounts of the arrival of Siamese envoys, and the return embassy from Myanmar to Ayutthaya. Also about suppression of heretic monks. Compared to the two published *Alaungpaya Ayedawbon* texts, this account by LN is much more comprehensive and is written in a more readable, interesting style. For example we can find in LN's account that some besieged people of Innwa in 1751 had to eat human corpses. Unfortunately, we have not been able to recover the rest of this incomplete manuscript.

The text recovered so far has many interesting contemporary information, e.g. the name of the new dynasty "Konbaung" came from the high ridge of land (levee) running north to south, constructed by Alaung-sithu (1112-1167) to the east of Shwe-bo.

Scholars should note that none of the published editions of the *Alaungpaya Ayedawbon*, though LN's name-title is given as author, are actually by him; they are all (in two versions, several editions) by Twin-thin Taik-wun Maha Sithu.¹

(b) **Hsinbyu-shin Ayedawbon (1787)**

In the exordium of the palm-leaf manuscript which has the text of this important historical record, LN is clearly stated as the author, together with a list of his other titles. The main title of the work is named by the author, LN, as *Hsinbyu-shin Min-taya-gyi Phaya Ayedawbon Thamaing-daw*. But at the very top of the first leaf of the manuscript, before the usual prayer which begins the text, there is another title, viz *Min Khan Sardan-daw-gyi*. It was under this alternative title that U Htun Yee, under his pen-name Shay-haung Sarpay Thutaythi Ta-oo, made a few copies of the text first available to scholars in two mimeographed volumes. I have made a copy of these texts for Dr. Kyaw Win, Retired Professor of History, Yangon University and newly appointed member of the Myanmar Historical Commission in late 2007 as he wanted to edit it for publication.

A number of Myanmar kings have as one of their titles Hsinbyu-shin, or the Possessor of the White Elephant, though in Myanmar history it is only two kings, viz. Hanthawaddy Hsinbyu-

1. *Alaungpaya Ayedawbon, Hnit-saung-twe*; ed. by U Hla Tin (Hla Thamein). Yangon: Ministry of Culture, 1961. Although the editor U Hla Tin wrote in the Introduction that the first of two versions printed in this volume is by LN; actually both are by Twin-thin Taik-wun Maha Sithu, according to the Senior Research Officer of the Myanmar Historical Commission, Dr. Yi Yi. See Dr. Yi Yi "Ayedawbon kyan mya pyat-thana"...1969. p. 45-48.

shin, King Bayinnaung (1551-1581), and Alaungpaya's second son, Hsinbyu-shin (1763-1776), the conquer of Ayutthaya, who are commonly known under this title.

Our eminent Myanmar historian, Daw Kyan, has pointed out that though Bodawpaya, or King Badon, is not popularly known as Hsinbyu-shin, he did possess several White Elephants including the female White Elephant found in Maha Hlega Forest entitled Thiri Marlar Maha Thubattar and also Nibbarna Pyitsaya Naga Yazar, male White Elephant, together with other white and red royal full-grown elephants, altogether (120) in number.¹ Because this text was written around the sixth year of this King's reign, a contemporary writer like LN could not have referred to him as Bodawpaya, a much later appellation first used by his grand-children, and it would have been quite proper to call the current king Hsinbyu-shin Mintaya Gyi.

This text can be accepted as an Ayedawbon Kyan, even if it does not cover the whole reign of the king, but only about one seventh. These first five years were important because the king had to crush the rebellions of Phaunga-sar Maung Maung (king for a week only), Nga Phone and others to consolidate his power.

The text gives in some detail the following important historical records compiled by a contemporary minister of the court, namely LN:

- (1) Crushing of rebellions at the beginning of the King's reign.
- (2) Detailed account of the first founding of the new capital, Amarapura, the "Immortal City".
- (3) The two Beiktheik coronation ceremonies of 1783 and 1784, which LN himself had to plan and organize according to traditional practice.
- (4) Details of the court costumes, head-dresses, etc.
- (5) Details of royal appurtenances, displayed according to custom on the left and right of the throne.
- (6) Prices of rice, ngapi and other basic commodities during the period 1782 to 1787.
- (7) Sending of Buddhist missionaries all over the country, listing their names and the towns they were sent to.
- (8) Sending of scholars (including Brahmin Hindu *Ponna*, court astrologers) to India and other countries to search for secular texts on medicine, law, astrology, and so on. (Many were later translated into Myanmar).

1. Daw Kyan, "Maung Laut, Maung Ywa, Maung Waing do a-kyaung", *Padauk Nwe*, no.6 (June 2006) p. 24.

- (9) Crushing of rebellion by Nga Sat and Nga Pei in Yangon.
- (10) Establishing Pitaka Taik religious libraries, after copying and editing Buddhist texts to keep in these repositories.
- (11) Collecting data and compiling a list of various officials, artisans, merchants, etc., and their descendants.
- (12) The campaign to successfully conquer Rakhine, giving the military routes, battles and so on.
- (13) The conveying of the much venerated Maha Muni Buddha Image from the Rakhine capital to Amarapura, giving in detail the dates, the different stages (halting places) and the veneration ceremonies at the capital and many other informative details.

There is a note at the end of the manuscript stating that it is compiled by LN, and that it covers the years Myanmar Era 1143 (1781/1782) to M. E. 1148 (1786/1787).

LN's life and career is a unique one amongst Myanmar writers; he was a recorder of Myanmar history during one of the most important periods of our history when a new and powerful dynasty, the Konbaung, arose with a sudden impact not only on two ancient kingdoms, the Mon and the Rakhine, but also the Ayutthaya dynasty of Thai kings. This impact resulted in the demise of all these three kingdoms.

LN, as a Myanmar chronicle compiler, noted down for posterity the disintegration of the Nyaung-yan (or restored Toungoo dynasty), and the crushing by Alaungpaya and his three sons of the Mons, Rakhine and Siamese Kingdoms. For the Mons and Rakhines the end of their long lines of kings was final; with the Thais the line of kings who had Ayutthaya as their capital ended and a new Thonburi-Bangkok line of kings began under a new dynasty, the Chakri, which continue up to the present.

LN is unique in serving and surviving with valour and distinction under up to six Myanmar kings, both as a literary personage, and also as a military staff officer and a high-ranking minister at the court and capital and never losing his position during those violent, fast changing times.

Conclusion

In 1938 Professor Pe Maung Tin wrote and published his *History of Burmese Literature*,¹ a pioneer work which is still unsurpassed. It is the standard reference book on the subject and also a school text-book which has been reprinted many times, but up to now no revised edition has appeared and no scholar in Myanmar has been able to write a similar work.

As a pioneer work the book had a few inaccuracies which in recent reprints have remained uncorrected. Within a few months of its appearance in 1938, a school-master from Mon-ywei, LN's birth-place, who knew about the inscription that LN left, wrote an article in a little known magazine for teachers pointing out that in Pe Maung Tin's account of LN and LT the biographical data and the list of their works are mixed-up.² But very few scholars seemed to have noticed it.

A few years after Myanmar regained Independence (1948), in the 1950s there was much controversy as to where LT was born; the people of Mon-ywei; claimed him as a native of their village because of the stone inscription there and villagers of Ma-gyi-ton argued that LT had written in his works that he was born in their village. After some time scholars realized that there were two LT, one born in Mon-ywei; who became LN, and the other LT who wrote the famous *Yadu* poem "Meza Taung-chay".

Bohmu Thamein (pen-name of Col. Saw Myint) has neatly summed up the main points of this controversy in two articles he wrote in the popular *Nwe-tar-yi* monthly magazine.³ Bohmu Thamein, or Hmu-thamein (his later pen-name) (b. 1922), a very influential former Minister for Information and Culture under the Revolutionary Government (took over power in 1962), has also given the text of LN's inscription from Mon-ywei; and the views of the various Myanmar scholars who have written about LN. Bohmu Thamein wrote that the controversy should now be ended. LN had been rehabilitated since then to his rightful place as a renowned writer, a recorder of his times, and also at the same time an influential minister-soldier who took part in nearly all the main military campaigns of the early Konbaung Period, probably in a high military

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1. U Pe Maung Tin. *Myanmar Sarpay Thamaing*. 5th ed. Yangon: Thudamawaddy, 1958. p. 172-180. 1st ed. 1938.
 2. U Taik Soe. "Letwe Nawrahta Atthtoke-patti", *Pyin-nya Magazine*, vol. 2, no. 12 (Dec. 1939) p. 56-57. This rare magazine is available in the Universities Central Library, Yangon.
 3. Bohmu Thamein. "Letwe Thondara Pyat-tha-na phyay-shin thint-pyi", *Nwe-tar-yi*, no. 115 (Jan. 1970) p. 25-32; no. 116 (Feb. 1970) p. 68-77. Both articles now reprinted in the author's *Bawa ta-gwei kyone-twei ya mhat-taing mya*. Yangon: Yone Kyi Chet Sarpay... 2007.p. 39-71.

administrative, and finance managerial position as a "Tat-ye", or Deputy Commander, giving him the opportunity to keep, records of the combats.

Scholars and librarians at the University of Yangon have searched far and wide in Myanmar for his "lost" writings and recovered some of his priceless records of Myanmar history; accounts of his turbulent times which restructured the national identities of Myanmar and Siam and ended the Mon, Rakhine and Ayutthayan Kingdoms.

The Burma Research Society, whose headquarter was in the University Library, rescued, edited and published LN's orthographic work in 1962. The Universities Central Library recovered his long lost Exegesis to concluding parts of *Pyo* poems, and had it edited and published in 1995 with the help of some Myanmar literature postgraduate students. And now two members of the Myanmar Historical Commission (retired Professors of History) are editing to publish his two Ayedawbon texts.

The author of this paper hopes that all these efforts of Myanmar scholars and librarians will finally reveal Letwe Nawrahta (U Nay) as a great recorder of Myanmar history, carefully noting down for posterity not only the exploits and activities of the king and court, but also about the common people, the hardship and starvation they suffered with the sharp rise in basic food prices, surrounded by enemies, resulting in the collapse of the Nyaungyan Dynasty of Innwa (Ava) in 1752 and the glorious rise of the Konbaung Dynasty from Alaungpaya to Bodawpaya, long before the final end of the Myanmar Kingdom after the three Anglo-Burmese Wars.

LN's intention was to write not only for the King and the Royal Court, but for all Myanmar people.¹ At the Myanmar Historical Commission, using LN's writings as one of the main contemporary sources, we are also trying to record the past with truth and integrity not specifically just for the current power wielders and the elite, but for all people of our country, and to make the authentic facts of Myanmar history better known in the world.

1. U Htun Yee in his paper "Letwe Nawrahta, Bawa hnint Sar-pay" p. 249 has high-lighted this fact quoting LN's statement from the Exordium of *Alaungpaya Ayedawbon* that his intention is to enable all men (*a-myo-tha do*) to read consecutively from where *Maha Yazawin-gyi* ended. LN did not say he wrote just for king and elites.

Appendix I
List of Titles Received by Letwe Nawrahta
(born 1723-died 1791)

Letwe Nawrahta's writings can be found on palm-leaf and *parabike* paper manuscripts, and in printed books under the titles he received during his long court career of (50) years.

No.	Title	King	Regnal Years	Remarks
1	Yanda Kyaw Swa	Maha Dhamma	1733-52	Became a Court Official under the Crown Prince around 1743. The first of the two titles was conferred by the Crown Prince
2	Pyan-chi Kyaw Htin	Yaza Dipati		
3	<i>Letwe Thondara</i>	Alaung-paya	1752-60	Given this title on 29 June 1757
4	Letwe Nawrahta			
5	Sithu Kyaw Htin	Naungdaw-gyi	1760-63	Probably on 4 Feb. 1761 Shown only on the bell inscription
6	Nanda Thura Kyaw Htin			
7	Nay-myo Thiri Zeya Kyaw Htin			
8	Nay-myo Maha Kyaw Htin	Hsinbyu-shin	1763-76	
9	Nay-myo Maha Thin Khaya Kyaw Htin			
9(a)	Min-gyi Kyaw Htin (not a new title)	Singu	1776-82	As his titles under three previous kings included Kyaw Htin, he was generally referred to as Min-gyi Kyaw Htin
10	Min-gyi Maha Thiha Thura	Bodaw-paya	1782-1819	Letwe Nawrahta died in the 9 th year of the King's reign, in 1791.

Appendix II

Synopsis of Letwe Nawrahta's *Yodaya Naing Mawgun* (the Mawgun record in poetic form of the Conquest of Ayutthaya in 1767)

We have only an incomplete text; I have only seen the (4) stanzas as printed in the *Anthology of Burmese Literature*.¹

As this *mawgun* record poem is extremely important as an eye-witness, contemporary account, I am giving the Synopsis, adapted into English, from the Myanmar one found as an Appendix to Ma Kyu Kyu Hla's M.A. in Myanmar Literature thesis *Letwe Nawrahta Bawa hnint Sarpay*² (The Life and Works of Letwe Nawrahta) submitted to the Rangoon Arts and Science University in July 1981.

The *Yodaya Naing Mawgun* by Letwe Nawrahta is in (5) parts, with a total of (46) stanzas. Pt.(1) comprises of stanzas 1-9.—Pt.(2), stanzas 10-18.—Pt.(3), stanzas 19-27.—Pt.(4), stanzas 28-36.—Pt.(5), stanzas 37-46.

Pt.1 in the introductory verses LN mentions that King Alaungpaya, being unable to complete the conquest of Ayutthaya, enjoined his sons, before his death, to complete the task. The middle son Hsinbyu-shin carried out his father's exhortation successfully. As the *mawgun* poem was written for Hsinbyu-shin, the glories of this king are given. Then the various troops and the names of their commanders are noted, that the (57) provinces of the Shan-Yun (Chiang Mai)³ were conquered first, before Ayutthaya was beleaguered.

Pt.2 gives the two routes taken by the Myanmar armies, the northern and the southern, and that the Siamese army and navy put up a strong defence. Also about the floods during the monsoon when the Myanmar troops had to retreat temporarily and details of naval battles (actually fighting from boats on the rivers) including the one on the Chiang Mai River (Ping). The poet mentioned that the Myanmar looked after the prisoners of war taken. Detailed descriptions of the fighting is given in verse.

Pt.3 is about Ayutthaya and her defences, out-lying towns with their fortresses, and how the Myanmar troops over-came them one by one.

1. *Myanmar-sar Nyunt-baung Kyan*; ed. by U Kyaw Dun. Rangoon: Govt. Print., 1929. Vol.III, p.2-3. New ed., ed. by Daw Myint Than. Yangon: Sarpay Beikman, 1992. Vol.3, p.2-4.

2. Kyu Kyu Hla, Ma. *Letwe Nawrahta Bawa hnint Sarpay*, Rangoon: Arts and Science University, 1981. Thesis for M.A. in Myanmar Literature. p.111-115

3. The names of the (57) provinces of Chiang Mai are given in this poem. So also in the other *Yodaya Naing Mawgun* by U Pon-nya, where these (57) provinces are also named.

Pt.4 is about the long siege when Ayutthaya was invested, and how the Siamese king sent emissaries with presents (tributes) to sue for peace, but as it was not unconditional surrender, or for complete submission, the Myanmar king turned down the offer. Five tunnels were surreptitiously dug under the Siamese defences to lead Myanmar troops to breach the walls of Ayutthaya.

Pt. 5 In concluding the *mawgun* poem, LN mentions the final conquest over the three kingdoms of Siam, *viz.* Ayutthaya, Lin Zin and Chiang Mai. The names and ranks of the various Myanmar military commanders are included in the laudatory verses as a memorial to their courage and valour.

Commentary

LN as a poet was not outstanding, but his *Yodaya Naing Mawgun* is invaluable as a contemporary eye-witness account. Unfortunately, LN's poem is overshadowed by another *Yodaya Naing Mawgun* (also known as *Zinme Naing Mawgun*) by the famous poet of the later Konbaung Period, U Pon-nya (1807-1867).

The name *Yodaya* in Myanmar stands for Ayutthaya, the Capital, as well as for Siam as a whole and for the Siamese people. In Pon-nya's poem, printed in book format and included in the *Anthology of Myanmar Literature*, and recently translated into English by U San Lwin (retired Director-General of the Myanmar Language Commission) *Yodaya Naing* is about how the Myanmar repulsed the Siamese incursions into Kengtung in Eastern Shan State during King Mindon's reign (1853-1878). Ayutthaya was no longer the capital city by that time; *Yodaya* therefore meant the Siamese.

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