

Accounts of King Bayinnaung's Life and *Hanthawadi Hsinbyu-mya-shin Ayedawbon*, a Record of his Campaigns*

Introduction

King Bayinnaung (AD 1551-1581) is renowned in Myanmar history as the King who not only reunited Myanmar and established the second Myanmar Kingdom, the Taungoo Dynasty, but also as the King who extended the frontiers of the country to her farthest extent, covering parts of Northern and Central Thailand and Laos.

Many accounts of his life are to be found in the main chronicles like U Kala's *Maha Yazawin-gyi* (1730), the *Hman-nan Yazawin-daw-gyi* (1829), local histories like *Thanlyin Yazawin* and the modern versions of the *Taungoo Yazawin* and in a few inscriptions. Like King Rajadirit (1385-1423) and Alaungpaya (1752-60) there is also a complete *Ayedawbon Kyan* recording his campaigns entitled *Hanthawadi Hsinbyu-myashin Ayedawbon*.

This paper attempts to give some historical facts as recorded in a contemporary bell inscription left by Bayinnaung himself and in the *Ayedawbon Kyan* about his conquests and achievements which is now accepted by most scholars as a contemporary record.

The paper also gives a brief account of the 20th century biographies and historical novels about King Bayinnaung written to promote nationalism and patriotism during Myanmar's struggle for Independence from British colonial rule.

Like some of the sacred images of the Buddha and revered saints, historical facts of the life of King Bayinnaung has been covered with various embellishments, gold-leaf coating to make his life more glorious, god-like and romantic.

This paper is also an introductory note to the first complete translation into English of the *Hanthawadi Hsinbyu-mya-shin*

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Ayedawbon, a contemporary record of the Campaigns of King Bayinnaung, which is being translated by U Thaw Kaung and U San Lwin (Director-General, Myanmar Language Commission).

Genealogy and Youth

There are no contemporary records of King Bayinnaung's ancestry, childhood and youth. Unlike King Kyansittha, Bayinnaung in the long inscription that he left for posterity, inscribed on a large bronze bell donated to the Shwe-zigon Pagoda at Bagan, did not give his genealogy. Neither did the *Hanthawadi Hsinbyu-myashin Ayedawbon*.

There is some controversy about Bayinnaung's ancestry: some say that his parents were commoners who came from Nga-tha-yauk in the Bagan area, or from Hti-hlaing village in Taungoo District, and some say he was born in Taungoo of royal lineage.

U Kala (fl.1714-33) who wrote the first comprehensive chronicle of Myanmar kings, the *Maha Yazawin-gyi*, about 150 years after Bayinnaung's death and during the Nyaungyan Dynasty founded by the Lord of Nyaungyan, one of the sons of Bayinnaung, mentions that Bayinnaung's father was Mingyi Swe, son of Taung Kha Min and giving his descent from Taungoo royalty.¹ (See Appendices I and II). U Kala could not write even if he had wanted to, that Bayinnaung was not of royal blood, during the reign of a king who was a direct descendant of the great King.

Hman-nan Yazawin-daw-gyi compiled by a Royal Commission which began its work in 1829 merely repeats U Kala with a note stating that the compilers agreed with what U Kala wrote with regard to the lineage of Bayinnaung.² So it was only in the 18th and 19th centuries that the purported genealogies of Bayinnaung's father and mother were first given.

During the time of the Myanmar kings, i.e. up to 1885, no one dared to cast doubt about the royal lineage of their kings, especially

1. U Kala. *Maha Yazawin-gyi*. Vol. 2. . . Burma Research Society ed. 1961 (reprint).

p. 160.

2. *Hman-nan Yazawin-daw-gyi*. . . 1941 (reprint). Vol. 2. p. 279-280.

famous kings like Bayinnaung and Alaungpaya. But throughout the three centuries after Bayinnaung's death, an oral tradition persisted claiming that he was not of royal blood, but a commoner, the son of a toddy-climber, one of the lowest positions in Myanmar society. Only during colonial times in 1910 was this written down, first of all by Mr. Taw Sein Ko, the well-known Sino-Myanmar scholar and Superintendent of Archaeology.¹

About a decade later Sir George Scott (1851-1935), who was an authority on Myanmar life and customs, having written a classic book *The Burman, his Life and Notions* (1882) under a pseudonym ShwayYoe, also mentioned in a general history of Myanmar that he wrote (entitled *Burma from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*; 1924)² that Bayinnaung was the son of a toddy-climber from Nga-tha-yauk in the Bagan township.

G. E. Harvey in his pioneer *History of Burma* (1925) stated in a note on Tabin-shwe-hti and Bayinnaung that "few Burmans retain for long a correct knowledge of their ancestry, and family trees sported by men after they attain greatness must be suspect. On the other hand, the fact that Bayinnaung's father was a toddy climber no more precludes the possibility of his having royal ancestors than it precluded his becoming vassal king of Toungoo when his son rose to greatness."³

Bayinnaung's date of birth is given by U Kala as Myanmar Era 877 Tabodwe month waxing moon 12th, Wednesday⁴ (16th January 1516) which is close to AD 1517 given by Harvey⁵ for Tabin-shwe-hti who was born about three months after Bayinnaung.⁶

In 1920 the Myanmar struggle for Independence started in earnest with the first university students strike against British colonial rule. As a

1. Taw Sein Ko. "Branginoco or Hanthawadi Sinbyu-Yin", *RSASB*, vol. 21 (1910).

Reprinted in the author's *Burmese sketches*. [Vol. 1]. . . 1913.p. 128-129.

2. Sir George Scott. *Burma from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*. . . 1924. p. 74.

3. G. E. Harvey. *History of Burma* . . . 1925.p. 342.

4. U Kala. *Maha Yazawin-gyi* . . . 1961 (reprint). Vol III, p.65.

5. G. E. Harvey. *History of Burma* . . . 1925.p. 342.

6. Myanmar chronicles gave Tabin-shwe-hti's date of birth as Myanmar Era 878 Kason

month, waning moon 1, Wednesday (17th April 1516). *Twinthin*

Maha Yazawin-thit gives a date about a year earlier (AD 28th April 1515).

consequence of the strike National Schools were established all over the country and new textbooks in Myanmar language were written for use in these schools.

U Po Kya (1891-1942), the influential Inspector of National Schools and a well-known writer, produced several history textbooks and readers. The first history text¹ that he wrote for use in schools to promote nationalism and patriotism did not mention that Bayinnaung rose from the ranks of the common populace. Only in a later work entitled *Myanma Gonyi Yazawin Phat-sa*² did U Po Kya write about Bayinnaung as a man of prowess who rose from the common people, a peasant from the Bagan area. Perhaps he wanted the young Myanmar students of the 1920's and of the pre-Second World War period to get the idea that anyone can achieve eminence and become a great leader and conqueror if one is brave, hard-working, willing to take risks and strives earnestly for the good of the country and the people.

Mr. W. L. Barretto, an Anglo-Myanmar Barrister, in a lecture that he gave on "Bayin Naung , the Naploeon of Burma" on 6th November 1931 (probably in Pyapon) with U Tha Zan U, District and Sessions Judge presiding, mentioned Nga-tha Yauk as the place where "the future Burma Napoleon saw light. His father was a toddy palm climber. A swarm of white ants surrounded the son where he lay. This was taken as a good omen, and he was named Cha Te[t] . . . a learned monk examined his horoscope and foretold his future greatness".³

Two other Myanmar authors of the 1920's and early 1930's also wrote about Bayinnaung although they rejected the saying that he was not of royal lineage. These two authors were Ledi Pandita U Maung Gyi (1878-1939)⁴ and U Thein Maung (Thadinsa Saya, i. e. Newspaper

1. U Po Kya. *Myanma gonyi* . . . 1924.

2. U Po Kya. *Myanma gonyi Yazawin phat-sa*. . . 1956 (reprint.) Vol. 1, p. 116. See also the same author's *Khit-hmi Myanmar Yazawin a-kyin* (A Brief Modern History of Burma) . . . 1936 (1949 reprint). p. 127.

3. W. L. Barretto. *Heroes of Burma*. A compilation of lectures. Yangon: Burma Union Press[1934?]. p. 20.

4. U Maung Gyi (Ledi Pandita). *Tabin-shwe-hti Wutthu-taw-gyi*. 2nd ed. . . . 1971 (reprint.) Chapter(8), p. 123-130. See also Chapters (16) to (20), p. 203-254. 1st published 1924-36 serialized in *Dagon Magazine*.

Editor) (1898-1966)¹. U Maung Gyi wrote about Bayinnaung's childhood, as the boy Maung Cha Tet (Master Termite Climb) so named because a swarm of termites climbed onto him as a child. Both authors also wrote about his teenage romance with Tabin-shwe-hti's elder (half) sister Thakin Gyi whom he later married and thus became an important member of the Myanmar Royal Family, and not long after the Crown Prince. These stories were picked up by the Thai novelist Mr. Chot Phrae-phan (pen-name Yakhob) and the name Cadet is familiar to the Thai people, though the Myanmar Chronicles do not mention this at all.

These popular writers got their material on Bayinnaung's childhood and youth from a little (47 p.) book called *Athtoke-patti htu* (Distinguished lives) published in 1906 which had a short (5) pages account of Bayinnaung's life covering only his youth. This little book although published in the early years of the 20th century, clearly belonged to the oral traditions of the previous century. The anonymous author in the preface wrote that the booklet contained the lives of prominent persons from Myanmar history up to the reigns of the last two Myanmar kings, viz. King Mindon (1853-1878) and Thibaw (1878-1885). These short lives were written down, collected probably from traditional accounts that were prevalent during the Myanmar kings' time. Some accounts in this book like Nandabayin (1581-1599), son and successor to Bayinnaung, entering into a conversation with Sakka, King of the Devas cannot be accepted as true facts of history.² So also in the account of Bayinnaung's youth, it is difficult to differentiate what is hearsay and what is historical fact.

In the early 1930s, apart from the works of U Po Kya and U Thein Maung, a very important work on the Myanmar kings governance came out in five volumes written by U Tin, District Officer of Bagan. In vol. 3

1. U Thein Maung (Thadinsa Saya). *Bayinnaung*. . . 3rd. ed. 1940. (Burmese heroes, no.3). p. 14

2. U Than Htut and U Thaw Kaung. "Myanmar Biographical Writings in the Twentieth Century", paper read at *Views and Visions in the Literary Heritage of Southeast Asia* International Conference, Yangon, 18-20th Dec. 2000. Published in the Conference *Proceedings*, pt.II, p.1-31.

published in 1932, U Tin the authoritative scholar on how the Myanmar kings governed, wrote about Bayinnaung and definitively stated that Bayinnaung was not of royal blood. He cited a case during King Thibaw's time when a commoner was given the title and insignias of a Prince, the case of Yanaung Maung Maung Toke. At that time the Royal Court collected what was known and available about Bayinnaung's common ancestry to provide a precedent.¹

The three uncertain points about Bayinnaung's origins and youth: (1) whether he was of royal descent or not, (2) the legends and miraculous events about his childhood and (3) about his love affair with the royal daughter of the King of Taungoo, have all been discussed by a number of scholars.² For novelists this has provided fertile ground for their imagination and for the people given enjoyable stories to read. Only one should try and differentiate historical facts from the fiction.

It is a historical fact that Bayinnaung married Thakin Gyi, the sister of King Tabin-shwe-hti (1513-1550) when he was only 19, and later King Tabin-shwe-hti conferred on him the title Bayinnaung meaning "the King's Elder Brother." So by marriage and by his ability he became a member of the royal family and together with Tabin-shwe-hti, his brother-in-law and brother-in-arms, the two of them extended the Taungoo Dynasty (1531-1752) to other parts of Myanmar bringing about the second unification of the whole country since the fall of the Bagan Dynasty in 1287.

The main events of King Bayinnaung's long reign of thirty years (1551-1581) is covered nearly completely, the first part by the bell inscription he left at Shwe-zigon Pagoda in Bagan which records the events from 11th January 1551 to 23rd May 1557,³ and the *Hanthawadi Hsinbyu-myashin Ayedawbon*, which records the King's main military

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1. U Tin (Bagan Wundauk). *Myanmar Min ok-chok-pon sardan*. . . 1970 (reprint). Vol. III, p. 27. See also Euan Bagshawe's translation under the title *The Royal Administration of Burma*. 2001. p. 297.
 2. U Kyaw Win (Professor of History, Yangon University). "King Bayinnaung as historical hero in Myanmar perspective," in *Comparative studies on literature and history of Thailand and Myanmar* . . . 1997. p. 1-2.
 3. Dr. Than Tun. "Hanthawady Sinbyushin : an Autobiography", *Golden Myanmar*, vol. 1, no. 4 (1994), p.13.

campaigns and his achievements from about 1550 to 1579, i.e. two years before his death. Historians should use these two contemporary sources to obtain the authentic facts and try to disentangle the web of fictionalized biography that has been written by Myanmar and Thai novelists in the first half of the 20th Century.

Bell Inscription

This inscription in Myanmar (43 lines), Pali (5 lines) and Mon (35 lines) from AD 1557 is important as it gives the correct regnal titles for King Bayinnaung as Siri-parama Maha Dhamma Raja and his Chief Queen (King Tabin-shwe-hti's sister) as Siri-agga Maha Dhamma Raja-devi.¹ The bell was cast and donated by Bayinnaung himself to the Shwezigon Pagoda in Bagan where it can be seen today.

It also clears up the expression "Conqueror of the Ten Directions",² which is well known in Mon and Thai as one of the main epithets of King Bayinnaung. This expression is not given in the main Myanmar chronicles like U Kala's *Maha Yazawin-gyi* and the *Hman-nan Yazawindaw-gyi*; it is to be found only in this inscription of King Bayinnaung.

The main events recorded in the bell inscription are as follows:³

- (1) Conquest of Ketumati (Old Taungoo City) on 11th January 1551.
- (2) Conquest of Sri-kshetra (Pyay or Prome) on 30th August 1551.
- (3) Conquest of Hanthawadi (Hamsavati/Bago) on 12th March 1552.

1. *Ibid.* p.13 and 15. see also *Report of the Superintendent, Archaeological Survey, Burma* - - - 1953. Published 1955. p. 17-18. For the full text of the bell inscription and the translation into English by Dr. Than Tun see Sein Myint. "The Bell Inscription of Bayinnaung . . .," *Myanmar Historical Research Journal*, no. 8 (Dec. 2001) p. 7-28.

2. In Thai "Phra Chao Chana Sib Thit" made famous by Mr. Chot Phrae-phan (pen-name Yakhob) in his novel *Phu Chana Sib Thit* (The Man who Gained Victory in Ten Directions).

3. The converted dates in the Christian era were made by Dr. Than Tun, see *Myanmar Historical Research Journal*, no. 8 (Dec. 2001) p 23-27.

- (4) A Bell of Justice hung (outside) the Palace for the public to ring to get redress of any grievance.
- (5) Coronation of King Bayinnaung and his Chief Queen on 12th January 1554, and the construction of a (new) palace called Kambojasati (Kanbawza-thadi).
- (6) Conquest of Innwa (Ava) on 22nd January 1555.
- (7) Relationships with Sri Lanka for the promotion of the Buddhist Sasana (religion).
- (8) The campaign to conquer the Shan country starting on 9th November 1556. Going through Innwa (Ava) between 24th December 1556 and 8th January 1557.
- (9) Conquest of Momeik (Mong Mit) and Thibaw (Hsipaw) on 25th January 1557.
- (10) Building of a pagoda at Momeik (Mong Mit) on 8th February 1557. Also a *cetiya* built at Hsipaw.
- (11) Conquest of Mohnyin (Mong Yang) on 6th March 1557.
- (12) Conquest of Mogaung (Mong Kawng) on 11th March¹ 1557.
- (13) Forbids the burial of male and female slaves at the funeral of Shan Chieftains.
- (14) Left Mogaung on 9th April 1557.
Bayinnaung stated in his inscription that by this time he had made the vassal Kings and Lords of Ketumati, Hamsavati, Tharaykhitaya (Srikshetra), Arimaddanapura (Bagan), Innwa(Ava), Momeik (Mong Mit), Thibaw (Hsipaw), Ruby Land, Mogaung (Mong Kawng), Mohnyin (Mong Yang) and Kalay all submit to him.
- (15) Gilt Shwe-zigon from *htupika* (pinnacle) to *phinap* (plinth).
- (16) A Bell weighing 2,100 viss (7,560 lbs. or 3423 kg.) of copper cast for Shwe-zigon Pagoda on 23rd May 1557.
- (17) Prayer for Buddha-hood and refererring to himself as “the

1. A variant reading gives 26th March see U Sein Myint. “The Bell Inscription of Bayinnaung . . .”, *Myanmar Historical Research Journal*, no. 8 (Dec. 2001) p 26.

Conqueror in the Ten Directions.”

We usually associate King Bayinnaung with his capital Hanthawadi (present day Pegu/ Bago). So why did he write the only significant inscription of his reign (found so far) and leave it in Bagan? Was it because his forefathers were from this area? No one yet knows the answer. And also why did he choose to write in both Myanmar and Mon languages when Myanmar kings had long stopped writing their inscriptions in Mon even from mid-Bagan period? Bagan being the fountain-head of Myanmar culture and recorded history, later kings tended to hark back to this ancient capital for their legitimacy.

This bell inscription should be further studied and needs to be known more widely by scholars. It has been rather neglected because it was placed in Shwe-zigon at Bagan instead of Shwemawdaw at Bago. Now that the original Mon inscription has been translated into Myanmar by U Chit Thein, Mon scholar of the Myanmar Archaeology Department, and into English by eminent Myanmar historian Dr. Than Tun, senior Member of the Myanmar Historical Commission, scholars can easily study it together with the Myanmar inscription from this bell.¹

There are a number of other interesting details about the life and times of Bayinnaung in this inscription, which have not been mentioned in my paper, but which can be read in *Myanmar Historical Research Journal*, no.8 (Dec. 2001) p.7-28. One wishes the inscription had been written, not in the 6th year of Bayinnaung's 30 years' reign, but much later; then it would have given the facts of his later conquests and achievements.

For the historical facts of this later period we have to rely on the *Hanthawadi Hsinbyu- myashin Ayedawbon* which records events right up to about two years before Bayinnaung's death.

Hanthawadi Hsinbyu-myashin Ayedawbon

This important work on Bayinnaung is called on manuscripts and printed versions under variant titles as (1) *Hsinbyushin Ayedawbon*, (2)

1. Sein Myint. "The Bell Inscription of Bayinnaung . . .", *Myanmar Historical Research Journal*, no. 8 (Dec. 2001) p 7-28. This article has all the (3) texts and also Dr Than Tun's English translation.

Hanthawadi Ayedawbon and (3) *Hanthawadi Hsinbyu-myashin Ayedawbon*.

An incomplete text was first printed in 1923 in *Ayedawbon Nga Saung Dwe* (The Five Volumes of *Ayedawbon*) and later reprinted several times in collected *Ayedawbon* works. All these printed texts lack about 17 pages (A4 size) at the end which give important data on the authorship and date of writing.

The *Ayedawbon kyan* is an important historical text which supplements the information given in the main Royal Chronicles. *Ayedawbon* in its original archaic meaning is a “historical account of a royal campaign.”¹ There are (7) *Ayedawbon kyan* found so far.² Five of them are centred on the achievements of a single king like Rajadirit (AD 1385-1423), Hanthawadi Hsinbyu myashin or King Bayinnaung (AD 1551-1581) and his son King Nyaungyan (AD 1559-1605), Alaungpaya (AD 1752-1760) and his son Bodawpaya (1782-1819). Two are on the Rakhine kings and region.

The distinctive features of *Ayedawbon kyan* are:

Relates accounts of

- (1) How individuals of prowess like Bayinnaung consolidated their power and fought to obtain the throne.
- (2) How these kings retained their power by military means and other endeavours like diplomacy, alliances and stratagem.
- (3) How rebellions were crushed.
- (4) How wars were waged for the expansion of their territory.³
- (5) Important achievements of a particular king like building new towns and cities, pagodas and palaces, etc.

For many years scholars were unable to know definitely who the author of *Hanthawady Hsinbyu-myashin Ayedawbon* was, because the missing last 17 pages were not available.

1. Myanmar Language Commission. *Myanmar-English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. . . 1993, p. 587.

2. U Thaw Kaung. “*Ayedawbon Kyan*, an important Myanmar literary genre recording historical events”, *Journal of the Siam Society*, vol.88,pts.1&2 (2000) p. 21-23.

3. U Hla Tun Phyu, ed. *Majjhimadesa Ayedawbon* . . . 1998. p. *Kaw* (ကောဝ်).

U Yan, the Royal Librarian of King Mindon and Thibaw, gives the name of this *Ayedawbon* with a remark that it was written by a Saya (Acharn) whose name is not known.¹

Scholars like Dr. Yi Yi of the Myanmar Historical Commission knew that the printed versions were incomplete and attributed the authorship to one or the other of two well-known authors of the early Konbaung Period, because these two authors had written chronicles and other *Ayedawbon kyan*, viz. U Tun Nyo (Twin-thin-Taik Wun Maha Sithu) and Letwe Nawrahta.²

Now that the Universities Historical Research Centre has obtained the complete text of this *Ayedawbon*, we definitely know who the author is. The colophon states that King Bayinnaung conferred the titles Yazataman (Rajataman) and later Oketharaw on the author³ who was a minister who faithfully served under him. The title Rajataman is found in both U Kala's *Maha Yazawin-gyi*⁴ and *Hman-nan Yazawin-daw-gyi*⁵ as a military commander who was in charge of an important cavalry unit under King Bayinnaung and who took part in many of the main campaigns which are recorded in this *Ayedawbon* text. This text therefore has significant historical value as being not only a contemporary record, but for many of the military campaigns recorded, an eye-witness account also.

The colophon states that the author was requested by the Crown Prince, eldest son of King Bayinnaung who later succeeded him as Nandabayin (1581-99), the King's brothers who were the Lords of

¹ . U Yan (Maing Khaing Myosa). *Pitaka-taw Thamaing*. . . 1959. (reprint) p. 266, item no. 2034.

² . Yi Yi, Dr. "Ayedawbon kyan mya pyat-thana," in *Kantha Sein-lei sardan mya*. Yangon: Mingala Sarpay, 1969. p. 30-62. Also "Hsinbyu-shin Ayedawbon," *Myanmar Swai-son Kyan* (Myanmar Encyclopaedia), vol.4. Yangon: Burma Translation Society, 1960. p. 239.

³ . Rajataman (Oketharaw). *Hanthawadi Ayedawbon*. Mimeographed copy . . . 1967. p. 97-98.

⁴ . U Kala. *Maha Yazawin-gyi*. . . 1961 (reprint). Vol.II, p. 251, 268, 271, etc.

⁵ . *Hman-nan Yazawin-daw-gyi*. . . 1941 (reprint). Vol.II, p. 281, 318, etc.

Pyay(Prome), Taungoo and Innwa (Ava), and the Ministers of the Royal Court to compile this *Ayedawbon* in Myanmar Era 926(AD 1564).¹ As the *Ayedawbon* covers events up to AD1579, two years before King Bayinnaung's sudden death in 1581, it must have been written during the period 1564 to 1580.

The author also wrote in the colophon that he consulted many records, up to a total of (235) in number which were accounts of various events of Bayinnaung's reign, and also some inscriptions. Out of (235) records he first selected (135) and after scrutinizing them rejected (100) as unworthy of being recorded in this *Ayedawbon* text. So the author used only (35) records, mainly on military campaigns and a few other important events like the building of a new Royal Capital City and Palace, some out-lying towns, and the giving of Zinme (Chiang Mai) by the King to his second son Nawrahta Saw to govern, two years before his death. If we examine the text carefully there are altogether (38) important campaigns and achievements recorded meticulously, item by item, and describing each campaign or event in some detail.

The (38) campaigns and achievements of Bayinnaung recorded in this *Ayedawbon* text can be divided into (6) categories:

- (1) Military campaigns to consolidate the Myanmar Kingdom and bring the vassal kings and lords, both Myanmar and Mon under Bayinnaung's control.
- (2) The campaigns to conquer the Shan region which successfully incorporated this region into Bayinnaung's Kingdom and which has remained a part of the Union of Myanmar ever since up to the present day.
- (3) The military campaigns to extend his territory into Northern and Central Thailand and parts of Laos. Zinme (Chiang Mai) remained a part of the Myanmar Kingdom for about 200 years from Bayinnaung's time.
- (4) Other achievements like building a new Royal City, a capital at Hanthawadi/ Bago and some out-lying towns near the borders like Myawady and Kalay.

¹ . Rajataman (Oketharaw). *Hanthawadi Ayedawbon*. Mimeographed copy. . . 1967.
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- (5) Bayinnaung's achievements in propagating the Buddhist Sasana, the construction or repairing of pagodas in his capital and in various places under his control.
- (6) Some achievements for the betterment of society, like the banning of animal and human sacrifices in the Shan region, standardization of weights and measures and so on.

The *Ayedawbon* begins in 1550 a few months before Bayinnaung became king. 1549-1551 were the last two years of Tabin -shwe-hti's reign; he had taken to drink introduced to him by a young Portuguese adventurer. The Kingdom which he and Bayinnaung had forged together from their teens for about (20) years was falling apart, but Bayinnaung with unparalleled loyalty to his King would not take over the Crown and only acted as an able regent and commander-in-chief. The Myanmar, Shan and Mon ministers in Tabin-Shwe-hti's court asked Bayinnaung to take the throne, but Bayinnaung answered:

"Brethren, gratitude and loyalty alike bind us to the King. What ye have said say it to me alone, tell it not to others. The Lord in His wisdom saith that an evil man, though he live an hundred years, shall not avail against an upright man though he live but a single day. I will advise His Majesty, and if his mind followeth not what I say, then is it for you and me to render him faithful service. Let us hold no more unseemly counsel ... Although, because of sin in a previous existence, the mind of our sovereign Lord is infirm and he raveth, yet shall the realm not perish if we watch over and defend it."¹

When Tabin-shwe-hti was finally assassinated near Katha outpost after leaving Pantaraw military outpost (probably near Sittaung)², Bayinnaung was away in Dala (present-day Twantay) not far from Yangon, on a military campaign to crush Mon rebels. The *Ayedawbon* begins with Bayinnaung at Dala and records the consolidation of his power by bringing back various rebels under his control. The dates of the

1. G. E. Harvey. *History of Burma* . . . 1925. p. 161. Translated by Harvey from U Kala. *Maha Yazawingyi*. Vol. 2. . . 1961 (reprint). p. 239. Not written down in *Hanthawady Hsinbyu-myashin Ayedawbon*.
2. *Ibid.* p. 161. Harvey made a mistake in thinking Pantaraw was Pantanaw in Maubin District. *Hman-nan*. 1941(reprint). Vol. II, p. 273 says that after leaving Pantaraw the King went to Rakhine outpost and from there he went to Katha which is probably Kyaik Katha where a Pagoda can be seen today marking the spot where the king was assassinated.

first seven years of military campaigns given in this *Ayedawbon* can be compared with those on the bell inscription.

The expansion of Bayinnaung's territories from the Shan States to Zimme(Chiang Mai) is then recorded. There are detailed accounts of the military campaigns to take (Chiang Mai) in 1557. The author Rajataman like U Kala refers to Chiang Mai as Suvanna Bhumi, the place from where Myanmar first obtained Theravada Buddhism. He probably accompanied the King to Chiang Mai. The Chiang Mai King was reinstated after the conquest with admonitions to remain loyal and bring tributes every three years to Bayinnaung.¹ Pagodas and monasteries were repaired by Bayinnaung in Chiang Mai and Lamphun area.

The *Ayedawbon* records the campaigns to conquer territories to the east and south from the Shan States of Myanmar, after the taking of Kyaington (Kengtung), to the Lanna Kingdom which included some parts of present-day South-west Yunnan right up to the Kingdom of Lang Chang in what is now Laos and to parts of Vietnam which was called by the Myanmar of Bayinnaung's time "the country of the black-faced people". The conquest of Ayutthaya in 1564² is given in some detail.

To the north-west also Bayinnaung captured parts of Manipur and Assam along the Khasi Hill tract.

Bayinnaung used the policy of reinstating the kings and lords of the states he conquered once they had taken the oath of allegiance and he kept on the ministers and high officials. Only when they rebelled against his suzerainty as King Mekuti of Zimme(Chiang Mai) did in 1564 were the kings deposed and brought back to his capital where they were kept in a section of the royal palace compound and well-looked after.

There were no more major military campaigns in the last five years of Bayinnaung's life. The *Ayedawbon* records the construction of the new Hanthawadi city and the Royal Palace which was named Kanbawza -thadi.³ It also gives an account of Bayinnaung conferring the

¹ . Rajataman (Oketharaw). *Hanthawadi Ayedawbon* . . . 1967. p.34.

² . The date is given as 1969 in David K. Wyatt's Thailand, a short hist ... 1984. p. 100.

³ . Rajataman (Oketharaw). *Hanthawadi Ayedawbon* . . . 1964. p.82-87

kingship of Zinme (Chiang Mai) on his second son Nawrahta Saw in 1579, about two years before his death.¹

There are interesting accounts of the construction of Kalay town near the Myanmar north-western border and A-Myawady town (now called Myawady)² on the Thai border, and the building of (4) corner stupas in the Royal City.

There is also an account of trading with foreign countries and the various goods that were brought each year to Kosambi or Pathein(Bassein) by 40-50 ships from across the seas bringing textiles, food, perfumes and spices, and even multi-coloured birds like parrots and various animals. The other important ports mentioned were Thanlyin (Syriam), Dala (present-day Twantay), Mottama (Martaban), Mawlamyine (Moulmein) and Taninthayi (Tenasserim).³

All this important information in the last concluding part of the *Ayedawbon* needs authentication as we have seen only a mimeographed copy of the text and so far no palm-leaf manuscript has been recovered with the colophon.

Personality and Character

Bayinnaung is depicted in Myanmar historical literature as a great king with a strong personality, brave and willing to take risks in what he wanted to achieve, at the same time as a just and religious person who practised tolerance and forbearance although he wielded immense power.

U Tin, the authority on the governance of Myanmar kings singled out (4) main traits of Bayinnaung's character which are worth recording for emulation. These four character traits are:

- (1) This king rose from poverty and therefore he thoroughly knew about his people; he was well-grounded in the realities of his time.
- (2) He had taken much risk, shown his bravery and was bold and courageous even before he became a king.

¹ . *Ibid.* p. 87-89.

² . *Ibid.* p. 89-93.

³ . Rajataman (Oketharaw). *Hanthawadi Ayedawbon* . . . 1967. p.95.

(3) He knew how to take under his protection other vassal kings and lords; he watched over the brothers and the sons of royal houses.

(4) He had much sympathy and consideration for the people.¹

In the bell inscription of 23rd May 1557, he portrayed himself as a champion of the Buddhist religion who did his best to promote and protect Buddhism as a Defender of the Faith. He would spare the lives of his enemies, give back to the kings and lords he conquered their positions, status and property after they had shown their allegiance to him. At the end of *Samsara* he supplicated for Buddha-hood, to be Enlightened. He recorded in the inscription that he hung a “Bell of Justice” in front of his main palace in Hanthawadi for anyone to come and strike it if he or she wanted a grievance to be justly redressed. He also wrote that he stopped the slaying of male and female slaves to be buried with their dead chieftain in the Shan region.

In the *Ayedawbon kyan*, Bayinnaung is shown as a great king, a *Cakravartin*, who listened to the counsel of his ministers and generals before he undertook any military campaign; for each campaign the name of the official who advocated it is recorded, saying that the great king concurred with the advice of so and so minister or general and therefore achieved success.

Dr. Than Tun called Bayinnaung an “Emperor without an Empire”, because he conquered territory not to colonise or to set up an Empire, but to keep the conquered kings and lords in their own positions so long as they remained loyal to him.²

The *Ayedawbon* records how he appointed his brothers and sons to administer the core area of his kingdom while he kept the vassal chieftans and kings in their own area which formed the periphery. Professor Tun Aung Chain in his paper on “Chiang Mai in Bayinnaung’s Polity” wrote:

¹ . These four points are based on U Tin (Bagan Wundauk). *Myanmar Min ok-chok-pon sardan* 1970 (reprint) Vol.III, p.26. See also Euan Bagshawe’s translation *The Royal Administration of Burma ...* 2001. p. 297.

² . Dr. Than Tun. “Emperor without [an] Empire”, *English for All*, no. 62 (July 1992) p. 71-74.

“The extensive polity was held together not so much by formal institutions as by personal relationships of a traditional nature. These relationships, which were established by Bayinnaung with each and every ruler or governor of the various territories of his polity, were based on two ideas: the idea of allegiance (*thitsa*) and the idea of favour and obligation (*kyeizu*).”¹

In portraying the bravery of Bayinnaung writers like Ledi Pandita U Maung Gyi mixed historical facts with fiction. Just to give two examples :

(1) When Tabin-shwe-hti wanted to have his “Ear-boring Ceremony” in Bago which at the time was the capital of his enemy the Mons, Bayinnaung is said to have chosen (500) brave soldiers by driving a pin through the right thumb of each and choosing only those who did not wince, starting with himself. There is no record of this in any chronicle found so far.

(2) In the attack on Hanthawadi/ Bago together with Tabin-shwe-hti, U Maung Gyi wrote that the enemy king threw a spear which embedded in Bayinnaung’s thigh. Bayinnaung just cut off the wooden handle of the spear with his sword and continued fighting without taking out the spear-head. This incident is recorded in the chronicles as happening to the King of Innwa (Ava) Thado Min Saw in 1565 while fighting in the Lang Chang campaign. The author had neatly transferred the incident to Bayinnaung.²

The mixing of fiction with historical fact becomes a grave distortion when some of these imaginative creations go into school textbooks and children are taught fiction as if it was a true account.

Bayinnaung’s horoscope³; according to the legendary account the horoscope saved Bayinnaung’s life from the wrath of Tabin-shwe-hti’s

¹ . U Tun Aung Chain “Chiang Mai in Bayinnaung’s Polity”, *Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Thai Studies*. . . 1996. See also U Tin (Bagan Wundauk). *Myanmar Min ok-chok-pon sardan* ... 1970 (reprint). vol. III, p. 31-32.

² . Saw Lu (pen-name of U Saw Tun, Northern Illinois University)’s article “Chai chai htwin htwin yazawin mu a-taing” (Expansions and creations from history) in *Ya-pyi A-twai Saung-ba mya*. . . 1998. p. 32-40 for a discussion of fact and fiction in biographical writings and novels about Bayinnaung.

³ . Tetkathoe Maung Thu Hlaing. *Bayinnaung Kyaw Htin Nawrahta* . . . 2000. Vol. 2, p.

father Mingyi Nyo, when he discovered that his daughter was *enceinte* from an affair with Bayinnaung in their teens.

The romantic side of Bayinnaung is not seen in the inscriptions, *Ayedawbon kyan* or in the chronicles, only *Athtoke-patti-htu* gives an account of his teen-age love for Thakin Gyi, the Royal Princess. This little book also relates another love affair which is reminiscent of a story from the Jatakas (no. 7 *Kalavahana Jataka*) and from the life of Kyansittha before he became a king. Bayinnaung is supposed to have fallen in love with a beautiful young widow, a Mon richman's daughter named Hne Ain Taing who already had a son. This was during Tabin-shwe-hti's time when Bayinnaung was staying in Patheingyi. He lived with her for sometime and while she was bearing his child he had to go back to the capital. Giving her a ring he told her to come to him if she has a son, but not to come if the child is a daughter. Later after Bayinnaung became king she came to the palace with two sons, but the King pretended that he did not remember her. She showed the ring, but still the King after consulting his Mon minister Binnya Dala asked her to go through "the ordeal by water," and only when she had passed the test would he accept her, naming the younger son Shin Thitsa (Master Truth)¹. In the version by U Tin the lady is said to be from Nyaungyan and the son later became the Lord of Nyaungyan who started the Nyaungyan Dynasty (1599-1752).²

235-237. See also *Zahta-taw-pon Yazawin*; [History of Horoscopes] ed. by U Hla Tin (Hla Thamein) . . .1960. p. 78.

1. *Athtoke-patti htu* ... [1906].p 45-47.

2. U Tin(Bagan Wundauk). *Myanmar Min ok-chok-pon sardan* ...1976 (reprint). Vol.

IV, p. 276-277. See also Euan Bagshawe's translation *The Royal Administration of Burma*. 2001. p. 557. In the Myanmar Chronicles the lady is known as Khin Pyi Sone, and both her sons are said to be by Bayinnaung.

Conclusion

Books on Bayinnaung continue to be published in Myanmar. In year 2000 at least two books were published.¹ To get more concrete historical facts research on the Taungoo Period of Myanmar history is being conducted by the Universities Historical Research Centre.

Bayinnaung's life has been termed "the greatest explosion of human energy ever seen in Burma (Myanmar)".² From his teens he had been leading military campaigns, usually in person, for over forty years and when he died suddenly at the age of 66 in 1581, he was planning an invasion of Rakhine (Arakan) with some of his advance troops already in Than-dwe (Sandoway). But he was "an Emperor without an Empire", or rather without a proper administration to control an Empire. Myanmar resources were too extended, for at his death the vast territories that he conquered and kept under his control through personal relationships and loyalty to his charismatic character all broke apart. Bayinnaung is remembered and hero-worshipped through fact and fiction as an illustrious Myanmar king who made a great impact on the course of Myanmar history from the 16th century to the present day.

¹ . Aung Khin Soe. *Dutiya Myanmar Naing-gan-daw hnint Bayinnaung Kyaw Htin Nawrahta* . . . 2000. Also Tetkathoe Maung Thu Hlaing. *Bayinnaung Kyaw Htin Nawrahta*. Vol. 2 . . . 2000.

² . G. E. Harvey. *History of Burma* . . . 1925. p. 174.

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