# Bayinnaung in the *Hanthawadi Hsinbyumya Shin Ayedawbon*Chronicle

by Thaw Kaung

King Bayinnaung (AD 1551-1581) is known and respected in Myanmar as a great warrior king of renown.

Bayinnaung refers to himself in the only inscription that he left as "the Conqueror of the Ten Directions".¹ but this epithet is not found in the main Myanmar chronicles or in the Ayedawbon texts. Professor D. G. E. Hall of Rangoon University wrote that "Bayinnaung was a born leader of men. . . the greatest ever produced by Burma. . ."²

There is a separate Ayedawbon historical chronicle devoted specifically to the campaigns and achievements of Bayinnaung entitled *Hsinbyumya-shin Ayedawbon*.<sup>3</sup>

## Ayedawbon

The term Ayedawbon means "a historical account of a royal campaign" <sup>4</sup>It also means a chronicle which records the campaigns and achivements of great kings like Rajadirit, Bayinnaung and Alaungphaya.

The Ayedawbon is a Myanmar historical text which records:

- (1) How great men of prowess like Bayinnaung consolidated their power and became king.
- (2) How these kings retained their power by military campaigns, diplomacy, alliances and
- 1. For the full text of The Bell Inscription of King Bayinnaung see Report of the Superintendent, Archaeological Survey, Burma . . . 1953. Published 1955. p. 17-18. For the English translations by Dr. Than Tun and U Sein Myint see Myanmar Historical Research Journal. no. 8 (Dec. 2001) p. 16-20, 23-27.
- 2. D. G. E. Hall. *Burma*. 2nd ed. London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1956. p.41.
- 3. The variant titles are *Hsinbyushin Ayedawbon* and *Hanthawadi Ayedawbon*.
- 4. *Myanmar English Dictionary*. Compiled and published by the Myanmar Language Commission. 2nd ed. 1993. p. 587.

strategem.

- (3) How rebellions were crushed.
- (4) How wars were waged for expansion of their territory.<sup>1</sup>
- (5) Important achievements of that king's reign, e.g. building of new towns and cities, pagodas, monasteries, palaces, etc.<sup>2</sup>

These *Ayedawbon* texts were first printed together in 1923 with a collective title *Ayedawbon Nga Saung Twe*, by the Thudhamawadi Press of Yangon.<sup>3</sup> *The Hanthawadi Hsinbyumya-shin Ayedawbon* (abbreviated hence forth to *HHA*), the Ayedawbon which specifically records the campaigns and achievements of Bayinnaung was thus transferred from palm-leaf manuscript to print for the first time in this collection of 1923.

Since then there have been later editions of these collective Ayedawbon texts, enlarged from the original five to six after another version of the *Alaung Mintaya Ayedawbon* was found in the National Library of Myanmar, and published in 1961 by the Ministry of Culture.<sup>4</sup>

Up to now the palm-leaf versions of the *HHA* have not been collated and edited and no separate monograph has been printed in book form with just the text of *HHA*.

## **Authorship**

Like several of the Ayedawbon texts *HHA* has authorship problems. Even U Yan, the erudite Royal Librarian under Kings Mindon and Thibaw, did not know who the author was and in the extremely useful, authoritative bibliography of classical Myanmar and Pali works which he completed in 1888 two years after the British Annexation, U Yan has a note stating that *Hanthawadi Hsinbyumyashin Ayebon* [same as Ayedawbon] is by an unknown Saya (Acharn).<sup>5</sup>

When the text of *HHA* was first printed in 1923 by the Thudhamawadi Press in Yangon, the editors led by Saya Bi and Saya Thein attributed the authorship to Letwe Nawrahta (1723-

- 1. Hla Tun Phyu, <u>U, ed. Majjhimadesa Ayedawbon kyan . . .</u> 1998. p. kaw (ෆෙර්).
- 2. For a fuller description and account of the various Ayedawbon texts <u>see</u> the author's article "Ayedawbon kyan, an important Myanmar literary genre recording historical events," *Journal of the Siam Society*, vol. 88, pts. 1&2 (2000) p. 21-33.
- 3. Ayedawbon Nga Saung Twe. Yangon: Thudhamawadi Press, 1923.
- 4. Ayedawbon Chauk Saung Twe. Also Alaungphaya Ayedawbon, hnit saung twe; ed. by U Hla Tin (Hla Thamain) . . . 1961.
- 5. Yan, <u>U</u> (Maing Khaing Myosa). *Pitakat-taw thamaing* . . . 1959. p. 266, item no. 2034. 1st pub. 1906.

1791). Professor of Myanmar Language and Literature at Yangon University, U Maung Maung Gyi, also thought that *HHA* was written by Letwe Nawrahta.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Yi Yi of the Myanmar Historical Commission attributed the authorship to U Tun Nyo (Twin-thin Taik Wun, Maha Sithu) (1726-1806).<sup>2</sup>

Two "discoveries" later proved that *HHA* could not have been written by either Letwe Nawrahta or U Tun Nyo. U Maung Maung Tin, an avid collector of Myanmar manuscripts and a member of the Myanmar Historical Commission found around 1980 a palm-leaf copy of *HHA* dated 1671, which was before either of the two supposed authors were born.

The other discovery was around 1967, when Brig. Tin Pe, a high ranking Minister in the Revolutionary Government of Myanmar, who also collected many palm-leaf manuscripts, found a copy of *HHA*, copied in 1839, intact with the lacking leaves at the end. He donated the manuscript to the Research Division of the Burma Socialist Programme Party. A mimeographed copy entitled *Hanthawadi Ayedawbon* was made in 1967 from this manuscript. In the colophon of this mimeographed copy there is a statement saying that *HHA* was written by Yazataman (Rajataman) who also had the title Oke-tha-raw conferred on him by King Bayinnaung himself.<sup>3</sup>

Yazataman (Rajataman) is mentioned by both U Kala and U Tun Nyo and also in the *Hman-nan*, the *Glass Palace Chronicle*. Yazataman was the commander of a cavalry troop division and took part in a number of campaigns under Bayinnaung and even before under Thabin -shwe-hti.<sup>4</sup>, serving with Bayinnaung for about forty years and continuing under Bayinnaung's son Nandabayin. He was probably a high ranking official under Bayinnaung because he refers to himself as an "amat-gyi".

In the colophon of the *Hanthawadi Ayedawbon*, the author states that in the year ME 926 (AD 1564), the Crown Prince (who later succeeded Bayinnaung as King Nandabayin (1581-99) together with Bayinnaung's brothers, the Lords of Pyay (Prome), Taungoo and Innwa (Ava) and the Ministers of the Royal Court, requested him to compile this *Ayedawbon*. As the *Ayedawbon* covers events up to AD 1579, two years before Bayinnaung's sudden death in 1581, it was

- 1. U Maung Maung Gyi "Intorduction", Myanmar Min Mya Ayedawbon ... 1967. p. 7.
- 2. Dr. Yi Yi. "Ayedawbon kyan mya pyat-thana ", ... 1969. p. 50. <u>See also U Thaw Kaung</u> "Ayedawbon kyan ... " <u>JSS</u>, v.88, pts. 1&2 (2000) p.23-25 for a fuller discussion of the authorship problem.
- 3. Rajataman (Oke-tha-raw). Hanthawadi Ayedawbon ... 1967. p.97. Mimeographed.
- 4. U Kala. *Maha Yazawin-gyi* ... 1961 (reprint). vol.II, p.251, 268, 271, etc. <u>also</u> U Tun Nyo (Twin-thin Taik Wun, Maha Sithu) ... *Maha Yazawin thit* ... 1998. p.40, 81, 96, 213.
- 5. Rajataman (Oke-tha-raw). Hanthawadi Ayedawbon ... 1967.p.98.
- 6. Rajataman (Oke-tha-raw). Hanthawadi Ayedawbon ... 1967. p. 97.

probably written during the period 1564 to 1580.

The author also wrote in the colophon that he consulted many available records, altogether (235) in number, which were accounts of various events in Bayinnaung's long reign of (30) years; he also consulted some inscriptions. Out of (235) records he first selected (135) and after scrutinizing them rejected (100) as unworthy of being recorded in this *Ayedawbon*. So the author used only (35) records, mainly on military campaigns and a few other important events and achievements like the building of a new Royal Capital City and Palace, constructing four corner stupas in Hanthawadi, the establishment of two border towns, and the conferring of the Kingship of Zin-me (Chiang Mai) to his second son Nawrahta Saw. There are accounts in *HHA* of Bayinnaung's efforts to propagate Theravada Buddhism, the construction and repairing of pagodas, the banning of animal and human sacrifices in the Shan region and the standardization of weights and measures in all areas under his control.

Scholars still need to undertake further research to find out whether the last (17) mimeographed pages of the *Hanthawadi Ayedawbon* are authentic. We also need to find a complete palm-leaf manuscript copy with the end part and colophon intact.

#### Aim and Structure of HHA

In the introductory part of *HHA*, the author states that he compiled the *Ayedawbon*, record of campaigns and achievements of Bayinnaung, to show that this great, king of kings conferred with his ministers, commanders and high officials when striving to bring under his control the various countries and how he achieved success because he heeded the good counsel of his high ranking officers.<sup>2</sup>

This aim of the author is quite different from U Kala who wrote the first comprehensive chronicle of the Myanmar kings. U Kala in the introduction to his *Maha Yazawin-gyi* writes that he wrote the chronicle to show that even great and powerful kings are eventually brought down by death and destruction.<sup>3</sup> This is in accord with the teachings of the Buddha who taught that nothing is permanent, that power and glory, wealth and high status, all end alike in decay and dissolution.

The author uses a regular literary structure for HHA, recording chronologically, except in a

<sup>1.</sup> Rajatama (Oke-tha-raw). *Hanthawadi Ayedawbon* ... 1967. p. 97. Mimeographed copy.

<sup>2.</sup> HHA . . . 1967 (reprint). p. 321.

<sup>3.</sup> U Kala. *Maha Yazawin-gyi*. BRS ed. ... 1960. p. 4. <u>See also Dr. Hla Pe. "Observations on Some of the Indigenous Sources for Burmese History Down to 1886" ... 1985. p. 38.</u>

few minor cases, and for each episode or campaign recorded he uses a well-defined arrangement, beginning with the year in Myanmar Era (ME), depicting the great King conferring with his high officials, considering various suggestions and options, deciding to take the proposal of a particular minister, commander, or Royal Prince whose name is given as a record, examining the astrological configurations, looking for omens, listening to sooth-sayers and so on as was customary at the Myanmar Royal Court of the time, before embarking on each campaign or undertaking.

Each campaign and achievement is recorded in some detail, in about two to seven pages of printed text, and at the end a moral is given, the author pointing out for each episode that the great King was successful because he listened to the counsel of a certain (named) high official. A precedent for such success is also given for each case, the author taking from the Jatakas or Myanmar history a particular story to illustrate that similar success was also attained in the past when the King listened to the wise counsel of high officials.

#### The Campaigns and Achievements

I have given consecutive numbers (1-26) for the Campaigns, because each episode is written as a separate record with a well defined literary structure as shown above. (Please see Appendix 1)

For the Achievements also I have continued the numbers given to the Campaigns, and numbered them 27-31 (<u>Please see</u> Appendix 2)

The (31) Campaigns and Achievements recorded in *HHA* can be classified into:

- (1) Military campaigns to consolidate the Myanmar Kingdom and bring vassal lords, both Myanmar and Mon, under Bayinnaung's control and authority (Campaign nos. 1-9)
- (2) The Campaigns to conquer the Shan region and successfully incorporate the principalities into the Myanmar Kingdom (Campaign nos. 10-13)
- (3) The military campaigns to extend his territory into Northern and Central Thailand and parts of present-day Laos and to the borders of Vietnam. (Campaign nos. 14-25)
- (4) Sending troops to Sri Lanka (Campaign no. 26)
- (5) Other Achievements like the construction of a new Royal City at Hanthawadi and some out-lying towns like Myawadi and Kalay. Building four corner stupas at Hanthawadi (Achievements nos 27, 29, 30, 31)
- (6) Conferring on his second son, Nawrahta Saw, the title "King of Zin-me" (Chiang Mai) (Achievement no. 28)

HHA begins in AD 1549 soon after King Tabin-shwe-hti had been assassinated at the instigation of a Mon Lord, with Bayinnaung in Dala, away from the capital suppressing Mon rebels. As the Crown Pince and Regent, Bayinnaung had in effect been governing the country for a few

years already, because Tabin-shwe-hti had taken to drink and become incapable of administering the Kingdom which he and Bayinnaung had forged together from their teens.

Bayinnaung succeeded to the kingship in name only, with the country in turmoil. The Mons were in control of the Capital Hanthawadi; the Lords of Pyay, Taungoo and Innwa had all proclaimed themselves kings, independent of the central authority which Bayinnaung had inherited.

HHA depicts Bayinnaung as an able and courageous commander "a born leader of men" as Prof. D.G.E. Hall calls him, leading his small, initial band of loyal ministers, commanders and soldiers, patiently winning back the territories under rebel control. He had the wisdom and foresight to listen to the advice of his ministers and delayed the re-taking of the capital. He did not immediately confront the Mon Lords leading their rebel hordes, but instead went back to the Bama (Burmese) base of Taungoo from where he and Tabin-shwe-hti had first started to form the Taungoo Kingdom, the second re-unification of the Myanmar Naing-gan.

Only when he had won over the Bama (Burmese) regions right up to Innwa did Bayinnaung take the advice of Minister Thiri Nawrahta to advance and attack Hanthawadi and retake the capital (See Campaign no. 6).

After the Bama and Mon Lords had all submitted to him, and he had full control over the main Ayeyawadi valley towns, only then did Bayinnaung take the advice given by Minister Maha Thura and other Lords and High Officials, to extend his territory to the Shan principalities of Bhamaw (Bhamo), Thibaw (Hsipaw) and other Shan States, which he successfully subdued, and which have remained a part of Myanmar from that time (mid-16th century) to the present day. (See Campaign nos. 10-13).

Bayinnaung then took the proposals of his ministers, including the Mon Minister Banya Dala, to expand his territory to Chiang Mai and the (57) cities under her control, to Ka-the (Cassay), Ayudhya (two campaigns, nos. 17 and 21), Lin Zin (Vien-chang) in Laos right to the country of the Viets, known to the Myanmar at the time as "the country of the black-faced people." (See Campaign nos. 14-25).

The printed text of *HHA* ends with Bayinnaung sending troops in five ships to Sri Lanka at the request the King of Colombo, Dhamapala, and on the successful quelling of a rebellion there with Bayinnaung's help, the grateful king sent from Sri Lanka a Buddha's tooth relic and a Royal Princess in the year ME 937 (AD 1576) which Bayinnaung received with much pomp and ceremony.

The newly found last 17 mimeographed pages of *HHA*, as written down in the *Hanthawadi Ayedawbon*, are extremely interesting as they record other achievements of Bayinnaung, some of

them not found in U Kala's Maha Yazawin-gyi and Hman-nan Yazawin-daw-gyi.

## **Personality and Character**

*HHA* depicts Bayinnaung as a brave and courageous warrior King, personally leading his men and officers in victorious military campaigns; at the same time magnanimous to his fallen, vanquished adversaries, sparing their lives and often giving back their ranks and positions once they had acknowledged his rule and suzerainty.

To give an example, in AD 1564 when the King of Chiang Mai rebelled against Bayinnaung's rule, the rebellion had to be quickly crushed. After his victory Bayinnaung ordered the King of Chiang Mai, his ministers and high officials to assemble in front of the most renowned Buddhist abbots, including the Chief Abbot of the Religion in Chiang Mai and said "I have the ability to forbear and forgive what many mighty kings of the past were unable to tolerate. All those who rebelled against my rule deserve to be put to death. But I regard your life only as a fragile flower blossom and will not crush it but spare your lives," and taking the captives in front of the Lahpon pagoda, in the presence of the eminent chief monks, released all of them.<sup>1</sup>

*HHA*, being a record of the great king's military campaigns and achievements, it shows Bayinnaung's ability, his military prowess, knowledge of military strategy and tactics, and his strong personality and charisma to attract men of various races to serve under him.

*HHA* is not a biography of Bayinnaung as it does not cover his birth and genealogy, his youth and the well-known love affair with King Tabin-shwe-hti's elder half sister, Thakin Gyi whom he eventually married. It does not mention his death either, though the author Yazataman or Oke-tharaw lived and served under Bayinnaung's son and successor Nandabayin.<sup>2</sup>

HHA has many episodes which illustrates the four main traits of Bayinnaung's character mentioned by U Tin, the foremost authority on the governance of Myanmar kings. These four traits of his strong personality are:

- (1) He knew about people, as he himself rose from poverty and was a commoner.
- (2) He knew how to take risks, was brave and bold even before he became a king.
- (3) He knew how to take under his protection vassal kings and lords; he watched over the brothers and sons of royal families.

<sup>1.</sup> *HHA* . . . 1967 (reprint). p. 369.

<sup>2.</sup> Only in AD 1597, the Lord of Kin-tha was given the title "Yazataman" probably after Yazataman (Oke-tha-raw) had passed away. See, Twin-thin taik-wun Maha Sithu (U Tun Nyo). *Maha Yazawin Thit*, vol. 2 (Taungoo Period), ed by U Kyaw Win . . . 1998. p. 233.

(4) He had much sympathy and consideration for the people.<sup>1</sup>

To develop trade and commerce and the collection of revenue *HHA* gives several instances of Bayinnaung standardizing weights and measures all over the realms under his authority, so that even far-flung regions used the same standards as the capital. The weights in different sizes were in the shape of the Hamsa, Brahminy Duck, and these Hamsa weights representing the symbol of Hamsavati, continued to be in use for many decades.

Port cities flourished bringing foreign goods, textiles, perfumes and spices, food, multicoloured birds like parrots and even animals to Kosambi or Pathein (Bassein). *HHA* in the last pages of the newly found text gives intriguing accounts of trading at Kosambi (Pathein), Thanlyn (Syriam), Dala (present-day Twantay), Mottama (Martaban), Mawlamyine (Moulmein) and Taninthayi (Tenasserim)<sup>2</sup>.

Bayinnaung is shown in *HHA* as a great Universal monarch, or world conqueror, a *Cakravartin*, who did much to spread Buddhism to the lands he conquered.

Although the bell inscription that Bayinnaung made and donated to the Shwezigon Pagoda in Bagan, states that the great king banned the practice of burning slaves with their dead lords in the Shan region,<sup>3</sup> *HHA* only says that Bayinnaung stopped practices contrary to the teachings of the Buddha in this region. Sir Arthur Phayre in his *History of Burma* (1884) mentions that Bayinnaung prohibited the sacrifice of animals by the Moslem population of the city.<sup>4</sup>

In concluding my paper, I would like to quote what Mr. W. L. Barretto said about Bayinnaung, whom he calls "the Napoleon of Burma". *HHA* gives many examples of Bayinnaung's "energetic life, his fidelity, his justice and last but not least, his sense of discipline" which made him revered up to the present not only in Myanmar, but in Thailand also.

<sup>1.</sup>U Tin (Bagan Wundauk). *Myanmar Min Okchok-pon sardan* . . . 1970 (reprint). vol. III, p. 26 See also Euan Bagshawe's translation *The Royal Administration of Burma*. . .2001. p. 297.

<sup>2.</sup> Yazataman (Oke-tha-raw). *Hanthawadi Ayedawbon* . . . 1967. p. 95.

<sup>3.</sup> Toe Hla, <u>Dr.</u> "Hanthawadi Hsinbyu-shin Kuthodaw Khaung-laung sar lei -lar chet," *Tetkathoe Pyinnya Padetha Sarsaung*, vol. 13, pt. 6 (1980) p. 46.

<sup>4.</sup> Sir Arthur Phayre. *History of Burma* . . . 1884. p. 110.

<sup>5.</sup> W. L. Barretto. *Heroes of Burma* . . . [1934?] p. 37.

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  - **Ref:** Commemorative Essays Myanmar Historical Commission, Golden Jubilee Yangon: MHC. 2006. p.