

# NOTES

## THE PHAUNGTAW-Ū FESTIVAL

by

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Of the numerous Buddhist festivals in Burma, the Phaungtaw-ū Pwe (or 'Phaungtaw-ū Festival') is among the most famous. I would like to say a few words on its origins and how the Buddhist religion, or 'Buddha Sāsana', came to Burma, particularly this part of Burma, the Shan States. To Burma and Thailand the term 'Buddha Sāsana' can only mean the Theravāda Sāsana or simply the 'Sāsana'.

### I

Since Independence this part of Burma has been called 'Shan State'. During the time of the Burmese monarchy it was known as Shanpyī ('Shan Country', pronounced 'Shanpye'). When the British came the whole unit was called Shan States because Shanpyī was made up of states of various sizes, from more than 10,000 square miles to a dozen square miles. As I am dealing mostly with the past in this short talk I shall be using this term Shan States.

History books of Burma written in English and accessible to the outside world tell us that the Sāsana in its purest form was brought to Pagan as the result of the conversion by the Mahāthera Arahan of King Aniruddha ('Anawrahtā' in Burmese) who then proceeded to conquer Thaton (Suddhammapura) in AD 1057 and brought in more monks and the Tipiṭaka, enabling the Sāsana to be spread to the rest of the country. We are not told how Thaton itself obtained the Sāsana.

The *Mahavamsa* and chronicles in Burma and Thailand, however, tell us that the Sāsana was brought to Suvannabhūmi by the two *thera* Soṇa and Uttara after the Third Sangāyanā at Pātaliputta in 236 BC during the reign of Emperor Asoka of the Maurya Dynasty. Where is Suvannabhūmi? According to the map of Rāmaññadesa in *Old Burma*, Professor Luce's *magnum opus*, Suvannabhūmi is that stretch of land that runs from the beginning of the estuary

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Regarding Roman numeral codes in the footnotes, please refer to the "References" section appended to this Note.

of the Sittang River to the Bilin River. Some people believe that it stretches all the way from Pegu to Moulmein, and some chronicles identify Suvannabhūmi with Rāmaññadesa. The prominent feature of this land is the 1,100-foot-high Mount Kelāsa near the modern town of Taungzun. Half of old Suddhammapura was on Mount Kelāsa, and the other half was on the lower level.<sup>1</sup> The seacoast in those days was nearer to Mount Kelāsa than now. It was here that Soṇa and Uttara are said to have landed, and local traditions say that traces of some ruins on the low mountain are those of the monastery built for the two *thera*.

When King Aniruddha conquered Thaton in AD 1057, or when King Kyanzittha visited the site of the landing of the two *thera* in 1098 and set up his Suvannabhūmi inscriptions,<sup>2</sup> or when the Kalyāṇī inscriptions were set up in 1479, Suvannabhūmi was as indicated in the map of Rāmaññadesa referred to just now. The *Sāsanavamsa* points out on page 12 that the distance between “the island of Sihāja” and Suvannabhūmi was seven days and seven nights by boat, that it was a great harbour “where merchants arrived from various countries”, and that “the multitude, princes and others, would come by boat to Suvannabhūmi from the town of Campā and the like for trade”. Suvannabhūmi of Rāmaññadesa, the book adds, answers the description of Suvannabhūmi “of the commentary”.<sup>3</sup>

In the region along the estuary of the Sittang and its banks, fortune-seekers and alchemists have been dredging and panning gold from ancient times. The gold of Dezumpa, north of Pegu, is specially prized by alchemists. Hence the name ‘Suvannabhūmi’, according to local traditions. The place where the relics of the two *thera* were enshrined is called ‘Kusinarā’, and this is still worshipped with great reverence by local people. The importance of local traditions cannot be dismissed lightly. Professor Luce was able to locate the site of the battle between Saw Lu (Aniruddha’s son and successor) and Ngayamankan, i.e. the Pyitawtha Kyun of the inscriptions and of the chronicles, because local people still remembered it.<sup>4</sup>

What I have said above is no proof that Suvannabhūmi existed on the eastern shore of the Sittang estuary, but it does suggest the possibility. The Archaeological Department of Burma has been excavating at the foot of Mount Kelāsa since 1975, and we eagerly await final results.

The Kalyāṇī Inscriptions tell us that the Sāsanā flourished in Rāmaññadesa for a long time after the landing of Soṇa and Uttara, but it weakened eventually and by the year 1601 after the Parinibbāna of the Buddha, or Cuḷa Sakkarāja (CS) 419 (AD 1057), the Tipiṭaka and the Order of Bhikkhus were taken by King Aniruddha to Pagan.<sup>5</sup> Although there is no mention of how the Sāsanā was faring during the 1,300-year period between Soṇa and Uttara and Aniruddha, there is evidence which leads one to believe in the possibility that it had not died out completely.

Chinese writings tell us there was a land route between China and India passing through north Burma in the second century BC,<sup>6</sup> and that embassies of the Roman Empire travelled this

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1. I, p. 43.

2. XX, p. 56.

3. I, p. 12.

4. XX, p. 47.

5. V, p. 76.

6. X(1), p. 207; X(3), p. 385.

route in AD 97 and 121.<sup>7</sup> Since the route was mentioned, the chances are that it had existed for some time. If a land route between China and India in those days passed through the jungles of north Burma, it is quite reasonable to assume that sea communications between India and Lower Burma, i.e. *Suvaṇṇabhūmi*, must have been quite lively at the time *Soṇa* and *Uttara* landed.<sup>8</sup>

Before the Second World War scholars of Burmese history placed the beginning of the kingdom of *Tharekhittarā* (*Śri Ksetra*, or *Old Prome*) around the fifth century AD, based on evidence from the fragments of the Pāli canon found there.<sup>9</sup> *Nihar-Ranjan Ray* has attempted to identify the script in which the Pāli inscriptions were written. He dates the script around the sixth century, "if not earlier", and says that *Theravāda Sāsana* was already an established religion in *Tharekhittarā* by the fifth century.<sup>10</sup>

Before the Second World War, too, European scholars took the years 50, 57 and 80 on the funeral urns of three kings of *Tharekhittarā* to be CS, and added 638 years to make them AD 688, 695 and 718. This was because they were overcautious and refused to believe in the possibility of Burmese culture and history earlier than that. Regarding Burmese cultural origins, on the other hand, Professor Hall does not favour the nationalistic but fallacious idea that Indian culture was brought to southeast Asia by waves of immigrants, and both he and Professor *Coedès* say that when the so-called Indian 'colonizers' did arrive in southeast Asia they met not savages but organized societies with a civilization "not completely unfamiliar" to them.<sup>11</sup> Many Burmese scholars take the dates on *Tharekhittarā*'s royal funeral urns to be the Saka Era or *Mahā Sakkarāja* established by Emperor *Kaniska* of the Kushans, and add 78 to make them AD 128, 135 and 158 respectively. This is not impossible, as it has now been established by radiocarbon tests that *Tharekhittarā* was already in existence by the first century AD and that it perished only around the eighth century.<sup>12</sup> If any scientific proof of earlier civilization in Burma is needed, this is it, and I am afraid scholars and experts will have to think hard to fit their old theories into this new and irrefutable discovery.

*Coedès*, probably drawing conclusions from European colonization of India and southeast Asia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, calls southeast Asian kingdoms of ancient times "Indian kingdoms".<sup>13</sup> Against this Hall says, "the use of such terms as 'Further India', 'Greater India' or 'Little China' is to be deprecated. Even such well-worn terms as 'Indo-China' and 'Indonesia' are open to serious objections, since they obscure the fact that the areas involved are not mere cultural appendages of India or China but have their own strongly-marked individuality."<sup>14</sup> There is no doubt which of the two views is nearer the truth, especially since the

7. X(1), p. 204.

8. VI, pp. 1262-3.

9. III, pp. 62-3.

10. XI, p. 4.

11. III, p. 15; IV, p. 14, p. 13.

12. XII. In this paper, U Aung Thaw, the present Director-General of the Department of Archaeology, Burma, basing his conclusion on the radiocarbon tests, says: "the Pyū people had already established themselves in the region of *Beikthanomyo*, *Halin* (*Hanlin*) and *Tharekhittarā* by the first century AD".

13. III, chap. III, XIII and XIV.

14. IV, p. 4.

discovery of Ban Chiang culture. The theory has been seriously put forward that southeast Asia was the original home of rice cultivation and of domestication of other plants.<sup>15</sup>

The reference to Cuḷa Sakkarāja is another example of scholars refusing to accept indigenous sources. The chronicles state that CS was founded by King Poppa Sawrahan of Pagan in AD 638.<sup>16</sup> It was the prerogative of monarchs of old to abolish and establish eras or *sakkarāja*. The Ratanakosindr Sakkarāja to mark the founding of Bangkok by King Rama I is a recent example. Luce maintains that CS was “invented” by the Pyū to mark the founding of Tharekhittarā,<sup>17</sup> but there is nothing to support this theory and it is quite wrong in any case in view of the new discovery of the earlier birth of Tharekhittarā.

This discovery seems to confirm the contention in the chronicles that Tharekhittarā indeed existed before the first century AD. And if, as stated previously, scholars thought that the Sāsana was well established in Tharekhittarā by the fifth century AD, cannot we reasonably assume that it was there well before the Pāli inscriptions were written? Further, the chronicles say that the Sāsana was flourishing in Rāmaññadesa and the kingdom of Arakan at the same time as in Tharekhittarā. The final results of excavations at Mount Kelāsa will tell us whether we can connect these statements with the coming of Soṇa and Uttara.

The two well-known Chinese pilgrims to India, Hsuan-tsang and I-tsing, certified respectively in AD 648 and 675 that Tharekhittarā was in existence.<sup>18</sup>

Chinese writings in mid-ninth century mention two land routes between China and India that passed through north Burma, and one of these went through a “Pyū capital” and Manipur.<sup>19</sup> Is this latter route one and the same as that of the second century BC? Of that unspecified “Pyū capital” the Chinese say the following:

The king's name is Mahārājā. His chief minister is Mahāseṇa. When he goes on a short journey, the king is borne on a litter of golden cord; when the journey is far, he rides an elephant. His wives and concubines are numerous, the constant number is a hundred persons. The compass of the city-wall is faced with glazed bricks; it is 160 *li* in circumference. The banks of the moat too are faced with bricks . . . Within the walls the inhabitants number several myriad families. There are over a hundred Buddhist monasteries with courts and rooms all decked with gold and silver, coated with cinnabar and bright colours, smeared with kino and covered with embroidered rugs . . . the king's residence is also like this . . . When they come to the age of seven, both boys and girls drop their hair and stop in a monastery, where they take refuge in the Saṅgha. On reaching the age of twenty, if they have not awaked to the principles of the Buddha, they let their hair grow again and become ordinary townfolk . . . There are twelve gates with pagodas at the four corners; the people all live within.<sup>20</sup>

This description could have come from any chronicle in Burma and Thailand; in fact it is more extravagant than any chronicle—the example of glazed bricks, for example; but having come from Chinese sources it is believed by scholars as authentic, while indigenous chronicles are regarded by the same scholars as something akin to fairy tales. If this Chinese account is

15. XXI, pp. 330-9.

16. VII, pp. 52-3.

17. Luce, G.H., *op. cit.*, vol. II, catalogue of plates and indexes, p. 330, para. 2.

18. X(2), p. 310.

19. X(2), p. 316.

20. X(2), pp. 318-9.

authentic, then the monasteries and the ordinations of *bhikkhu* and *sāmaṇera* as described definitely belong to the Theravāda sect as you would find in Burma today. Authentic though the Chinese writings may be, they fail to tell us the name of this city; but it seems to me that the ruins and artefacts of Tharekhittarā answer the description of such a grand city. Professor Luce thinks it could be Halin near Shwebo in the north, and says, "if I hesitate to press for the identification, it is partly due to my surprise that if this site was the Pyū capital known to the Chinese, they did not mention the sulphur and saline springs which are so notable a feature of the landscape at Halin today."

It should be remembered that the walls of Tharekhittarā are more or less circular in shape, as stated in the Chinese quotation above as well as in the Burmese chronicles, with a diameter of 2.5 miles, while those of Halin are rectangular, measuring roughly 2.0 by 1.0 miles. I take the word "circumference" in the quotation to be that of a circular shape. The chronicles state that the diameter of the circular walls of Tharekhittarā is 1 *yojana*, while the actual measurement is about 2.5 miles.

From the radiocarbon testing to the mid-ninth-century Chinese records, Tharekhittarā seems to have embraced the Sāsana throughout its life of nearly 1,000 years. Circumstantial evidence seems to point that way. Is it not possible, then, that the Pyūs obtained their Sāsana from their neighbours, the Mōns of Rāmaññadesa? And so far scholars have not quarrelled with the statement in the chronicles that it was the Theravāda Sāsana that Aniruddha brought from Thaton in 1057. From that date up to now the Theravāda Sāsana has been the predominant faith in Burma.

## II

How did the Sāsana come to the Shan States? I have read several chronicles of major Shan States, but none has mentioned any definite date when the Sāsana was introduced, except in one chronicle which I deal with further on. Most chronicles more or less assume that the Sāsana was there from the beginning. The chronicles of Mōngmāu and Hsīpaw have the same beginning as the Burmese chronicles, with the founding of Tagaung by a Sākya prince who migrated from India long before the coming of our Buddha. About the time of the Parinibbāna of the Buddha, Tagaung was destroyed by an enemy from the east, and the last of the line of Sākya rulers by the name of Bhinnakarājā was killed. His followers thereupon broke up into three divisions; one of these became the "Nineteen Shan Clans" who migrated east and founded the kingdom of Mōngmāu, and from there they spread to such other Shan States as Mohnyin (Mōngyāng), Mōngmit, Hsenwī, Hsīpaw, Mōngnai and Yawnghwe. This beginning gives the Shans a close connection with the Burmans, and also gives some of the Shan ruling houses a link to the Sākya clan and thence the 'Solar Race'.

Nowhere in the chronicles of the above Shan States is the year that the Sāsana was introduced identified. We are left with statements in such Burmese chronicles as *U Kalā* and

*Hmannan*<sup>21</sup> that it was King Bayinnaung (Burengnawng) who introduced the Sāsana into the various Shan States in the sixteenth century when he won the allegiance of all the ruling princes. We are also told that the king prohibited human and animal sacrifices that followed the death of a Shan ruler.<sup>22</sup> In this connection Mr Harvey states that when a major *sawbwa* (*caufā*) died, as many as 10 elephants, 100 horses, and 100 each of men and women would be slaughtered.<sup>23</sup> Even if 200 human slaves were expendable, I doubt if so many precious elephants and horses could have been spared. Bayinnaung brought the Sāsana not only to the Shan States of Burma, but also to the Shan States presently part of China, but in those days submitted to the Burmese suzerainty—these Chinese Shan States are known as ‘Koshanpye’ or the ‘Nine Shan States’: Mōngmāu, Hsikwan, Mōngnā, Sandā, Hosā, Lasā, Mōngwan, Kūngma and Mōnglem. And there is no reason to disbelieve the way the Sāsana was established by Bayinnaung in the Shan States.

Earlier I refer to one Shan chronicle that mentioned the coming of the Sāsana, and this is the chronicle of the State of Kengtung (Chiengtung). According to this chronicle the original inhabitants of the state were Lva or Va, and the first Tai or Shan ruler was a grandson of King Mangrāy by the name of Prince Namthum (Namthuam) sent from Chiengmai in CS 615 (the date given in the Yonaka Chronicle for this event is CS 686).<sup>24</sup> The Shans drove the Va out of Kengtung; the traditional belief among the Va in the present Va (Wa) States is that they were driven by the Shans from Kengtung to their present homeland. In the year CS 712 (AD 1350) King Phāyū of Chiengmai sent his son Prince Sattabandhu or Cedbantū to rule Kengtung with a contingent of officials, astrologers and four *mahāthera* whose names were Mahā Hongśāvati, Dasapañño, Dhammalañkā and Dhammatrailoke. Of the four monasteries built for the *mahāthera* the sites of three are still *wat* or monasteries, and the site of the fourth one is recognizable. In CS 810 (AD 1448) there arrived in Kengtung, also from Chiengmai, a reformed sect of the Sāsana called the Forest Sect, as opposed to the original Garden Sect; the former received its name from the original Wat Pādaeng in Chiengmai and the latter from Wat Suandōk also of Chiengmai: *pā* means ‘forest’, and *suan* ‘garden’. Some of the details of the establishment of this Forest Sect are given by Mr A.B. Griswold and Dr Prasert na Nagara in their article “An inscription from Kengtung (AD 1451)” published in the *Journal of the Siam Society* (vol. 66 pt. 1, January 1978).

This inscription is in Wat Pā Daeng in Kengtung and I am glad to say that the lord abbot, at my urging, has had erected a substantial covering over it to protect it from sun and rain. The monastery has a copy of its chronicle in Khün (Kengtung) script called *Tamnān wat pā daeng*, which has been translated into English and will be published by the Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, sometime in December or January next in a series named Michigan Papers on South and Southeast Asia. There is another chronicle of the same monastery, *Tamnān mulāsāsanā chabap wat pā daeng* in Thai, published by Chiang Mai University in January 1976, and translated into English

21. Full titles: U Kalā’s Mahāyāzawingyi; Hmannan Mahāyāzawindawgyi.

22. VIII, p. 166.

23. VIII, p. 343.

24. XVII, p. 36; XVIII, p. 544.

and published by the *JSS* (vol. 65 pt. 2, July 1977). Of the two, the Thai one is more precise and its dates are clearer, but it lacks the details of local customs in Kengtung as are given in the Khün copy. According to both copies, the Sāsana spread from Kengtung to Sipsōngbannā, Mōnglem and the Chinese Shan States. The arrival of the Forest Sect in Kengtung occurs about 100 years before Bayinnaung's conquest of Lān Nā Thai and all Shan States. At present certain monasteries in the Northern Shan States, the Va States and the Chinese Shan States still follow what the Shans west of the Salween call the 'Yōn' (Yuan) Sect. Khün manuscripts on Shan paper and palmleaf have been found west of the Salween with dates between 150 to over 200 years. These manuscripts are now in the custody of the Shan State Council here in Taunggyi. Does this mean that much of the Shan States of Burma received the Sāsana from Chiengmai and Kengtung before the rise of Bayinnaung?

### III

We come to the chronicle of the Phaungtaung-ū Images, which we cannot begin without reference to the chronicle of Yawngshwe State.

The ruling princes of Yawngshwe claimed descent from the Sākya prince who founded the first Burmese, or more accurately Pyū, kingdom of Tagaung because they came from Mōngmāu which was founded by the 19 Shan States which were connected with the founder of Tagaung. As I say earlier, major ruling houses of the Shan States could also make such a claim, with the exception of that of Kengtung which had its origin from Chiengmai within historical time.

The name 'Yawngshwe' in Shan denotes the successive valleys on both sides of the Inle. 'Yawng' means 'highland' and 'Hwe' means 'valley', the same as the Thai word 'huay'; the idea being, I think, that the highlands are intersected with valleys. The Burmese name for Yawngshwe is 'Nyaungshwe', meaning 'gold *bodhi* tree', and it has its origin according to the following story. There was a *bodhi* tree in the town, golden in colour, which brought prosperity to the people. A prince of Taung-ū (we are not told which prince of what period) built a *cetiya* over the *bodhi* tree and named it Shwe Taung-ū Ceti. Nyaungshwe is the name derived from that golden-hued *bodhi* tree.

The classical name of Yawngshwe as a state is Kambojaraṭṭha. Its boundaries formerly were much bigger than in modern times. Kambojaraṭṭha's first capital was Kawthambī (Kosambi) which was built slightly north of the Bawrithat (Bodhisatta) Cetiya which is on the way to Yawngshwe — it is on the right-hand side of the road, about four miles from the junction of that road to the main highway at the railway terminal of Shwenyaung. According to Harvey, the Bawrithat was founded by King Aniruddha of Pagan.<sup>25</sup> As in the rest of Burma or in Thailand, these classical names of provinces and cities are connected with those in India of the Lord Buddha's times. After Kawthambī, two more capitals called Rammavati and Panphae

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25. VIII, p. 24.

(‘*ban phai*’ means ‘bamboo village’) came into being, and both were sited on the eastern bank of the Inle Lake not far from the modern village of Maingthauk (Möngsawak)—traces of the walls of Panphae can still be seen.

The chronicle of the Phaungtaw-ū Images states that names of successive rulers in these three capitals were in records and annals which have since been destroyed, owing to incessant fighting in those days as well as in modern times.

The present town of Yawnghwe is the fourth capital. It was founded in the year CS 721 (AD 1359) during the reign of *Sawbwa* (*Caufā*) Si Seng Hpa (‘*cī saeng fā*’ means ‘adorned with heavenly gems’). When we take into consideration the historical fact that Shan and Thai kingdoms and principalities in Burma and Thailand came into being during the thirteenth and fourteenth century, Si Seng Hpa is probably the first historical ruler of the state of Yawnghwe. Names of successive rulers of Yawnghwe after Si Seng Hpa are known together with the dates of their reigning years.

It was during the reign of Si Seng Hpa that five images of the Buddha were found by local people to be emitting supernatural rays from a jungle-covered cave in a locality called Thanhtaung (pronounced ‘thandaung’ meaning ‘one thousand million’) on the west of the Inle. When the report reached the prince he was filled with pious delight, and with appropriate retinue went to the cave to see the wonderful sight for himself. He then had the jungle cleared and brought the images to his capital to be worshipped by himself and his subjects.

How did the images get to the cave? According to the Phaungtaw-ū chronicle and local belief, the king of Pagan who succeeded Kyanzittha, i.e. King Alaungsithū, was in the habit of travelling in his magical royal barge to distant lands outside Burma. On one of these travels when the king reached Mallayu Island (the chronicle locates this as an island near Madras in south India, where sandalwood abounds), the Thagyāmin (Sakka or Indra) gave him five images of the Lord Buddha fashioned out of a southern branch of the holy *bodhi* tree (apparently from Buddhagaya) and a piece of supernatural sandalwood. Alaungsithū had the images placed in a place of honour, namely the forefront or prow of his barge. Hence the epithet in Burmese ‘Phaungtaw-ū Payā’, meaning ‘images of the prow of the royal barge’, which in Thai would be ‘*bra buddharūp hua rōa brathīnang*’.

After King Alaungsithū returned to Pagan he was in the habit of visiting various parts of Burma, travelling always in his magical barge with the sacred images at its prow, and on one such journey his barge, by the king’s supernatural power, came to a stop at a place on the western shore of the Inle Lake known as Phaungtaw Pauktaung (‘mountain penetrated by the royal barge’). You can see this from the Lake; it is a big valley in the west in the shape of a hull of a boat; it reminds one what one has learned in school about a ‘hanging valley’, although it doesn’t ‘hang’ in this case. Somewhere near the bottom of the valley is the locality called Than-htaung; it was in a cave in this locality that Alaungsithū is said to have deposited (‘*thāpana*’) the five images which lay unseen and buried there until the reign of Si Seng Hpa.

The Phaungtaw-ū chronicle gives the date of Alaungsithū’s visit to the Lake when he deposited the five images in the cave CS 457 (AD 1095). The accepted dates in the history of Burma of Alaungsithū’s reign are placed at AD 1112-1167.



These 'Phaungtaw-ū Images' resided in the capital, Yawnghwe, from during the reign of Si Seng Hpa for a period of 256 years until CS 977 (AD 1615). If this is true we could place the discovery of the Images in the year CS 721 (AD 1359), the same year that Yawnghwe was founded. At this time, in the years around 1615, the ruler of Yawnghwe was a female *sawbwa* by the name of Nang Nung Pe ('lady who wears brocade'). Being a lady and fearing that dangers might befall the Images, the princess-*sawbwa* had them moved to a town called Indein in the southwest of the Lake. There the Images resided 156 years until CS 1133 (AD 1771) when the monastery which housed them was burnt down by a fire and they were moved to Ban Pong (? 'Hot Spring Village'). In CS 1243 (AD 1881) the Phaungtaw-ū Images were moved to their present residence, the monastery at Namhū (Namrū), right inside the lake area. Wherever the Phaungtaw-ū Images resided monastery subjects would be appointed to serve them.

These monastery or pagoda subjects have been called monastery or pagoda 'slaves' in English. I think this is a misnomer. The position of these pagoda or monastery people was a privileged one, for, apart from duties towards the pagoda or monastery to which they had been assigned, they were exempted from corvée and military conscription imposed by the state on the ordinary population. The term 'subject' is more appropriate, I think. The villagers of Namhū of today still regard themselves as monastery subjects, physically and morally duty-bound to serve the Phaungtaw-ū Images and the monastery.

The Phaungtaw-ū chronicle states that from the time of Prince Si Seng Hpa, through 30 successive reigns of the *sawbwa* of Yawnghwe until the present time, it has been the custom to take the Images from their place of residence in boat processions through various towns and villages, including the capital, for the rulers and the ruled to pay homage and reverence with offerings of flowers, candles and alms-food. This event in modern times takes place just before the Pavāraṇā (end of the Buddhist 'Rains Retreat'). In the old days the processions passed through six localities, apparently in so many days, then 12, and then 20 places or so within 17 or 18 days, as is the practice now. At some places the Images stop for one night, at some places only for a few hours, usually in the morning so that the devotees may offer alms-food. The stop at Yawnghwe used to be two nights but now I believe this has been extended to three nights. The sequence of stopping stages may or may not be the same from year to year, but one thing is certain: the Images inevitably arrive in the capital mid-morning of the seventh waxing day of the Burmese month of Thadingyut, i.e. eight days before the Pavāraṇā.

There is a 'catch' in the calculation of lunar days in Burma, on the one hand, and in Thailand and Kengtung on the other. The counting in Burma is almost always one day ahead of that in Thailand. Take the present seventh waxing of Thadingyut; for Burma and the rest of the Shan States it falls on Thursday the 27th September 1979, while in Thailand and one remaining Shan State of Burma, Kengtung, the same day is counted as the sixth waxing, so that the seventh waxing of this Pavāraṇā month in Thailand and Kengtung falls on Friday the 28th September 1979. Actually the Thai calculation is nearer to the true phase of the moon, in that the roundness of the moon on a Thai full-moon day is more perfect than that of the moon on a Burmese full-moon day which is one day ahead of the Thai. Once in a while the two systems coincide. When do they do that, and why should this be so, only a specialist in astronomy can tell us. I often wonder how the two calculations will affect the result of astrology.

To return to the movements of the Phaungtaw-ū Images, the itinerary begins from Namhū monastery, where the Images leave for the first stage of their journey. This year the move began on the first waxing of Thadingyut, i.e. about six days ago. From this first stage the procession will go from place to place until the seventh waxing when the Images come to Yawnghwe, arriving there mid-morning. The procession on the water on this day is the most spectacular when the Kāravek Phaung (a 'kāravek' is a mythical bird, and 'phaung' means 'barge') is towed by hundreds of leg-rowers in long boats or dugouts strung together stern to prow. There is much shouting by the leg-rowers in the various boats, as if inspired by religious fervour, and they row with vigour and will of intense *saddhā* to the beat of drums, gongs and musical instruments. Sometimes a small barge follows the Kāravek Barge like a floating stage, on which the village belles dance to the music of an orchestra. Everyone taking part in this grand procession on the water regards him- or herself as performing a meritorious act (*kusa-lakamma*) capable of bettering his or her *kamma* in this and future lives.

Seeing the Kāravek Phaung will give you some idea of the royal barges used by kings of Burma in the old days. Those royal barges of course would be larger and, perhaps, with two birds instead of one and with royal chambers of various sizes, and instead of bamboo frames decorated with paper and tinsel for the superstructure, solid teak would be used, beautifully carved and adorned with gold-leaf. The bird on the Kāravek Phaung is supposed to a reproduction of that mythical *kāravek*.

The sight of the religious fervour, not only of the people taking part in the aquatic procession but also of people in hundreds of boats who go to pay reverence either while the barge is on the move or after the Images have been taken from the Kāravek Phaungtaw to a specially constructed pavilion in Yawnghwe town itself, or other localities, will help you to realize how deeply ingrained the Sāsana is in our people, and why Burma, in the same manner as Thailand, is such a stronghold of our Buddha Sāsana.

Let me conclude with a few words about the people of Inle Lake and the leg-rowers. Linguistically there are two main groups: Inthā and Shan. I hesitate to use the word 'ethnic' because it is too technical and the people too mixed up to make a clearcut division. The Shans speak a dialect of Shan with an accent somewhat resembling that of Thai-Yuan or Northern Thai. Usually the Lake Shans speak the Inthā dialect of Burmese as well.

The Inthās speak a Burmese dialect that is difficult for ordinary Burmans to understand at the beginning; nevertheless the dialect is Burmese. According to the Yawnghwe chronicle, two brothers named Nga Taung and Nga Naung from Tavoy (Dvāy) came and took service under *Sawbwa* Si Seng Hpa. With the permission and assistance from the *Sawbwa* the two went back to Tavoy and brought 36 households back to Yawnghwe. These people originally settled at Nan Thè, near Yawnghwe, and gradually multiplied and spread southwards until they peopled the entire Lake district. Their descendants are the Inthās, so numerous that by the last count during the British administration they comprised 40 per cent of the population of the state. 'Inthā' means 'son of the lake'.

As for the leg-rowing, no one has been able to tell me satisfactorily how it came about, but one can make a good guess. Storms are infrequent on the Lake outside the monsoon season,

and the local people can work for long hours on their large, flat-bottomed boats. The work they do involves a great deal of standing; spearing and trawling of fish, and moving of earth, a sort of compost for their floating gardens, cannot be done comfortably or efficiently in a seated position. So I presume that leg-rowing has evolved from these three factors: placid water, flat-bottomed boat on which the boatman can stand without upsetting it, and the nature of the work done by the 'sons of the Lake' on the water. Once you have learned how to balance yourself properly on the boat it is not difficult to row with one of your legs hooked to the oar, which is held in place by one of your hands.

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\*NB: PTS = Pāli Text Society

JBRS = Journal of the Burma Research Society

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