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***Ayedawbon Kyan*, an Important Myanmar Literary Genre Recording Historical Events**

Introduction

Researchers on Myanmar history of the monarchical period have found the *Ayedawbon kyan*, a very important Myanmar literary genre which gives records of historical events, next in importance only to the *Yazawin daw* or the main Royal Chronicles like the *Hman-nan* (*Glass Palace Chronicle*). In an important way the six or seven *Ayedawbon kyan*, historical texts, supplement the records which are in the main Myanmar chronicles.

The *Ayedawbon Kyan* texts that I will be talking about are:

- (1) *Dhanyawaddy Ayedawbon*
- (2) *Rajadirit Ayedawbon*
- (3) *Hanthawaddy Hsinbyumyashin Ayedawbon*
- (4) *Nyaungyan Mintaya Ayedawbon*
- (5) *Alaung Mintaya Gyi Ayedawbon* (3 different texts)
- (6) *Majjhimadesa Ayedawbon*
- (7) *Hsinbyushin Ayedawbon*

Of these six *Ayedawbon kyan*, the first five are what is collectively known as *Ayedawbon Nga Saung Dwe*, which means the *Five volumes of Ayedawbon* as these five were first printed in one volume by the Thudhamawadi Press under this title in 1923.

The 6th *Ayedawbon kyan*, the *Majjhimadesa Ayedawbon*, was ‘discovered’ in manuscript form in the 1950s from the British Library in London and at the Universities Central Library in Yangon I was able to collect three copies on palm-leaf in Myanmar. It was first printed and published as a separate monograph only in 1998.

The 7th *Ayedawbon kyan*, the *Hsinbyushin Ayedawbon* is still in manuscript form and remains unpublished.

Meaning of the word *Ayedawbon*

Before discussing the texts and their authors, I would first of all like to explain the meaning of *Ayedawbon*, a word whose meaning has changed somewhat from its earlier use to its modern meaning.

The standard Myanmar-English Dictionary compiled and published by the Myanmar Language Commission of the Ministry of Education gives the following two English meanings to the Myanmar word *Ayedawbon* အေနေတော်ပုံ:

noun 1. [archaic] historical account of a royal campaign (as in ရာဇမိရာဇ်အေနေ)

တော်ဝံ *Rajadirit Ayedawbon*)

- 2. social or political uprising; revolution.¹

The *Judson Burmese-English Dictionary*, compiled by Dr. Adoniram Judson, revised and enlarged by Robert C. Stevenson and Rev. F.H. Eveleth, does not have an entry for *Ayedawbon*, but has entries for the root word *Ayedaw* and another for *Ayebonsa*, a less common Myanmar word, a variant of the word *Ayedawbon kyan*.

Judson gives the following English meanings:

အရေးတော်ဝံ [Ayedawbon]. noun. a representation of affairs, account, history².

အရေးတော် [Ayedaw], noun. literary. A royal affair; a term applied to wars waged by the king, rebellions, etc. အရေးတော်တုန်းခါ မင်းတုန်းမင်းအရေးတော်တုန်းခါလ အရေးတော်မဖြစိမိ။

အရေးဝံစာ [Ayebonsa], noun. a journal of military occurrences.³

The word *Ayebonsa* is given in Judson’s *A Dictionary of Burmese and English . . .* 1st ed. 1852 with the same explanatory meaning in English, but the word *Ayedawbon* as a separate entry or *Ayedawbon kyan* is not given right up to the revised edition of 1953.

The most scholarly and comprehensive, though unfortunately, incomplete, Burmese-English dictionary is the one first compiled by J.A. Stewart and C.W. Dunn, and later revised and edited by Dr. Hla Pe and H.F. Searle. In vol. 5 of this dictionary, the meaning of the word *Ayedawbon* is given as below:

“အရေးတော်ဝံ [Ayedawbon]—written account, one of the five Ayedawbon, viz. “ညဝတီ၊ ဟိန္ဒဝတီ၊ ရာဇာဓိရာဇ်၊ တံသာဝတီဆင်ဖြူရှင်၊ ညောင်ရမ်းမင်း တရား၊ အလောင်းမင်းတရား accounts of the lives these kings.”⁴”

The compilers of this dictionary also explain that the root word အရေး *A-ye* is used especially in forms *A-yedaw*, *A-yebon*, *Ayedawbon* and that the meaning is:

“affair, cause, campaign, struggle, revolution; fortune, prospects, position; historical account of a campaign or struggle for power or a cause.”⁵

Dr. Hla Pe in a separate article also defines *Ayedawbon* as a “royal affair: it generally consists of the struggle to power, a savouring of Hitler’s ‘*Mein kampf*’”⁶

Myanmar historian Dr. Aye Kyaw has compared the Myanmar terms *Yazawin (rajawan)*, *ayedawbon* and *mhattan* with some Thai terms. He writes:

“Besides the *rajawan*, the Burmese terms, *mhattam* and *aretoau pum* [ayedawbon] are synonymous with the Thai terms, *chotmai het* or *kotmai het* and they deal with account or report on particular events. In particular, the *aretoau pum* are concerned with the short histories of particular wars or uprisings.”⁷

The modern meaning of *Ayedawbon* as a “Social or political uprising; revolution” has been discussed in some detail by Dr. Robert H. Taylor in his article “Burmese Concepts of Revolution”. He also discusses the original meaning:

“The root of *ayei-daw-bon* is *ayei*, meaning a business or affair, to which is appended *taw (daw)* the suffix denoting royalty, a deity, or (now) the state—and *bon (pun)*, a narrative or sequence of events, giving literally “story of royal or state affairs”. Judson, in a dictionary he prepared in the early nineteenth century, noted that *ayei-daw*, while literally meaning royal affairs, was a term applied especially to wars waged by kings, but also rebellions, etc., while *ayei-bon-sa (sa* meaning paper) was a journal of military occurrences. In current daily parlance the term is generally taken to mean the style or nature of a movement or matter concerning royalty or the state; it indicates a political movement in a similar but more forceful sense than the alternative but neutral term *hlok-sha-hmu*. An *ayei-daw-bon* is also a body of literature, being the five or six historical accounts of the struggle for power by Kings Danyawadi [*sic.*] Yazadart, Hanthawadi Hsinbyushin, Nyaungyan Min. and Alaungpaya.”⁸

The word *Ayedawbon* continued to be used in the titles of over a dozen books, after 1885 and the end of the Myanmar monarchy, right up to recent times. For example there is book called *Thakin Nu Ayedawbon* [Thakin Nu’s Struggle

for Power] (1949), *Taungthu Laithama Aye-dawbon* [Peasants' Revolution] (1965), *Kyaung-tha Ayedawbon* [Students' Revolution] (1956), *Sethmu-lethmu Ayedawbon hnei Myanmar zwe* [Industrial Revolution and Myanmar Persistence] and so on. Obviously my paper does not cover these latter books.

In this paper I will be talking about *Ayedawbon kyan*, as a distinct Myanmar literary genre in the form of monographs which give historical accounts of royal campaigns and accounts of the lives of four famous Myanmar kings, namely:

- (1) Rajadirit (or Razadarit), AD 1385–1423
- (2) Hanthawaddy (Hamsavati) Hsinbyumya Shin, or King Bayinnaung, AD 1551–1581
- (3) Nyaungyan Mintaya, AD 1599–1605
- (4) Alaungmintaya Gyi or Alaungpaya, AD 1752–1760

The other two *Ayedawbon kyan* do not centre on particular kings, but on events in certain regions, viz.:

(5) *Dhanyawaddy Ayedawbon* is on the Rakhine (Arakan) region from the time of Kanrajagyi, a king who reigned, c. 825 BC to events in AD 1784 when Rakhine was annexed by the Myanmar King Bodawpaya. Dhanyawaddy is the name of one of the capital cities of the Rakhine kings, and also a classical name (Pali) of this Kingdom (Arakan).

(6) *Majjhimadesa* is the Myanmar Pāli word for central India, *Majjhima* meaning “the middle” and *desa* “region”, or “country”. *Judson's Burmese-English Dictionary* gives the meaning of *Majjhimadesa* as being a Pali word for the middle place, the middle part of the world, including the sixteen countries of India, famous in Buddhist history.⁹ The *Majjhimadesa Ayedawbon* is about events in the Rakhine (Arakan) region during the reign of King Badon or Bodawpaya, and about a Myanmar mission to India; it covers the period AD 1787 to about 1822.

Distinctive characteristics of Ayedawbon kyan

A typical *Ayedawbon* treatise has the following characteristics:

Accounts of

(1) how individuals of prowess fought to become kings; especially their military

campaigns to achieve power and obtain the throne.

(2) how these kings kept their power by various means and endeavours.

(3) how there were rebellions against their power and the throne and how they were successfully crushed and quelled.

(4) how wars were waged for the expansion of their territory.¹⁰

Problems in connection with Ayedawbon kyan

The *Ayedawbon kyan* treatises pose a number of problems to scholars. Among them are:

- (1) Authorship of some of the texts.
- (2) The total number of *Ayedawbon kyan* that were written.
- (3) Language problems (at least one is a translation into Myanmar)
- (4) Whether some are parts of larger works.
- (5) Incomplete or corrupt texts.
- (6) Uncertain dates of composition or compilation.

Two Myanmar scholars have tried to find solutions to some of these problems but they have only been partially redressed. These two scholars were Dr. Yi Yi¹¹ eminent Myanmar researcher and historian of the Myanmar Historical Commission and Professor of Myanmar Literature at University of Yangon, U Maung Maung Gyi;¹² both have now passed away. I will be discussing some of the problems based mainly on their writings.

Authorship

Three of the *Ayedawbon kyan* have authorship problems:

- (1) *Hanthawaddy Hsinbyumyashin Ayedawbon*
- (2) *Nyaungyan Mintaya Ayedawbon*
- (3) *Alaungmintaya Gyi Ayedawbon* (three versions)

Hanthawaddy Hsinbyumyashin Ayedawbon

The authorship of *Hanthawaddy Hsinbyumyashin Ayedawbon* is not given in the main reference source for Myanmar classical literature, viz. the *Pitakat-taw Thamaing* by U Yan. The bibliography by U Yan mentions the

name of this *Ayedawbon* and says that it was written by a Saya [acharn] whose name is not known.¹³

The printed version found in various editions does not seem to be complete and no author's name is found in the text or manuscripts.

The authorship has been attributed to

(1) Letwe Nawrahta and (2) to U Tun Nyo (Twin-thin Taik Wun Maha Sithu) by different scholars.

In the introduction to the Thudhamawadi edition of *Ayedawbon Nga Saung Dwe*, the editors Saya Bi, Saya Thein and Saya Ko Ba Kyaw attributed authorship to Letwe Nawrahta¹⁴ and in later modern printed collected editions of the *Ayedawbon kyan* like the *Myanmar Min Mya Ayedawbon*. Prof. U Maung Maung Gyi writing in the Introduction agrees with the Thudhamawadi editor and famous Myanmar writer Hmawbi Saya Thein in giving the authorship to Letwe Nawrahta.¹⁵

But well known researcher of the Myanmar Historical Commission, the late scholar and historian Dr. Yi Yi attributed authorship to U Tun Nyo based on a comparison of the style of writing.¹⁶

Dr. Yi Yi compared the style of writing in the *Hsinbyumyashin Ayedawbon* with the writing in one of the versions of the *Alaungpaya Ayedawbon*. In both, the author at the close of each episode in the narrative writes "this is the end of this particular (name mentioned) *Ayedawbon*, one episode". For example in *Hsinbyumyashin Ayedawbon*: "This is the end of the *Ayedawbon*, one episode, on the conquest of Toungoo City."¹⁷

In the same style one of the versions of the *Alaungmintaya Ayedawbon* which Dr. Yi Yi identified as being by U Tun Nyo, at the end of each episode it is stated that this is the end of such and such *Ayedawbon*, one episode. In this *Ayedawbon* even the exact date is given for each event, e.g. "On 5th waxing of Wagaung, year 1114 (AD 1752 July 5) at a place called Shwe Paung Laung, the conquest over the Talaings [Mons] *Ayedawbon*, one, episode is hereby ended."

To make the problem more complex, the version of the *Alaungpaya Ayedawbon* which Dr. Yi Yi identified as being by U Tun Nyo is attributed to Letwe Nawrahta by U Hla Tin

(Hla Thamain) the editor of the two versions of the *Alaungpaya Ayedawbon*. If Dr. Yi Yi is proved to be wrong and this version of the *Alaungpaya Ayedawbon* is by Letwe Nawrahta, then the *Hsinbyumyashin Ayedawbon* which is similar in style might also be by Letwe Nawrahta.

Some Myanmar scholars, apart from Dr. Yi Yi, gave Letwe Nawrahta as the author of *Hsinbyumyashin Ayedawbon*. This is probably because Letwe Nawrahta did write an *Ayedawbon* usually called *Hinbyushin Ayedawbon* but it was not on Bayinnaung but on King Bodawpaya.

To resolve the authorship problem, I tried, about fifteen years ago, to find a more complete version on palm-leaf manuscript of the *Hsinbyumyashin Ayedawbon*. I found a rare palm-leaf manuscript of this *Ayedawbon* whose text is more complete than the printed one, but there is no mention of the author's name in the manuscript either. This manuscript version was in the possession of Myanmar scholar and member of the Myanmar Historical Commission, U Maung Maung Tin, who has now donated the manuscript to the Universities Historical Research Centre.

Unfortunately, this manuscript version did not solve the authorship problem either, but only made it more complex, for in the colophon the date 1033 Pyathoe lasan 5 (Myanmar Era) is given¹⁸ and it is probably the date of composition. If this date is correct, this *Ayedawbon* was written in 1671. As Letwe Nawrahta was born only in 1085 Waso la (1723) and U Tun Nyo in 1088 (1726/27) the *Hsinbyumyashin Ayedawbon* cannot be by either of these writers. More research needs to be carried out to resolve this problem.

One Myanmar author, Maung Kyauk Taing, in a fairly comprehensive article he wrote on Letwe Nawrahta in a book published by Myanmar Nainggan Sarpay Pyant Pwa-ye Athin (Myanmar Society for the Propagation of Literature) in 1974, mentioned that he had already seen a full, complete text of this *Ayedawbon*, in typescript, copied from a palm-leaf manuscript. He said that the text was the same as the one printed and published, only it had 17 typed pages extra at the end which gave the colophon.¹⁹

The colophon stated that the author was a Myanmar Minister whose title was Yazataman (Rajataman) who later received the title Oke-tha-raw, and that he served under King Bayannaung. If this is correct then this *Ayedawbon* is a contemporary record.

In early 2000, I was able to get a mimeographed copy of the complete text of this *Ayedawbon*, with the help of U Thein Hlaing, Deputy Director General of the Universities Historical Research Centre. This mimeographed copy was made from a palm-leaf mss. copied in AD 1839.

The colophon states that the author Yazataman (Rajataman), with the title Oke-tha-raw, was requested by the Crown Prince, eldest son of King Bayinnaung and by the King's younger brothers, the Kings of Pyi (Prome), Toungoo and Innwa (Ava) and also by the Ministers to compile this *Ayedawbon* in the year Myanmar Era 926 (AD 1564).²⁰ Actually the *Ayedawbon* covers events up to AD 1579, two years before King Bayinnaung died suddenly after a short illness in 1581.

The author also mentions that he compiled the *Ayedawbon* using contemporary sources, various inscriptions and 235 records of various events that took place during the reign. Out of these records he selected 135, of which 100 were rejected as not being worthy of being recorded in this *Ayedawbon*. So it seems that the author wrote about only 35 important events, mainly military campaigns, that were successfully accomplished by the King, as he thought that they are important to record for posterity. I would like to see other palm-leaf mss. versions of these last 17 pages, to decide on their authenticity and to see whether there are variant texts.

I feel sure that there are more complete texts of this *Ayedawbon* on palm-leaf, probably waiting to be "discovered" by some enterprising librarian or scholar, still lying neglected in one of the many monastic libraries of Myanmar.

Nyaungyan Mintaya Ayedawbon

This is not listed by U Yan. The author's name is also not given in the text of this *Ayedawbon*.

After careful scrutiny of the text Dr. Yi Yi states that it is a composite work with text either directly copied or adapted from U Kala's *Maha*

Yazawin Gyi, the Great Chronicle of Myanmar, vols. 3 to 17 and 18 and from *Min Ye Dibba E-gyin*, written around AD 1608 by Shin Than Kho (1598–1638).

The authorship of this work has been attributed to:

(1) Maha Atula Dammika Yazar, the judge who was the Myosa of Myin-gon-daing in the introduction of the Thudhamawadi edition by the editor Saya Thein and others.²¹

(2) Letwe Nawrahta

Prof. U Pe Maung Tin in his *History of Burmese Literature* attributed *Nyaungyan Mintaya Ayedawbon* to Letwe Nawrahta.²²

Prof. U Maung Maung Gyi is of the opinion that Letwe Nawrahta wrote three *Ayedawbon kyan* which are in a way consecutive in historical events covered, i.e. *Hsinbyumyashin Ayedawbon* on King Bayinnaung, *Nyaungyan Mintaya Ayedawbon* on the dynasty founded by Prince Nyaungyan, one of the sons of King Bayinnaung and *Alaung Mintaya Gyi Ayedawbon*, on King Alaungpaya who founded the Konbaung Dynasty, the Dynasty directly after the Nyaungyan Dynasty.²³

Dr. Yi Yi on the other hand does not think that any of these authors wrote this *Ayedawbon* and that this work is just like a notebook in which extracts from U Kala and *Min Ye Dibba E-gyin* (a poem on the birth of Min Ye Dibba, a son of King Anaukphetlun) had been copied by someone.²⁴ Even if that is the case *Nyaungyan Mintaya Ayedawbon* is still of value to historians because there are only few works on the Nyaungyan Dynasty (AD 1597–1752).

Alaung Mintaya Gyi Ayedawbon

This *Ayedawbon kyan* poses some of the most complex problems of authorship because at least three different versions have been found and two do not have authorship statements. According to U Yan, the Royal Librarian of King Mindon and King Thibaw, there are two versions. One is by Letwe Nawrahta and the other by U Tun Nyo. U Yan states that the one by Letwe Nawrahta is a contemporary record written during King Alaungpaya's reign (1752–1760). At the time Letwe Nawrahta had the rank of *Thandawsint*.²⁵

The other version that U Yan lists is the one that he says is by Twin-thin-taik Wun, Mingyi

Maha Sithu, i.e. U Tun Nyo, a native of Maung Htaung village of Alon Myo (Alon town) Ahet Taik (Upper tract). Unfortunately U Yan does not give further details.

A monograph entitled *Alaungpaya Ayedawbon* was first printed in 1883 by Okkalapa Press and later reprinted in 1900 in Yangon by the well-known printer and publisher, the Hanthawaddy Press, which transferred many valuable Myanmar and Pali manuscripts into printed form. These first printed versions did not give the name of any author, but only mentioned that it was by a wise man from the time of King Alaungpaya. In a new issue of 1943, with a new cover, the Hanthawaddy Press printed on the cover the name of the author as Twin-thin-taik Wun, Maha Sithu.

Only in the popular Thudhamawadi edition of the *Ayedawbon Nga Saung Dwe*, first published in 1923, did the editors in the short one page introduction attribute the authorship to Twin-thin-taik Wun, Maha Sithu (U Tun Nyo).²⁶

Later collected editions of this version of Alaung Mintaya Ayedawbon changed the authorship to Letwe Nawrahta, because U Pe Maung Tin in his *History of Burmese Literature*²⁷ and Prof. U Maung Maung Gyi²⁸ both give the author as Letwe Nawrahta. In fact a later edition of the collected *Ayedawbon kyan* reprinted U Maung Maung Gyi's article as an Introduction.

In 1961 the Ministry of Culture published two versions of *Alaungpaya Ayedawbon*, edited by U Hla Tin (writer Hla Thamain). U Hla Tin in his introduction states that a new version of the *Alaung Mintaya Gyi Ayedawbon* was found in the Myanmar National Library from the collection inherited from the Bernard Free Library. U Hla Tin says that the new version first published in this edition is by Letwe Nawrahta and that the earlier published edition is by U Tun Nyo²⁹ (i.e. going back to the authorship given in the Hanthawaddy and Thudhamawadi editions).

Dr. Yi Yi, on the other hand, after examining both texts in this new edition says that both are by U Tun Nyo, because she had seen a third version in manuscript form in the Mandalay University Library which had Letwe Nawrahta's name in the text. Dr. Yi Yi states that the new version from the Bernard Free Library collection

is the *Alaungpaya Ayedawbon* by U Tun Nyo and the earlier version published by Hanthawaddy, Thudhamawadi and others is also by U Tun Nyo but that it is not a separate *Ayedawbon* but only the part on Alaungpaya from the author's *Maha Yazawin Thit*.³⁰ Dr. Yi Yi's verdict is now widely accepted by scholars, though in popular collected editions, Letwe Nawrahta's name still appears as the author. This has come about because the version by Letwe Nawrahta still remains in manuscript form and has not been printed in book form up to now.

Maung Kyauk Taing made a careful comparison of the two *Alaungpaya Ayedawbon* published together in 1961, and he disagrees with Dr. Yi Yi's verdict. He thinks that they are by two different authors and gives detailed analysis of the texts to prove his contention. He accepts that the first published version is by U Tun Nyo but not the version published in 1961. He says that we still need to do further research to find out who the author is, as he does not think Letwe Nawrahta wrote it either.³¹

The other *Ayedawbon kyans* do not have problems of authorship.

(4) The *Dhanyawaddy Ayedawbon* in the colophon mentions that it was written by the Rakhine Sayadaw (i.e. Abbot of Arakan) whose title was *Kawitharabi Thiri-pawara Egga-maha Dhamma-razadi-razagura*. It was written in Myanmar Era 1149 = AD 1787,³² i.e. three years after the Rakhine Kingdom came to an end.

(5) *Rajadirit Ayedawbon* is now widely accepted as being written, or rather compiled and translated into Myanmar (from some Mon historical texts whose authors are not known), by Banya Dala, a Mon minister and general who served under King Bayinnaung (AD 1551–1581). Banya Dala lived about AD 1518 to 1572. Banya Dala was undoubtedly a man of great ability, a Mon patriot, a well-known military commander, minister and author. He later fell into disgrace due to a military failure and was exiled by King Bayinnaung to central Thailand, to a malarious place called *Zanet*. The King of Ayutthaya took pity on him, and with the consent of King Bayinnaung transferred him to Kamphaeng Pet old town around AD 1572, but Banya Dala is said to have fallen sick and died within a month of his arrival.

When *Rajadirit Ayedawbon* was first published in 1923, the Thudhamawadi editors erroneously attributed the authorship to Sithu Gamani Thingyan.³³ But U Yan states that Sithu Gamani Thingyan wrote only two historical works, namely the *Zinme Yazawin* and the *Rakhine Yazawin*.³⁴

U Yan and later U Pe Maung Tin stated that this *Ayedawbon* is by Banya Dala, and this was supported by U Maung Maung Gyi and Dr. Yi Yi. So there is no controversy in connection with the authorship of this *Ayedawbon*.

Banya Dala's writing has been praised as a model of good Myanmar prose of the early Toungoo period and the text was prescribed for Myanmar literature students.³⁵

In the British Library, Oriental and India Office Collections, there is a palm-leaf manuscript entitled *Magadu Ayedawbon*. On further examination, this text has been found to be the first portions of the *Rajadirit Ayedawbon*, concerning Magadu who later became Lord of Martaban under the title Wareru (AD 1287–1296). So this *Ayedawbon* cannot be designated as a separate one.

The *Rajadirit Ayedawbon* being a compilation and translation into Myanmar language from Mon historical records and also because it was written in the language of nearly 500 years ago, there are many obscure words and passages in the text. Sithu U Kaung who established the Burma (Myanmar) Historical Commission in 1952 and became its first Chairman, requested the Mon scholar Dr. Nai Pan Hla to make a modern Myanmar translation from the Mon version which was later published by the Burma Research Society.³⁶

(6) *Majjhimadesa Ayedawbon* does not have any authorship problems either as it is clearly stated in the colophon to the palm-leaf manuscripts that it was written by Nay Myo Zeya Kyaw Htin, the Governor of Dwarawaddy (or Sandoway Than Dwe) town. He was born in Mrauk-U, the old capital of the Rakhine Kingdom; his father was a Rakhine, who was also a governor and his mother was a Myanmar, a descendant of Innwa (Ava) royalty.³⁷

This *Ayedawbon* was completed on November 17, 1823; we know this because the Myanmar equivalent date is given in the colophon (Myanmar Era 1185 Tazaungmon La-san 5).³⁸

The main problem which concerns the *Majjhimadesa Ayedawbon* is whether it is a real *Ayedawbon*. The author himself does not call it an *Ayedawbon* but only a *Sadan* or treatise.³⁹ Dr Yi Yi also rejects it from the *Ayedawbon* list.⁴⁰ Only U Hla Tun Phyu who did a Master's thesis at Yangon University on this *Ayedawbon* tries to prove that it is a real *Ayedawbon*.

(7) Lastly, I would like to mention another *Ayedawbon kyan* which is still in manuscript form, and which I have not seen. Maung Kyauk Taing says that Letwe Nawrahta wrote another important *Ayedawbon kyan*, apart from the *Alaungpaya Ayedawbon*. It is also called *Hsinbyushin Mintaya Ayedawbon Thamaing* but it is not on King Bayinnaung but on King Badon or Bodawpaya,⁴¹ one of the sons of King Alaungpaya.

On the manuscript the title does not have the word *Ayedawbon*; the title is *Min Khan-daw Sardan*. But the author in the opening passage has the phrase *Hsinbyushin Mintaya Gyi Ayedawbon Thamaing* and some have called this work under this name.

Hsinbyushin means "Owner / possessor of the White Elephant" and it is often used in the title of some Myanmar kings. With King Bayinnaung the plural "mya" is suffixed to "Hsinbyu" = White Elephant(s) and he is usually known as Hsinbyumyashin. The other famous Myanmar King Hsinbyushin was one of the sons of King Alaungpaya who reigned from AD 1763–76. King Bodawpaya (1782–1819) is usually not referred to as Hsinbyushin.

Historical Periods and Events Covered in Each Ayedawbon Kyan

Dhanyawaddy Ayedawbon

The line of Rakhine kings came to an end in AD 1784. Like most histories of Rakhine after a short account of the legendary kings, the history starts with Sanda Thuriya (AD 146–198). The text has many homilies and wise counsels given to various kings on good governance by wisemen and ministers. From the time of Sanda Thuriya, the line of Rakhine kings is given, with more detailed accounts of kings Minbyagyi, Min Phalaung and Min Rajagyi until the time of Maha Thamada Raja Min when Rakhine became part of the Myanmar kingdom in 1784. The text

was written soon after and finished on 10th February 1788 as the Myanmar equivalent date was recorded in the colophon.

Majjhimadesa Ayedawbon

This *Ayedawbon* is also on Rakhine and continues from AD 1784 to about 1816. The text can be divided into three parts.

Pt.1 covers the period of rebellion against Myanmar rule by followers of the last Rakhine king from about AD 1794 to 1795, and tells how it was crushed.

Pt.2 is on Nga Chin Byan's rebellion from about AD 1798 to 1811.

Pt.3 is on Myanmar missions sent by King Bodawpaya to India to collect manuscripts, and also to carry out intelligence work on the British expansion into India. The author of this *Ayedawbon*, Zeya Kyaw Htin, led the mission of 1812. Near the end of the text are some royal orders of the Myanmar king in connection with the mission, including records on an Indian princess and her retinue sent to King Bodawpaya in 1814–15 and a royal order to repair and widen the royal road between Dwarawaddy (Sandoway) on the sea coast across the Rakhine Yoma mountains to the Ayeyawady River (near Pyay or Prome).

Rajadirit Ayedawbon

Unlike the other three *Ayedawbon kyan* which have the name of the king in the title of the work, *Rajadirit Ayedawbon* is not only on Rajadirit (AD 1385–1423) but the text begins much earlier with Magadu who became king of the Mon territory of Lower Myanmar as King Wareru (AD 1287–1296). This *Ayedawbon* covers a period of about 165 years as it ends with the death of Rajadirit in 1423.

The early portion of this *Ayedawbon* before Rajadirit has been copied in a separate palm-leaf manuscript under the title *Magadu Ayedawbon*. It is now in the British Library, Oriental and India Office Collections (Burmese manuscript no.3449).

Rajadirit Ayedawbon is an interesting work of literature as it has many stories, accounts of court intrigues, rebellions, diplomatic ventures and so on, and you can now read it in my friend and colleague's U San Lwin's excellent translation into English. You will meet many

intriguing characters, and towering above them all is King Rajadirit, fighting against this rival, Myanmar King Min Khaung, but magnanimously mourning him when he died. Rajadirit is portrayed as a wise, righteous king, chivalrous, admiring wise men, kind to women and to his followers, in short a good Buddhist monarch whose conduct could be held up for emulation.⁴²

Hanthawaddy Hsinbyuyashin Ayedawbon

The text is on the life, especially the military campaigns, of King Bayinnaung (1551–1581). G.E.Harvey writes that "His life was the greatest explosion of human energy ever seen in Burma. From his teens till his death (at 66) he was constantly in the field, leading every major campaign in person".⁴³ This *Ayedawbon* is a detailed record of these military campaigns, a number of them being against the Shans, Chiang Mai, Ayutthaya and Linzin (Vientiane).

The *Ayedawbon* does not cover King Bayinnaung's younger days, his life as "Maung Chadet" (Cadet in Thai romantic fiction) or his alleged romances with the ladies. It begins around AD 1549 with his rise to kingship. The printed version starts in AD 1549 and ends abruptly in 1576 with the arrival of a princess from Sri Lanka together with a Buddha's tooth. This was about five years before his death. Actually there were no military campaigns in the last five years of his life. In 1581 he was planning a campaign to conquer Rakhine and some of his advance forces had already taken Than Dwe (Sandoway), but he fell sick and died at the age of 66.

Now that I have obtained the last 17 pages of this *Ayedawbon*, which had been missing I can relate what is in these pages. As expected there are no records of military campaigns. More importantly and of much value to historians are the 6 events⁴⁴ recorded in this part. They include:

(1) The building of the royal palace at Hanthawaddy (Hamsavati) or Bago (Pegu), giving in detail the names of the 20 gates of the walled city, the names of the various buildings of the palace. The text states that it was modelled on the royal palaces in Taungoo and Ayutthaya with three inner enclosures.

(2) Conferring on his second son, Nawrahta Minsaw, in AD 1579, the kingship of Zinme (Chiang Mai) which the King regarded as

Survanna bhuin, at a royal ceremony in a specially constructed royal pavillion in front of the Maha Zedi (Chedi) at Bago (Pegu). It also tells how the great King admonished the Crown Prince and his younger son, the King of Chiang Mai, to live always in harmony with brotherly love.

(3) The construction of A-Myawaddy Town on the Mynamar eastern border (with Thailand), in AD 1576, as a frontier defence outpost with four trading centres (bazaars) in it, named respectively Hanthawaddy, Yodaya (Ayutthaya), Zinme (Chiang Mai) and Lin Zin (Vientianne).

(4) The construction of Kale town near the Myanmar north-western border (with China and India) in AD 1576.

(5) An account of trading with foreign countries and the various kinds of goods brought by the 40 to 50 ships which annually came to Pathein (Bassein).

(6) The construction of four stupas at the four corners of the royal capital city of Hanthawaddy.

Alaung Mintaya Gyi Ayedawbon

Both of the published texts of this *Ayedawbon* cover the life of King Alaungpaya from birth to death, and give many details of his military campaigns. The first published version by the Hanthawaddy and Thudhamawadi presses begins with a short account tracing Alaungpaya's supposed ancestry and descent from a daughter of the Pagan King, Narapate Sithu.

The version first published in 1961 by the Ministry of Culture begins with accounts of the Buddha's legendary visits to various parts of central Myanmar and his prophesies.

It also gives short accounts of Pyu and Pagan kings and tells how Alaungpaya's forebears (all allegedly descended from Pyu and Pagan royalty) travelled north to Moksobo (later renamed Shwebo).

Both texts then tell of Alaungpaya's birth at Moksobo in AD 1714, of how the Mon king sacked Innwa (Ava) and took away the Myanmar king and royal family to Hanthawaddy in 1752 and how Alaungpaya rebelled and fought against the Mons to regain Myanmar supremacy. In the military campaigns recorded in this *Ayedawbon* we can see the Mon power finally crushed, some Mon towns like Dagon for example

renamed Yangon (or End of Strife) and many details of the short reign (AD 1752–1760) are given. Both texts end with Alaungpaya's death from unspecified illness on his return journey after an unsuccessful campaign against Ayutthaya in 1760.

The unpublished version of *Alaungpaya Ayedawbon* which mentions that Letwe Nawrahta is the author is the most complete text not only on King Alaungpaya's reign but also gives an account of 40 years before his rule began, i.e. from about 1711 or 1712. The history of these 40 years has been published in a mimeographed form by U Tun Yi (pen-name Shayhaung Sarpay Thutaythi Ta Oo). U Tun Yi gave it the title *Nyaungyan Khit Nhit 40 Yazawin* [40 years of the Nyaungyan Period]. On reading through the first pages of this text the author is mentioned as Letwe Nawrahta and the author himself calls the text an *Ayedawbon* and the title of the whole work *Alaung Mintaya Gyi Athtokepatti Ayedawbon Yazawin* (*Athtokepatti* is the Myanmar word for Biography.)⁴⁵

The full text of this *Ayedawbon* is in the Mandalay University Library and we need to copy and edit it for publication. The manuscript has the heading *Letwe Nawrahta Yazawin*, and comprises of 13 anga (i.e. 156 leaves) and eight leaves (a total of 164 leaves) with nine lines of writing per leaf. A typed copy is available in the Universities Historical Research Centre, Yangon.

Hsinbyushin Ayedawbon

This *Ayedawbon* is also by Letwe Nawrahta and it is about King Bodawpaya (1782–1819). It remains in manuscript form.

According to writer and researcher U Tun Yi the palm-leaf manuscript has six anga (i.e. 72 leaves) and two leaves (a total of 74 leaves) with 12 lines to a leaf.⁴⁶ It covers only the first four or five years of Bodawpaya's reign to 1786. The author himself died in 1791, having risen to prominence under King Alaungpaya. He faithfully served under all three sons of Alaungpaya who became kings. As Bodawpaya died only in 1819, 28 years after the author, this *Ayedawbon* covers only the campaigns Bodawpaya waged to obtain the throne, especially the rebellions of Phaungasa Maung Maung and Nga Phone. It also tells how Amarapura was built as

the royal capital, about the coronation ceremonies and the author gives even prices of rice, fish paste (*ngapi*) and so on.⁴⁷

This *Ayedawbon* is a useful source for records of the Rakhine campaign under the Crown Prince in 1785 including detailed accounts of how the Maha Muni image was brought to Amarapura.

There are also detailed accounts of royal appurtenances which were displayed according to custom in either the left or the right order, and about the court dresses, crowns, etc. which cannot be found in the main published source for the period, the *Konbaungset Maha Yazawindaw Gyi*. It is also a contemporary account unlike some of the later histories. Although the author himself calls his work an *Ayedawbon* the palm-leaf manuscript has the heading *Min Khan Daw Sardan* [Treatise on Royal Ceremonies].⁴⁸

Conclusion

I have given a brief survey of the *Ayedawbon kyan*, Myanmar historical treatises written between King Bayinnaung's reign (1551–81) from mid-16th century to AD 1823, i.e. early 19th century. These treatises were a popular Myanmar literary genre of historical writing that was copied on palm-leaf manuscripts from generation to generation.

What historical value do they have? Many are contemporary writings written during the period they covered, such as the *Hanthawaddy Hsinbyumyashin Ayedawbon* and *Alaung Mintaya Gyi Ayedawbon*, and consequently could be historically more accurate.

Most of the authors were exceptional Myanmar people: active military commanders, able ministers and competent writers like Banya Dala under King Bayinnaung and Letwe Nawrahta under kings Alaungpaya and his sons right up to the reign of King Bodawpaya. The authors obviously admired the kings they wrote about.

They are good historical records and a useful adjunct to the Myanmar chronicles like U Kala's and the *Hman-nan* (Glass Palace Chronicle). Some give more detailed accounts as they were written by men who took a leading part in the events recorded.

They not only cover Myanmar history, but are also a good source for Mon and Rakhine history. For many of us who cannot read the Mon language the *Rajadirit Ayedawbon* in Myanmar language and now in English, gives a good translation of early Mon history as recorded in the Mon historical texts entitled *Okpanna Suvanna Bhumi Arranba Kahta* and *Thudhammawadi Thiha Rajadi-raja vumsa kyan*.⁴⁹

For a concise history of Rakhine under their own kings, from early times to AD 1784, the *Dhanyawaddy Ayedawbon* is a good historical record written a few years after the last of the Rakhine kings.

Some of the *Ayedawbon kyan* like the *Rajadirit Ayedawbon* are examples of good Myanmar prose of the 16th century and also examples of translation into Myanmar from Mon.

Some of the authors were high officials under the kings they served and therefore had access to court records kept in the king's archives, or record offices. Unfortunately, most of these court records have been destroyed and so the *Ayedawbon Kyan* treatises preserve some of the valuable historical records in a condensed form.

The subjects covered in the *Ayedawbon kyan*, events during the reigns of some of the great kings of Myanmar, are important not only for Myanmar history but for Thai history as well, especially *Rajadirit*, *Hanthawaddy Hsinbyumyashin* (King Bayinnaung) and *Alaungpaya Ayedawbon* treatises.

What we still need to do is to find more manuscript versions of *Ayedawbon kyan*, to collate different copies and bring out scholarly editions, edited by competent researchers; also to translate some of them into English so that they could be read and studied by a wider circle of scholars interested in Myanmar and Thai history. I hope that scholars both from within Myanmar and from outside will join us in these endeavours.

I hope my paper, in however small a way, will contribute towards a wider knowledge and understanding of this important Myanmar literary genre recording historical events, the *Ayedawbon kyan*.

Notes

- ¹ Myanmar Language Commission. *Myanmar-English Dictionary*. 2nd ed., 1993. p. 587.
- ² Judson, Adoniram. *A Dictionary of the Burman Language*. Unauthorized 1st ed., 1826. p. 28.
- ³ Judson, Adoniram. *The Judson Burmese-English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. . . . 1921. p. 100.
- ⁴ Stewart, J. A., et al, *Burmese-English Dictionary*, compiled by J.A. Stewart and C.W. Dunn, revised and edited by Dr. Hla Pe, A. J. Allott and J. W. A. Okell, Pt. V . . . 1969. p. 319.
- ⁵ *Ibid.* p. 319.
- ⁶ Hla Pe, Dr. "Observations on some of the indigenous sources for Burmese history down to 1886", in the author's *Burma: Literature, Historiography, Scholarship, Language, Life and Buddhism*.
- ⁷ Aye Kyaw, Dr. "Burmese sources for Lan Na Thai history" . . . p. 247.
- ⁸ Taylor, Dr. Robert H. "Burmese concepts of revolution," in *Context meaning and power in Southeast Asia*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, SEAP, 1986. p. 82.
- ⁹ *The Judson Burmese-English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. rev., 1921., p.741.
- ¹⁰ Hla Tun Phyu, U, ed., *Majjhimadesa Ayedawbon Kyan*, 1998. p. Kaw (ကော)
- ¹¹ Yi Yi, Dr. "Ayedawbon kyan mya pyat-thana", [The problems of Ayedawbon kyan], in *Kantha Sein-lei sardan mya*, 1969, .pp.30-62.
- ¹² Maung Maung Gyi, Tetkatho. "Ayedawbon Chauk Saung", [The six vols. of Ayedawbon] in the author's *Sar Myet-shu*, [1964] p. 275-283.
- ¹³ Yan, U (Maing Khaing Myosa). *Pitakat-taw thamaing*, 1959, p.266, item no., 2034.
- ¹⁴ *Ayedawbon Nga Saung Dwe*, Yangon, Thudhama-wadi, 1923, (1) page introduction (no page no.).
- ¹⁵ *Myanmar Min Mya Ayedawbon*, Yangon, B.E.T. Sar-oke Taik, distributed by Nant Tha Taik, 1967, p.7.
- ¹⁶ Yi Yi, Dr. "Ayedawbon kyan mya pyat-thana", p. 50.
- ¹⁷ *Hanthawaddy Hsinbyushin Ayedawbon*, in *Myanmar Min Mya Ayedawbon*, Nant Tha edition, 1967, p.325.
- ¹⁸ *Hsinbyumyashin Mintaya Gyi Ayedawbon*. Typescript copied from palm-leaf manuscript in U Maung Maung Tin (M.A.)'s Collection, Yangon, Universities Central Library, 1985, Leaf 141, (UCL Accession no. 327461).
- ¹⁹ Kyauk Taing, Maung. "Thukhamain U Nay i Sarpay Gita Thutaythana", in *Min Letwe Nawrahta* (1085-1335), Yangon, Myanmar Nainggan Sarpay Pyant Pwa-ye Athin, 1974, pp. 111-112.
- ²⁰ *Hanthawaddy Ayedawbon*, Mimeographed Copy, copied from palm-leaf mss., 1967, p. 97.
- ²¹ *Ayedawbon Nga Saung Dwe*, 1923, (1) page introd. (no page no.).
- ²² Pe Maung Tin, U. *History of Burmese Literature*, 4th edition, [1955], p. 179.
- ²³ Maung Maung Gyi, U Tetkatho, "Ayedawbon Chauk Saung", [1964], p. 280-81.
- ²⁴ Yi Yi, Dr. "Ayedawbon kyan mya pyat-thana" . . . p. 53.
- ²⁵ Yan, U. (Maing Khaing Myosa). *Pitakat-taw thamaing* . . . 1959. p. 266, item nos. 2035 and 2036.
- ²⁶ *Ayedawbon Nga Saung Dwe* . . . 1923. (1) page introd. (no page no.).
- ²⁷ Pe Maung Tin, U. *History of Burmese Literature* . . . 4th edition . . . [1955]. p. 177-179.
- ²⁸ Maung Maung Gyi, U Tetkatho. "Ayedawbon Chauk Saung" . . . [1964] p. 280-81.
- ²⁹ *Alaungpaya Ayedawbon, Hnit Saung Dwe* [Two versions], ed. by U Hla Tin (Hla Thamain) 1961. See "Introduction", by U Hla Tin for detailed comparison of the texts, p. 1-13.
- ³⁰ Yi Yi, Dr. "Ayedawbon kyan mya pyat-thana" . . . 1969. p.45.
- ³¹ Kyauk Taing, Maung. "Thukhamain U Nay . . . 1974. p. 116-121.
- ³² *Dhanyawaddy Ayedawbon* in Myanmar Min Mya Ayedawbon . . . Nant Tha ed. 1967. p. 131.
- ³³ *Ayedawbon Nga Saung Dwe* . . . 1923. (1) page in trod. (no page no.).
- ³⁴ Yan, U. *Pitakat-taw thamaing* . . . 1959. p. 264, item nos. 2018 and 2019. see also my article on Sithu Gamani Thingyan in *Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Thai Studies* . . . 1996.
- ³⁵ Zaw Gyi (pen-name of Myanmar author U Thein Han). "Mon wungyi hnei Myanmar Sagapyay" reprinted in *Yazadirit Ayedawbon*. 3rd ed. Yangon: Zwe Sarpay Yeik Myon, 1974., p. hsa (ဆ) to pha (ဖ).
- ³⁶ *Rajadirit Ayedawbon*. Mon version ed. by Nai Pan Hla. Yangon: Burma Research Society, 1958. (Mon text series, no. 3). See also the introduction by Nai Pan Hla to his new translation of *Rajadirit Ayedawbon*. Yangon: Myawaddy Sarpay Taik, 1997. p. 11. Nai Pan Hla points out that the Mon text is actually a compilation from earlier Mon histories, and the title *Rajadirit Ayedawbon* was given only later.
- ³⁷ *Majjhimadesa Ayedawbon*, ed. by U Hla Tun Phyu. Yangon: Moe Kyi Sarpay, distributed by Rakhine Thagyi Sarpay, 1998. p. phe (ပဲ)
- ³⁸ *Ibid.* p. phaw (ဖော) for a fuller biography of the author by U Hla Tun Phyu see p. 1-9. 1. *Majjhimadesa Ayedawbon* . . . 1998. p.phe (ပဲ) and phaw (ဖော).
- ³⁹ Yi Yi, Dr. "Ayedawbon kyan mya pyat-thana" . . . 1969. p.60.
- ⁴⁰ Hla Tun Phyu, U. "Introduction" to *Majjhimadesa Ayedawbon* . . . 1998. p.kan (ကံ) to khe (ခဲ).

⁴¹ Kyauk Taing, Maung. "Thukhamain U Nay . . . 1974. p.136–137.

⁴² See also Zaw Gyi's literary appreciation of *Rajadirit Ayedawbon* reprinted in the introductory part of the Zaw Sarpay edition of this *Ayedawbon* under the title "Mon wungyi hnei Myanmar sagapyay" . . . 1974. p. hsa(∞) to da (o).

⁴³ Harvey, G. E. *History of Burma* . . . 1925. p.174.

⁴⁴ *Hanthawaddy Ayedawbon*. Mimeographed copy; copied from palm-leaf mss. . . . 1967. p. 81–98.

⁴⁵ *Nyaungyan Khit Nhit 40 Yazawin*, by Letwe Nawrahta. Presented by Shayhaung Sarpay Thutaythi Ta Oo. Yangon: Myanmar Hmu Beikman Sarpay Ban [no date 188?] p. 182.

⁴⁶ Tun Yi, U (Writing under the pen-name Shay-

haung Sarpay Thutaythi Ta Oo). "Letwe Nawrahta Bawa hnei Sarpay [Life and Writings of Letwe Nawrahta] in *Min Letwe Nawrahta* . . . 1974. p. 280.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 281.

⁴⁸ Kyauk Taing, Maung. "Thukhamain U Nay Sarpay Gita Thutay-thana" . . . 1974. p. 137.

⁴⁹ *Rajadirit Ayedawbon*, translated from Mon by Nai Pan Hla . . . 1997. p. 11.

⁵⁰ Yan, U (Maing Khaing Myosa). *Pitaka-taw thamaing* . . . Yangon: Hanthawaddy, 1959. p. 265–66.

⁵¹ Tet Htoot, U. "The nature of the Burmese chronicles," in *Historians of South East Asia*, ed. by D.G.E. Hall. London: Oxford University Press, 1963. p. 60.

Appendix

U Yan's list of *Ayedawbon Kyan* in his bibliography of Myanmar, Pali and Sanskrit texts on all aspects of Myanmar literature during monarchical times (i.e. up to 1885) is given below. U Yan, known under his designatory title as Maing Khaing Myosa (1815–1891), was the royal librarian at the court of the last two Myanmar kings, Mindon and Thibaw. His bibliography was completed in 1888 and is entitled *Pitakat Thamaing*.⁵⁰ It lists the *Ayedawbon kyan* (and authors if known) that were probably in the royal library under his charge.

Myanmar scholar U Tet Htoot has given this list as part of the bibliography of historical texts (listed by U Yan) with some of his (U Tet Htoot)'s own comments:

[U Yan's item no. 2033]. *Yazadhirit Ayebon*, Memoir on the reign of Yazadhirit by Bhinnyadala, a Mon who served under Bayinnaung as a minister. He plotted many times to assassinate Bayinnaung but the latter spared him as being a wise man. He was disgraced by Bayinnaung

only when he meddled in military affairs in his campaigns in Siam during the latter part of his reign.

[U Yan's item no. 2034]. *Hanthawaddy Hsinbyumyashin Ayebon*, Memoir on the reign of Bayinnaung Anonymous.

[U Yan's item no. 2035]. *Alaung Mintayagyi Ayebon*, Memoir on the reign of Alaungpaya by Letwe Noratha. See Monywa Sayadaw's account of him in U Tet Htoot's paper. U Yan mentions that Letwe Noratha had the rank of a Thandawsint and that this *Ayedawbon* was written during Alaungpaya's reign.

[U Yan's item no. 2036]. *Alaung Mintayagyi Ayebon*, Another memoir on the reign of Alaungpaya by Twin-thin-taik Wun, Mingyi Maha Sithu. U Yan mentions that Maha Sithu was born in Maung Htaung village in [Upper] Alon. (His real name was U Tun Nyo). U Tet Htoot thinks that this is the one which had been published from out of these two memoirs.⁵¹