

The Chiang Mai Campaign of 1787–1788: Beyond the Chronicular Account

The official Myanmar chronicle *Umannan Mahayazawindawgyi* (Glass Palace Chronicle) provides the following account of the Chiang Mai campaign of 1787–88:

Wongyi (Minister of the Great Council) Mahazeyathura,¹ in command of 66 contingents, a total of 4,000 horses and 45,000 men, set out on 29 August 1787 to advance on Chiang Mai by the Mongnai route to pacify Chiang Mai and the region east of the Salween which were disturbed.² At the same time, Khan-o Bo Letyathihathingyan, in command of 46 contingents, a total of 35,000 men, went downriver to Martaban and from there advanced on Pa Song.³

Reaching Mongnai, Mahazeyathura divided his troops into five forces: the 2 contingents of Yankyawpyitsi and Yazathihakyawhtin advanced as a vanguard; Thitsein Bo Nemyothihathihkaya with 12 contingents advanced by Mongpu and Monghsat to Chiang Saen; *Letvawathma* (Commander of the Right Palace Enclosure) Nemyokyawgaungnawrabha with ten contingents advanced by Kengtung to Mongyawng; *Myede Myede* ("Eater" of Myede) Nemyothurakyawhtin with 29 contingents advanced on Muang Fang and Chiang Rai; Mahazeyathura himself, with 15

contingents, followed in the rear of Nemyothurakyawhtin.

Arriving at Muang Fang, Mahazeyathura received news from Nemyokyawhtintinhkaya that Chiang Saen was making a firm stand, and instead of following in the wake of Nemyothurakyawhtin to Chiang Rai, he turned towards Chiang Saen and, together with Nemyokyawhtintinhkaya, captured Chiang Saen.

Nemyothurakyawhtin, who had marched by way of Chiang Rai, was the first to arrive at Lakhon (Lampang). The others soon joined him, with Mahazeyathura the last to arrive, and the 66 contingents besieged Lampang. With *Chao Kawila's* father Chai Kao and *Chao Kawila's* brother *Chao Noi*⁴ putting up a strong resistance, the Myanmar forces suffered heavy casualties. On 15 February 1788 an Ayutthaya army of 50,000–60,000 men arrived,⁵ and the besieging Myanmar forces were caught between two fires for four days and three nights. Unable to withstand this, Mahazeyathura and the Myanmar forces withdrew to Chiang Saen.

Letyathihathingyan, after arriving in Martaban, divided his troops into three forces: Thirinanakayawhtin with 15 contingents advanced on the left, Yegangthihakyaw with 15

contingents advanced on the right, and Letyathihathingyan himself with 16 contingents advanced in the centre. Reaching Pa Sang, Letyathihathingyan attempted to capture the city, but with strong resistance offered by *Chao Kwila* and heavy casualties suffered by his troops, he settled down to a siege. The Ayutthaya army of 50,000–60,000 which had defeated Mahazeyathura's forces at Lampang then arrived in Pa Sang, forcing Letyathihathingyan to abandon the siege and retreat.

On a summons from the capital, Mahazeyathura returned, leaving behind Yazathihakyaw-hin and 30,000 men as a garrison in Chiang Saen (Maung Maung Tin 1967 II: pp. 49–54).

The account of the Chiang Mai campaign of 1787–1788 conforms to the general pattern of campaign histories which form a substantial part of the Myanmar chronicles. These histories generally have three main components—a list of the troops taking part in the campaign (i.e. a list of the commanders), the routes of march, and the major engagements—and are written from the perspective of the army on campaign.

But campaigns involve much more than military action, and other aspects of the military campaign are revealed in such material as the Royal Orders⁶ which also provide a view of the campaign from the perspective of the Court.

The plan of operations for the campaign of 1787–1788, which was put up by the ministers, was given royal approval on 21 July 1787 (Than Tun 1986: p. 542). While the chronicle account only describes the advances against Lampang and Pa Sang, the Royal Orders make clear that an advance on Bangkok formed the main part of the campaign. A messenger was immediately sent to Martaban, the staging point for the campaign in the south, with a special boat being provided by Prince Bassein.⁷ Supplies were a major consideration in military campaigns and Mahathihabura, Governor of Rangoon, immediately set about collecting supplies. However, he was over-zealous and exceeded his jurisdiction and was therefore ordered on 28 July 1787 to confine himself strictly to Rangoon and not to demand any supplies from the towns and villages along the Irrawaddy river course (Than Tun 1986: p. 552). A further order in August 1787 instructed him to send 20,000 baskets

(22,500 bushels by current reckoning) of unhusked royal rice from Rangoon, as well as the rice from the royal rice lands of Dala, to Martaban (Than Tun 1986: p. 557).

Rice was a continuing concern and, halfway through the campaign, an Order of 13 November 1787 forbade the export of rice from the ports of Rangoon, Bassein and Tavoy (Than Tun 1986: p. 650).

There was not the same concern with supplies for the advance in the north where there was a greater urgency.⁸ On 2 August 1787 Nemyokyawhtinthinkaya was ordered to advance to the disturbed region east of the Salween with 5,000 men, 1,500 or 2,000 musketeers and 500 horses and with the authority to employ the resources of the Myelat region (the Shan territories west of the Salween) as the situation demanded (Than Tun 1986: p. 557).

On 4 August 1787, the official start of the campaign was set for 13 August 1787 (Than Tun 1986: p. 559). But before that date problems arose regarding the command of the campaign. The details are unclear, but it would seem that *Myinsugyiwan* (Minister of the Cavalry Groups) Mingyimahamingaung had been sent ahead to Martaban to make preparations for the campaign.⁹ On 9 August 1787 the Order was issued:

The generals and commanders in Martaban and Tavoy who have been appointed to subjugate Ayutthaya [Bangkok] will not perform their duties honestly. The Crown Prince is appointed to the command of the troops in Martaban and Tavoy and to the subjugation of Ayutthaya (Than Tun 1986: p. 561).

The start of the campaign was postponed on 11 August 1787 to 29 August and Orders issued on 19 August for the southern campaign, which included giving Nemyothinkaya¹⁰ command of an army of 31,275, to advance on Bangkok by the Three Pagodas route, and Letyathingyan command of an army of 15,743 to advance on Chiang Mai by the Yunzalin (Muang Thalang) route, and the recall of Mingyimahamingaung and Mingyinandakyawhtin¹¹ to the capital (Than Tun 1986: pp. 564, 574–575).

Presumably the ceremony officially inaugurating the campaign was performed as scheduled on 29 August 1787. It conformed to astrologi-

cal considerations. In the original date (13 August), the ceremony was to start at 11.26.56.4 a.m.; offerings were to be made to the Three Gems and the guardian spirits of the religion; and a Sunday-born man with the letter *ka* (the first letter of the Myanmar alphabet) written on his forehead was to go in front of the marching troops. On 29 August, the ceremony was performed at 7.02.24 a.m. and two men, a Tuesday-born and a Wednesday-born, went in front of the marching troops (Than Tun 1986, pp. 559, 564).

It is not known whether the Crown Prince marched out with the troops but it would seem that he did not take command of the campaign.¹⁷ Mahazeyathura had been instructed on 11 August to advance on Chiang Mai on that day (Than Tun 1986, p. 564) and the chronicular account indicates that he did do so.

Apart from problems concerning the command, there were also problems in mustering men for the campaign. Those *myothuys* (local headmen) who had been unable to provide a full muster for the campaign were condemned to death, but Mahazeyathura intervened, and royal approval was given on 9 September 1787 to his suggestion that instead of the punishment they should be made to serve in the vanguard of his army (Than Tun 1986, p. 593).

Service in the vanguard of the army was a form of punishment as well as an opportunity for redemption.¹⁸ Several criminals were assigned to the Chiang Mai army, nineteen being thus assigned on 2 August 1787 for such various crimes as murder, theft and elopement with an official's wife (Than Tun 1986, p. 557). It is not known how these criminals distinguished themselves in the campaign. At least one, Nga Pyay, a thief who was belatedly assigned to the Chiang Mai army on 20 October 1787 deserted, and on 13 November 1787 was condemned to death by the cleaving open of his chest (Than Tun 1986, pp. 629, 632).

While a string of Orders indicate that the Court kept in contact with the campaign in the south, it was left in ignorance of the development of the Chiang Mai campaign. Horsemen were sent on 22 December 1787 to obtain information (Than Tun 1986, p. 680), but this not satisfy the King and on 3 January 1788 he ordered the *wundauks* and *swegyis* (Deputy ministers and

secretaries of the Great Council) to be imprisoned because they had been negligent in their management of the Chiang Mai campaign (Than Tun 1986a, p. 334). The next day he issued a reprimand to the senior *Wungyi*, Thadothirimahauzana.¹⁹

When a royal matter is to be administered, it must be attended to and concluded immediately. Is it not that they [the officials of the Great Council] remain as they wish and the matter is prolonged because the *Wungyi* does not attend to and administer it but is negligent (Than Tun 1986a, p. 335).

However, the King's anger abated, and the officials were released on 5 January (Than Tun 1986a, p. 337).

News of the disaster of the campaign arrived at the Court in March 1788. It made a strong impression on the Court and brought about a vigorous response. Orders were issued from 21 March to 7 April 1788 to prepare the defences against a Thai invasion.

In the south, Mahathirithathu was recalled from Tavoy and Nemyogunnakyawthu appointed Governor in his stead and ordered to guard Tavoy and Mergui with 2,000 men. Mingyikyawhtin, who had commanded the southern campaign, was appointed Governor of Martaban and ordered to guard it with 5,000 men. Mingyimahamingaung, who had been recalled from Martaban in August 1787, was now appointed to Rangoon and instructed to provide men and supplies for Martaban and Tavoy, drawing upon the resources of towns and villages along the lower Irrawaddy course south of Prome. Meanwhile 5,000 *viss* (8,000 kgs) of saltpetre and 5,000 *viss* of gunpowder were sent to Mingyimahamingaung for him to forward to Mingyikyawhtin at Martaban (Than Tun 1986a, pp. 410, 423, 426).

Leryathibathingyan, who had commanded the troops advancing by the Yunzalin route, was ordered to guard Yunzalin with his men. *Taangbetuikwan* (Minister of the Southern Division) Minhlathu was appointed to Toungoo and instructed to provide for the needs of Tavoy, Martaban and Yunzalin by drawing upon the resources of Toungoo, Yamethin, Sindaw, Meiktila, Nyaungyan, Taungdwingyi,

Hlaingdet, Thagara and other towns. It was also ordered that the tax rice of Toungoo be retained there and not sent to the capital (Than Tun 1986a: pp. 410, 414, 425).

In the north, Wundauk Nemyosithu was sent with a force to Mongnai and Mongpan with instructions to fortify them, to block all fences and roads across the Salween, to employ the resources of the Myelat region, and to collect at Mongpan rice from the surrounding area in case there was a need to send further reinforcements from capital. Mahazeyathura, who had retreated from Lampang, was ordered to establish himself east of the Salween where he could be supplied. The *nahkan* (adjutant) who had arrived from him was also sent back with supplies of ammunition (Than Tun 1986a: pp. 410, 413, 415, 423).

Musketeers formed a significant part of the Myanmar forces, and the decimation of the Myanmar forces in the campaign created an urgent need of musketeers and muskets. On 24 March 1788, the peasants of the Sun-ye royal rice lands were summoned so that they could be armed with muskets and formed into a musketeer group. On 2 April, men capable of making gun parts, whatever the service group they belonged to, were summoned to the palace and put to work for the making of muskets. At the same time, a general order was issued for the collection of saltpetre from all towns and villages which made them. Furthermore, with long term needs in mind, an Order was issued on 20 April 1788 to turn the commoners of several divisions and towns¹⁷ into servicemen and form them into musketeer groups (Than Tun 1986a: pp. 415, 424, 433).

Perhaps it is also to this period that an Order misdated 14 November 1573 belongs:¹⁸

Taungthaman Spirit who guards the Royal City!

I reign in accordance with the seven rules of not causing decline¹⁹ as did the good and noble

bodhisattva kings of old. At the spirit shrine near the Royal Palace I continually offer every year clothes, articles of use, scents, lamps, flowers and food. Not giving consideration to the fact that with the good and noble kings of old, when there was a threat to the country which had to be removed, the spirits guarding the Royal City assisted and served according to their capacities, you only accept my benefactions and do not serve me fully and, because of that, the affair of my having a host of men, elephants and horses advance against and conquer the dirt of the Religion. Kawila, Lord of Ayutthaya Bangkok, remains unconcluded and is prolonged.

Taungthaman Spirit! Strive and serve me fully. If you do not serve me fully I shall make a bonfire of the spirit image and the spirit shrine.

Taungthaman Spirit, Taungbyon Spirit, Taungmyint Spirit, Taunggyin Spirit, Mahagiri Spirit, Two Brother Spirits!²⁰ Serve me so that my affair is concluded! (Than Tun 1985: p. 104)

It would be a truism to say that the Myanmar chronicles provide only a partial view of history. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the Royal Commission responsible for the Hmannan Mahayazawindawgyi which took such meticulous care in examining and revising the details of U Kala's *Mahayazawin* (Great Chronicle) and Twinthintarkun Mahasithu U Tun Nyo's *Mahayazawinthit* (New Chronicle) did not go to too much trouble in chronicling the more recent history of the Konbaung period. It relied heavily on narrative accounts such as the campaign histories which lay ready to hand rather than create new narratives out of the wealth of material which was at its disposal. A venture beyond the chronicle, therefore, reveals many aspects of history ignored by the Royal Commission and also shatters the image presented in the chronicle of an ordered world in which the King was largely in control of events.

Notes

¹⁷ Appearing in the Chiang Mai Chronicle (Wyatt & Wichienkeo 1998: p. 163) as *AsueWun* – i.e. *Ahncun*, or Minister of Commoners Mahazeyathura U Myat Baw was the son of Thademyemthakayawhau U Tshita, *thwamawngri* in the reign of Mahadhamma-

rajadhipati (c.1733–1752). He was appointed *Yewun* (Deputy Governor) of Rangoon during the reign of Singu (1776–1782) and because of his services in the Mon rebellion of 1783, in which the rebels gained control of Rangoon for three days (8–10 September)

and killed the Governor, he was recalled to the capital on 17 October 1783. He was appointed *Taungbettaikwan* (Minister of the Southern Division) on 15 May 1784. *Athawun* on 28 July 1785 and *Wungyi* on 27 June 1786. His sister was the queen of both Hsinbyushin (r.1763-1776) and Bodawpaya (r.1782-1819) while his brother was *Atawun* (Privy Minister) of the Crown Prince. His son and grandson served as *Atawungyi* in later reigns. In Bodawpaya's Thai campaign of 1785-1786, he replaced the *Atawun* (Minister of the Privy Council) Mingyimalahawshay in the command of the main army on 30 November 1785 while it was on march from Amarapura to Martaban; the army advanced along the Three Pagodas route and reached only Sar Yok before retreating for lack of supplies (Cordier 1891: pp. 32-39; Maung Maung Tin 1967 I: pp. 24-32; Minkyawya 1962: pp. 145, 149; Than Tun 1986: pp. 287, 335, 466, 487, 503).

Phraya Cha Ban and Chao Kawila of Lampang revolted against General White Head (Thadomrhitin), the Myanmar Governor of Chiang Mai in 1771 and, securing the assistance of Phya Taksin of Bangkok, gained control of Chiang Mai in 1775. Becoming ruler of Chiang Mai, Chao Kawila not only repulsed the Myanmar campaign of 1785-1786 but also made a successful attack on Mongpan and instigated Mongpu, Menghsat, Mongyawng, Muang Fang, Muang Phrao and Chiang Rai to revolt against the Myanmar in 1787 (Wyatt & Wichienkeo 1998: *passim*).

¹ Pa Sang, near Lamphun on the Mae Tha river, was established as a temporary capital by Chao Kawila in 1782 (Wyatt & Wichienkeo 1998: p. 159).

² Chao Noi Thanmalangka, the Uparaja, was at Pa Sang, probably another brother. Chao Kham Sorn, ruler of Lampang, was meant.

³ Chao Kawila, who was at Pa Sang, had sent for assistance from Bangkok (Wyatt & Wichienkeo 1998: p. 163). Both the Myanmar chronicle and Chiang Mai Chronicle continue to use 'Ayuthaya' for Bangkok.

⁴ Than Tun, (ed.) *The Royal Orders of Burma, AD 1598-1885*, (10 vols.) Kyoto: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1983-1990.

⁵ Bassein, the principal city of the Irrawaddy delta, was noted for its oarsmen.

⁶ Information about Chiang Saen and Mongyawng had been obtained by the (questioning of men arrived from there, but since the information was conflicting, an Order was issued on 12 July 1787 to send more horsemen to get more precise information (Than Tun 1986: p. 535).

⁷ It was to Mingyimalahungang at Martaban that the Governor of Rangoon had been ordered on 2 August 1787 to send the rice supplies. Mingyimalahungang U Myat Htin was a household

retainer of Bodawpaya who had helped Bodawpaya gain the throne in February 1782 and was one of the 12 retainers each rewarded with 3,000 ticals (48 kgs) of silver immediately after Bodawpaya's accession. He was first appointed *Lamaingwan* (Minister of Royal Ricefields) then *Myinsugawun* on 27 November 1783. In the Thai campaign of 1785-1786 he was in joint command of the vanguard of the main army which advanced along the Three Pagodas route and was before Kanchanaburi when a general retreat was ordered (Maung Maung Tin 1967 I: p. 533; II: pp. 29-34; Minkyawya 1962: pp. 148-149; Than Tun 1986: p. 297).

⁸ Nemyothihkaya, formerly Mekkhaya Bo, was appointed *Letweyintama* (Commander of the Left Palace Enclosure) on 23 February 1782. In the Thai campaign of 1785-1786 he served as *Sitka* (Vice-Commander) in the force of 12 contingents commanded by Prince Sagu which advanced with the main army along the Three Pagodas route. The force followed and caught up with the vanguard at Kanchanaburi (Maung Maung Tin 1967 I: 533, II: pp. 24, 35).

⁹ Lamaingwan Mingyimalahungang U Myat Thu was, like Mingyimalahungang, one of the 12 household retainers rewarded with 3,000 ticals of silver after Bodawpaya's accession to the throne. He was first appointed *Taungbettaikwan*, then *Atawun* (Minister of the Privy Council) on 2 May 1784. Committing a misdemeanour, he was removed from office on 28 April 1785, but was re-appointed *Lamaingwan* on 17 July 1785. In the Thai campaign of 1785-1786 he served as *Sitka* in the main army advancing along the Three Pagodas route and was stationed at Kyaubin (two stages before the Three Pagodas) to arrange supplies for the advancing army. He was put in command of the Ayuthaya campaign of 1786-1787 and advanced with an army of 85 contingents along the Three Pagodas route, but was able to advance only one stage beyond the Three Pagodas before being forced to retreat (Maung Maung Tin 1967 I: p. 533; II: pp. 25, 30, 37-39; Minkyawya 1962, pp. 148, 152; Than Tun 1986: pp. 333, 444, 454).

¹⁰ This is suggested by the Order of 24 September 1787, "Let the Crown Prince attend at his place and make obeisance as usual at the End-of-Lent; Obel-sance Ceremony [performed on 27 September 1787]" and by other orders indicating that Mingyikyawhtin was in command of the southern campaign—i.e. Orders of 24 August, 28 August and 25 November 1787 instructing supplies to be sent to Mingyikyawhtin, and Order of 2 October 1787 instructing him to have Sundawaythaw remain behind to guard Martaban (Than Tun 1986: pp. 577, 581, 608, 613, 601). Unfortunately, the campaign history of the southern campaign is missing from the chronicle.

¹¹ In the Ayutthaya campaign of 1774–1775, Minyezeayakyaw, who had quarrelled with the commander Athiungyi Mahathihathura over a matter of tactics, was recalled with his fellow officers to the capital. While the fellow officers were executed, Minyezeayakyaw was sent back to Mahathihathura who sent him to capture a Thai position which was holding up the Myanmar advance. Minyezeayakyaw did so, and presumably was pardoned (Maung Maung Tin 1967 I, pp. 504–507).

¹² Appearing as Pagan Mingyi, i.e. Pakhan Mingyi from Pakhan, whose revenues he enjoyed as noted in the *Chuang Mai Chronicle* (Wyatt & Wichienkeo 1998, p. 160). Thadothirimahazana U Hnauang was one of the 68 men whom Alaungpaya formed into an elite group at the start of his effort to attain to the vacant Myanmar throne. He was appointed *Lerwe-wjinhmu* by Naungdawgyi (c. 1760–1763) and *Wangyi* by Hsinhyushin in 1764, and served as *Hungyi* through three reigns. He took part in Alaungpaya's Ayutthaya campaign of 1759–1760 and was in joint command of the rearguard in the retreat. In the Thai campaign of 1785–1786, he was in command of the army of 29 contingents which advanced on Chuang Mai on 25 September 1785 and besieged Lampang with twenty contingents while the rest of his troops under Nemyosithu advanced southwards as far as Phitsnulok before the order arrived for a general retreat (Maung Maung Tin 1967 I, pp. 31, 316–318, II: 23, 35; Minkyawya 1962, p. 147).

¹³ Minhlasithu U Oo, son of Minhlasithu U Sizem who died in battle at Syria in 1755 and whose daughter was a minor queen of Alaungpaya, served in the 1785–1786 Thai campaign as *Sike* in the force of 11 contingents commanded by Prince Sagu which advanced along the Three Pagodas route and commanded the vanguard of 20 contingents in the Ayutthaya campaign of 1786–1787. He was recalled from Martaban in August 1787 together with Mingyinhamaingung and Mingyinandakyawhin and was briefly imprisoned from 21 September to 15 October 1787 (Maung Maung Tin 1967 I, pp. 28, 148–149, 323–324; II, pp. 23–24, 37; Than Tun 1986, pp. 574, 603, 622).

¹⁴ Nemyokyawhtinbinkaya's force which was ordered to advance east of the Salween on 2 August 1787 was assigned 1,500–2,000 musketeers as against 5,000 ordinary infantry. The force assigned to Letyathihingyan on 19 August 1787 for the advance along the Yunzalin route consisted of 4,000 musketeers as against 10,953 ordinary infantry (Than Tun 1986, pp. 557, 575).

¹⁵ Northern Hsiagyay, Twimlin, Mahadan, Northern Cavalry region, Shwebo, Ngarawic, Klawthband, Sputtara towns.

¹⁶ The Order forms part of a collection of Orders (Than Tun 1985, pp. 85–114) belonging to the reign of Bodawpaya which are erroneously dated and assigned to the reign of Bayinnaung (1551–1582), probably on the basis of both kings using the appellation, 'Lord of the White Elephants.' The Order of 4 January 1778 appears with the date 17 June 1565 and the order of 20 April 1788 with the date 1 March 1569 in the collection.

¹⁷ The Aparithaaya. These were: 1) constantly deliberating in assembly, 2) being united in assembly and united in action; 3) refraining from prescribing what ancient kings have not prescribed and abrogating what have been prescribed but following their prescriptions; 4) giving reverence to elders and following their counsel; 5) refraining from forcibly seizing young maidens; 6) offering food to the spirits guarding within the city and without according to custom; 7) and providing protection and security to monks and brahmins (Hmannan 1992 I, p. 69).

¹⁸ Taungthaman, Taungbyon, Taungnyon and Taunggyi Spirits are local spirits associated with the physical landscape of Amarapura; Mahagiri Spirit whose shrine is on Mount Popa, and the Two Brother Spirits, Mingyi and Minglay, whose annual festival at Taungbyon is the occasion for a great gathering of spirit mediums and their adherents, are prominent members of the pantheon of 37 spirits.

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