

An Introduction

First of all it must be admitted that it was through happenstance that I came to work on this project. Dr. Sunait Chutintaranond of the Department for Thai Studies, Chulalongkorn University had given me a sheaf of typed manuscripts to edit and not being much of an editor, I eventually rewrote the whole lot. Most of us know that U Ponnya was an accomplished scholar but speaking for myself alone I readily confess that embarking on this project has really opened my eyes to his awesome literary prowess. His talent for masterly turns of phrase can be enjoyed as much as his references to personalities and episodes from the Scriptures and literary classics. He recounts the events preceding this episode and describes the battle scenes in a setting of real place names and geo-graphical features that are to be found in actuality. Thus it is much more than just a pean to the king's glory.

True, some episodes such as Indra, the king of celestial gods personally intervening with his divine troops or the case of a couple of cannon on the enemy side refusing to fire and rolling down into the Myanmar camp on their own may be hard to believe, but the story of an enemy unit wandering into the Myanmar line where it was easily captured is not a unique event in war.

Variouly titled "Yodaya Naing Mawgun" (A Chronicle of Victory Over Ayuthia), and "Zimme Naing Mawgun" (A Chronicle of Victory Over Chiangmai) it chronicles the episode of a Siamese incursion into Myanmar in 1853 which was beaten off. The author himself had not given any specific title and the Hanthawaddy Press have given the title of "Hpoun daw bwe Mawgun" (A Chronicle of the King's Glory) to the first 21 stanzas and "Zimme Naing Mawgun" to the remaining 57 stanzas in its edition. However since the author had specifically mentioned at the end of the twentyfirst stanza "thus ends this first part", again at the end of the sixtieth stanza that "this book with the lacquered

and gilt cover constitutes the second part "and on the final seventy eighth stanza " this is the third part of the chronicle ", it is quite clear that all three parts constitute the chronicle of this episode.

The first twentyone stanzas are in the main, a rough sketch of the Konbaung dynasty up to the time when he won the throne and eulogises the power and glory of King Mindon no doubt. An eminent scholar of the Myanmar language has defined 'mawgun' as "panegyric poem"¹, and as such it could be said that U Ponnya was only doing what was expected of him when he was ordered to write a "mawgun" on that campaign. On the other hand, it should be kept in mind that under the two preceding kings, the country had lost two wars with the British. Thus one can imagine how sweet this victory against encroaching foreign troops must have tasted to people including U Ponnya and may well have heightened his inspiration.

As to the contention that it should be "Zimme Naing Mawgun", one might point out that invading troops were mainly from Chiang Mai and the northern part of Thailand such as Nan, Phre Lampang etc. although there is no doubt contingents from Ayuthia if not Bangkok had also taken part. Secondly, "The Konabaughset Yazawin" (Chronicle of the Kings of Konbaung Dynasty) mentions "Kalaungs" (Lu people from the Chiang Mai area) being taken as prisoners of war, and finally from the Thai side it is learnt that during the Lanna period (Lanna being the term for the 8 northern provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Phayao, Lamphun, Lampang, Phrae, Nan and Mae Hong Song) during the reign of King Mahotharaprathet (1847-54) "an unsuccessful war against Chaing Tun"² was undertaken.

Against this, proponents who are in favour of calling it "Yodaya Naing Mawgun" might say that it has been known as such in the main. Dr. Than Tun in his presentation of chronology in the Part Nine of his "Royal Orders of Burma" seem to support this view as he mentions thus "27 April 1853 - Thais came to attack Kengtung". The Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States³ also says

¹ Burmese Poetry (1300-1971) by Dr. Hla Pe; JBRS Vol. LIV Parts 1 & 2 Dec 1978.

² "Development of Thai Culture" by The Fine Arts Department, Thailand p 149.

³ "Gazeteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States" Part II Vol. I by J George Scott & others (1891) p 408-413.

that the Kengtung annals refers to it as 'inroad by Siamese'. 'Second Siamese invasion' etc. and that according to it three such campaigns made, the first in 1849 (M.E 1211), the second in 1853 (M.E 1214) and the third in 1854 (M.E 1216). However, the Gazetteer's explanatory notes point out the Kengtung annal's accounts differed with that of Siamese history regarding the nature of casus belli and the invasion routes. What was definite was that, the first campaign ended in a Siamese retreat while in the second and third invasions they also took heavy losses. According to these accounts, the third was said to be the greatest Siamese invasion, with all the Laos provinces providing contingents, that the Mong Nai Sitke Maha Thiha Thura was in command and that the Siamese losses were 'enormous'.

The scheme of presentation used in this translation is to give an overall translation in parallel bilingual columns and then give detailed translations on a passage by passage basis where necessary complete with pertinent glosses in the accompanying notes. Words that may have been elided in the text or altered somewhat to accomodate rhyming are supplied with proper amendments in parentheses or brief explanations in the notes. Loan words from Pali, Sanskrit, Mon etc. are labelled as such.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my heartfelt thanks to U Tun Tint, Member, Myanmar Language Commission who has gone through my manuscript, pointed out the errors and patiently explained words and concepts that made me see them in a new light. His observations have also steered me away from typographical errors which are to be found in both editions. However, I freely admit that any error or omission in this book is entirely mine.

Taung Goe
20 March 2003
Yangon