

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

MR CHARLES DUROISELLE, Superintendent, Archæological Survey, Burma, suggested in 1918 that I should write this book. Since then he has guided my reading and given me access to his notes—the accumulated notes of a lifetime—so that the first half of this book is largely his, and the only reason his name does not appear on the title page is that he has not seen the final draft.

Next to him my chief collaborators were J. S. Furnivall, H. F. Scarle and J. A. Stewart, members of my own service, and Professor G. H. Luce, Rangoon University; with these four I have been in regular consultation for several years. My thanks are also due to Mg San Shwe Bu (Honorary Archæological Officer), Mr Justice May Oung, Maung Mya (Archæological Assistant), Mg Po Kye 2 (Subordinate Civil Service), C. K. De (Secretariat Librarian, Rangoon), R. Grant Brown (Indian Civil Service), Miss L. M. Anstey, Arthur Waley, W. A. R. Wood (His Britannic Majesty's Consul-General, Chiangmai), G. W. Wheeler (Bodleian Library), George Cœdès (Librarian, Vajirāna National Library, Bangkok), and many others.

The reader will find the footnotes intelligible if he remembers that authorities are referred to by means of abbreviations or keywords which are printed in italics and are explained in the alphabetical bibliography at p. 373. Only the italicised portion of a reference is given in the bibliography; thus p. 95 refers to *ARASI* 1915-6 Duroiselle "The Ari of Burma and Tantric Buddhism"—the bibliography expands *ARASI*, the periodical containing Duroiselle's article, but does not give the article, even s.v. *Duroiselle*.

I have taken advantage of long leave in Europe to consult unpublished state papers in the India Office, and the usual Dutch and Portuguese sources. Chinese sources have been translated in the files of the Political Department. As to the native sources, they are so little known outside Burma that explanation is necessary.

It has too long been the fashion to deny the existence of historical material in Burma. But it is a question of standard, and the native material, though modest in both quantity and quality, is better than in the rest of Indo-China. Inscriptions may be rare in the fifth to the tenth centuries, but from the eleventh there is literally a deluge of them; and whereas in Campa, Cambodia and Siam, scripts have in the course of centuries undergone such profound changes that the compilers of later chronicles could not read the earlier inscriptions, in Burma inscriptions from the eleventh century onwards are in what is practically "square Pali," which is still used in the *kammawasa* (ordination service). Hence after the eleventh century the chronology of Burmese chronicles is reliable. Unfortunately the inscriptions used by historians were often copies containing dates which had been seriously miscopied (*Duroiselle*, "List" v, vi); this, and the tendency of the chroniclers to overlook inscriptions such as the Myazedi (p. 43), which did not happen to be in the collection near the palace (p. 268), resulted in the chronicles often being several decades out from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. Some 1,500 inscriptions have long been printed in the six volumes of *Inscriptions*, which are useless to philologists because the spelling has been modernised and the copying is defective—there is one page which contains eighty-two mistakes; this is now being rectified, for the major inscriptions, in *Epigraphia Birmanica*, issued by Mr Duroiselle, which retains the original spelling and gives a large photograph of each text.

Second to these, and inferior, are the vernacular chronicles. One of them, the *Yazawingyaw*, goes back to the fifteenth century (p. 104). Other early works are the sixteenth century *Razadarit Ayedawpon* (p. 170), and the curious *Pawtugi*

Yazawin (p. 188), written probably within a generation of De Brito's death (1613) by some burmanised Portuguese captive. But the standard chronicles are eighteenth and nineteenth century lucubrations, such as the *Hmannan Yazawin*, compiled by a royal commission in 1829; linguistic criteria show them to be based on material which is clearly late; save for quotation of archaic songs, their style reveals no archaisms of so marked a type as to suggest that their basic MSS. date from before the sixteenth century. Indeed it could hardly be otherwise. Although some sort of palace records were kept in the Pagan and Pegu palaces before that date, the country possessed no developed civilisation with diffused private or institutional papers. Vandals like Thohanbwa 1527-43 and Alaungpaya 1752-60, rebels like those who in 1564 burnt down Bayinnaung's capital, helped to destroy such records as there were. Changes of dynasty would lead to their neglect and dispersion. For such as survived, there were no proper record-room methods; mildew, white ants, and the accident of fire prevented MSS. from reaching any great age, especially those which were not strictly religious. It is the rarest thing in Burma to find MSS. as much as two centuries old even in the imagination of the possessor.

The chronicles abound in anachronisms (p. 340) and in stock situations which recur as regularly as in a yellow back. But it was not the eighteenth century compilers who started the fashion of romancing; they were only following precedent, for close study will show that perhaps as much as half the narrative told as historical down to the thirteenth century is folk-lore (pp. 315, 316, 327, 329). When a standard history of Burma comes to be written, it will be necessary to divide the reigns of such kings as Anawrahta into two parts; the first part will be The Evidence, e.g. inscriptions showing him to have actually existed and what he did, and the second part will be The Anawrahta Legend. Such division is not feasible within the limits of this little pioneer work, and although critics trained in the history schools of the West will be shocked at my treatment of the Pagan period, anyone

familiar with the atmosphere of Further India will be able to supply his own comment on these pages, which reproduce the miraculous narrative objectively. Nor is it practicable to produce a lucid and well arranged book at the present stage, when the chief desideratum is to collate and record evidence much of which is scattered and untranslated or unprinted.

The chroniclers regard general conditions in early times as being the same as in their own day, the eighteenth century. The only evidence we have as to what they really were consists of exiguous inferences from mediæval inscriptions and of occasional references by foreign travellers; so far as it goes, such evidence gives one the idea of a stationary civilisation, the same in the Middle Ages as at the time of the English Conquest in 1824. What the English found is so easily ascertainable in print that, in the interests of space, I have omitted it, and refer to general conditions only when the narrative contains contemporary evidence to show what they were.

The main Burmese record is the *Hmannan Yazawin* down to 1752 and thereafter the *Konbaungset*; both are official. Local histories such as *thamaings* are frequently late, some, such as *Ko Hkayaing Thamaing*, being written a decade ago; written by individuals, they have not the range and accuracy of the great official compilations, but some, such as the *Shwemawdorn Thamaing*, must have been maintained at pagodas for centuries and record valuable traditions.

Alaungpaya, as his behaviour at Pegu in 1757 indicates (p. 235), destroyed many Talaing records; tradition says his successors did so, and the Talaings after they were conquered had neither the heart nor the means to maintain archives. I have used a Burmese MS. version of *Razadarit Ayedawpon*; the British Museum MS. "History of Pegu," by *Sayadaw Athwa*, used by Sir Arthur Phayre; Burmese MS. translations of the *Thatonnwemun Yazawin* and the *Paklat Talaing Chronicle*; and *Schmidt's* German translation of "Slapat ragawan datow smim ron."

The best Arakanese records, *Maharazawun* (148 *angas*), *Do We "Rahkaing Razawun"* (48 *angas*), *Nga Me "Mahara-*

zawun" (24 *angas*), are practically unobtainable, being in palm leaf copies which are few and far between. San Shwe Bu has given me a few notes from Do We, Nga Me and others, and I have used Phayre's Arakanese MS. in the British Museum. *Dinmyawadi Yazawin*, the only printed Arakanese history I know, is a third hand piece of work. An admirable though slender check on Arakanese chronology exists in the dated medallions issued by the rajahs of Arakan from the fifteenth if not the tenth century onwards (p. 137).

For Siamese chronicles I am mainly indebted to Mr. W. A. R. Wood, who furnished me with a *précis*. Shan chronicles are so consistently reckless with regard to dates, varying a couple of centuries on every other leaf, that I have disregarded them. As for the remaining races, such as Karens, Chins, Kachins, they were illiterate, and there is no record.

Hence our main authority is the standard Burmese chronicles. It is impossible to study these, especially in conjunction with the other native records, without acquiring considerable respect for them. No other country on the mainland of Indo-China can show so impressive a continuity. The great record of substantially accurate dates goes back for no less than nine centuries, and even the earlier legends have a substratum of truth. But that which gives continuity also gives false perspective; the record is that of the Burmese, the energetic and dominant minority who possessed an abiding palace and a continuous tradition. Written in the shadow of the throne, the chronicles tell little of general conditions, and their story is not that of the peoples of Burma, or even of the Burmese people, but simply that of the dynasties of Upper Burma. In a land of centrifugal tendencies, facts are distorted to fit into a centripetal scheme, and the Burmese capital is made to occupy the whole of the canvas, while races such as the Shans, who for centuries were of at least equal importance, and the Talaings, who were probably the leaders of civilisation to the very end, are scarcely mentioned save as a foil.

The Pagan period appears to have unity, but, apart from inscriptions, material is lacking; the Shan period is seen

to be chaotic, because the chronicles were becoming fuller with the growth of the monastic system and the diffusion of literacy. Thibaw 1878-85 is notorious; yet if our only evidence were the Burmese court records, he would appear as a model monarch who spent his time uttering sublime sentiments, making ideal arrangements for religion, abolishing monopolies, etc., etc. The chronicles for the period of Pagan, which read so charmingly, were written by men who thus describe the First Anglo-Burmese War, 1824-6 (B.E. 1186-7):—

In the years 1186 and 1187 white strangers from the west fastened a quarrel upon the Lord of the Golden Palace. They landed at Rangoon, took that place and Prome, and were permitted to advance as far as Yandabu; for the King, from motives of piety and regard to life, made no preparations whatever to oppose them. The strangers had spent vast sums of money in their enterprise, so that by the time they reached Yandabu their resources were exhausted, and they were in great distress. They then petitioned the King, who in his clemency and generosity sent them large sums of money to pay their expenses back and ordered them out of the country. (*Crawford I.* 304.)

It is difficult to see the history of Burma in its true colour and orientation, because material is lacking. Weakness is the predominant feature of central government in the East, and in Burma most of our material is that of the central government; hence the story told in this book is sombre. But it is less depressing than that of many eastern countries, and it would not be depressing at all if only we could get out of the palace and among the people. It is a people which must sometimes have wondered whether its government did not emanate from a vampire rather than a king, and yet it never lost its buoyancy or missed its hold on the essentials of civilisation. The clergy may have been recluses, but they not only lived beautiful lives: they fearlessly maintained the Law of Mercy. When greater races bound the feet or veiled the face of their women, or doubted if she had a soul, the Burmese held her free and enthroned her as chieftainess and queen.

Perhaps some better equipped writer will tell this story and portray the life of which we catch glimpses in many an old

song. When he appears, much that is ugly will recede into the background; at present it clogs the foreground. Those who would have it omitted forget that a historian has no power to suppress an integral part of the record; neither the rules of his craft nor the dictates of his conscience allow it, for, in the words of one of the greatest of Liberals, John Morley: "The law of things is that they who tamper with veracity, from whatever motive, are tampering with the vital force of human progress."

G. E. H.

EXETER COLLEGE,
OXFORD.