

**LEGENDARY
HISTORY OF BURMA
AND ARAKAN**

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Legendary History of Burma and Arakan by C. J. F. S. Forbes

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C. J. F. S. FORBES

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OF
BURMA AND ARAKAN

BY
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PREFACE.

THE history of the Burman and Talaing countries has been already narrated by several writers. Crawford and Burney were the first to bring before European readers the annals of the Burmese, but these writers only incidentally deal with their neighbours the Talaings, and there are great discrepancies in the chronological tables furnished by each of them. Next Dr. Mason, in his valuable compendium of everything relating to Burma, has given two abstracts, one of Talaing, the other of Burmese history. Sir Arthur Phayre, to whom British Burma owes so much, has published, in the journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, two valuable essays on the "History of the Burma Race" and on the "History of Pegu." There are besides slight historical sketches in other works such as those in Father Sangermano's *Burmese Empire* and Yule's *Embassy to the Court of Ava*. But there is no short history embracing in one connected series a general and comprehensive view of the events happening contemporaneously within the area of what was known before the English occupation of Pegu as the "Burman Empire."

Dr. Mason's dates are often confused and his facts incorrect in the earlier parts of the history. Sir Arthur Phayre's interesting essays are incomplete and, moreover, treat of Arakanese, Burmese, and Talaing history separately in scattered numbers of a scientific journal not generally accessible.

In framing the following slight sketch, while advantage has been taken of the labours of all the above authors, and the opinions of Sir Arthur Phayre especially have been given their due weight, the actual facts have been taken from the existing Talaing and Burmese histories, and the dates obtained by checking one with the other.

There exist a number of local chronicles of the petty dynasties which have at various times established themselves in different

parts of the country. Thus there is a Thatone history, a Martaban history, a Prome history, a Pagan history, and several others. The commencement of all these is generally a mixture of fable and fact, not always easy to separate, tending to glorify the founder of the city or dynasty, but each helps to confirm or check the others in points where they mutually converge. The writer has collated by means of translations from the *original* Talaing manuscripts several of these epochal histories of the Talaing nation, and has compiled the Burman portion of the history from the works above mentioned corrected in some cases from a copy of the *Razawingyoke*, or "Compendium of the chronicles of the Kings," belonging to a Mandalay ponegyee.

With regard to the wonderful fables with which the earlier parts of these records are filled, should any deem on their account the whole narrative untrustworthy, we would ask whether on the same grounds we should also blot out several pages of early English history, the authorities for which are the equally fable-mongering "early chronicles."

No national traditions are without their meaning, if we could find it, and because we cannot do so at once to dismiss them as utterly useless and false is both unwise and unscholarly.

C. J. F. S. F.

LEGENDARY HISTORY OF BURMA AND ARAKAN.

ALL Talaing and Burmese chronology depends on the era of the nirvana of Gaudama. On this point all Buddhist nations are not agreed, the Tibetan, the Chinese, and the Japanese having each a date differing from the other and also from that adopted by the Singhalese, the Burmans, Talaings, Shans, and other nations of Indo-China.

European scholars have been equally divided, but the date now generally accepted by them is that used by the Buddhists of Burma, which will place this event in the year 543 before Christ. This is the year 1 of the sacred Buddhist era, so that the present year, A.D. 1878, answers to the year 2421 of the Burman sacred era.

Late researches in India seem, however, to prove that there is an error of 65 years in this date. Among the ruins at the ancient famous Buddhist temple of Buddha-Gaya has been discovered an inscription in the words "in the year 1819 of the emancipation of "Bhagavata, on Wednesday, the 1st day of the waning moon of "Kartik." According to the Burman reckoning this date answers to A.D. 1276. But the day of the week and the day of the moon being both given, it is by calculation easy to tell whether in any given year they so coincide. This calculation has been made by a learned Hindu astronomer, and it is found that the 1st day of the waning moon of Kartik in A.D. 1276 fell on a Friday, but in A.D. 1841 it fell on Wednesday, the 7th October, which would place the beginning of the Buddhist era, that is, the date of the nirvana of Gaudama, in the year 478 B. C.

We shall, however, in the following pages use the commonly received date in order to prevent confusion or mistake.

The countries which by Europeans are often confused and comprehended under the general name of "Burma" consist of the three great divisions of Arakan, Pegu, and Burma, which formerly constituted three distinct empires, even when at times sub-divided into several petty States.

Arakan comprised what now forms the British division of Arakan, and as far as Cape Negrais. Pegu, or the Talaing Kingdom,

seems in ancient times to have extended from a little below the city of Prome to the south coast as far as the Martaban Point. Burma comprehended the country north of Pegu, and eastward from Arakan, Cathay or Manipur, and Assam to the borders of China and Northern Siam. Its northern boundaries in early times would be difficult to define. This description is not of course intended as an accurate geographical definition of each of these countries.

The Burmese and Arakan *Razawin*, or History of Kings, goes back to the origin of the present world, even alluding to those before, as taught in the Buddhist religious books. There is nothing to interest any reader, as may be seen from the commencement of the second part of the so-called history, which thus sums up what has gone before:—

“In the first part we have narrated the history of the Kings, commencing from Maha Thamada up to the time of the Excellent Para Gaudama, there being 884,569 Kings in regular succession.”

This is the fabulous part of the history and is merely copied from the Buddhist books brought together with the religion from India. The next part may be termed the legendary history of Burma, that is, it consists of a series of ancient traditions, which, although we cannot accept all the details as true, seem to contain some of the important facts of the early history of the race handed down from the earliest times in the shape of legends or stories. This portion commences at an indefinite date before the birth of Gaudama. But as a line of 81 Kings are enumerated from the foundation of the monarchy to the latter event, if we only allow an average of ten years to each reign, this will carry us back to the ninth century before Christ.

“At this time,” says the Native history, “there was a war between the King of Kawthala (or Oude) and the Thakya Princes of Kawleeya, Daywadaha, and Kappeelawoot (the country around Fyzabad). The Thakya Kings were subdued, and one of them, the Prince of Kappeelawoot, Abeeraza by name, with his army left the Myitzeemapyee (or middle country) and marched eastward. Having crossed the Thallawadee river (the Chindwin river) they rested on the west bank of the Irrawaddy river, and crossing over that settled in Thingatharata, the city now called Tagoung.”

This traditionary origin of the Burman race from the country of central Gangetic India has been ridiculed by most European writers, even by Sir A. Phayre, as utterly unfounded. The subject is too uncertain and surrounded with difficulties to admit of being treated of here, but it may be remarked that all our latest information tends to show that the Burmans and Talaings came into their present countries from the westward, and probably through the

valley of the Ganges. Until therefore the contrary can be proved, it seems only reasonable to accept the tradition of the migration of the chief part of the Burman race and their Princes from some part of Northern India. But when the Burmese historians go on to connect their first Kings with the Rajput Princes who reigned in the States of Kawthala and Kappelawoot at the time Gaudama was born, and believe the Burman people to be of the same race as the inhabitants of that region of India, they only show their utter ignorance of any countries or people except themselves. The Rajputs and their subjects belong to the Indo-Germanic race, to which also the English, the French, the Germans and other nations of Europe belong, while the Burmans are of the Mongolian race, of which the Talaiings, Shans, Siamese, and Chinese form also a part. Both their bodily characteristics and their language when compared prove the utter want of connection between the Burman and Rajput races. This pretended origin of their Kings was no doubt the invention of courtly historians to flatter the pride and vanity of royal minds after the conversion of the nation to Buddhism.

The ruins of Tagoung still exist and there is no reason for doubting that it was the earliest seat of the Burman monarchy. After the death of Abeeraza his two sons, Kanrazagye and Kanrazangeh, disputed the crown, but agreed as a means to settle the question that each should build a religious edifice, and that he who first completed the work should succeed to their father's throne. The younger brother, Kanrazangeh, had recourse to stratagem, and in one night with bamboos and plastered cloth erected a pagoda, on seeing which, without examination, Kanrazagye departed at once with his adherents westward and settled at Kalaydoug on the west bank of the Chindwin river. Here they were joined by the kindred tribes of the Pyoo and Thet, who seem to have been at that time in possession of the middle Irrawaddy valley. The remains of this latter tribe may probably be found in a people bearing a somewhat similar name inhabiting the northern part of Arakan.

Having placed his son, Moodooseikta, over those who remained here, Kanrazagye with the rest of his followers pushed on again westwards and founded a city on the Kyoukpindoug mountain in the north of Arakan, the ruins of which city are still to be seen. Thus, according to both Burmese and Arakanese history, was founded the nation and kingdom of Arakan. Following this tradition the Burmans have always acknowledged the Arakanese as the elder branch of the race and style them "Bya'magye." Kanrazangeh and his descendants reigned for thirty-one generations