

## Note on King Kyazwa's Bequest

Von U Tiu Lwin

(Hamburg)

There is a passage in the *Mahāyazawingyi* of U Kala<sup>1</sup> about King Kyazwa (1234—50) of Pagan whose ascension "to the throne left vacant by the death of his father King Nadounmya . . . marked the beginning of a period of decline for the kingdom of Pagan<sup>2</sup>". The passage reads:

"He dammed the water filling from the foot of Tuywin Hill, and made a great lake. He filled it with the five kinds of lotus and caused all manner of birds, duck, sheldrake, crane, water fowl, and widgeon, to take their joy and pastime there. Near the lake he laid out many cultivated fields which yielded three crops a year. Hard by the lake he built a pleasant royal lodge, and took delight in study seven times a day<sup>3</sup>."

This much is all right as there is nothing puzzling in the account of the king. But the puzzle comes in when one reads the following lines:

"Thus he laboured at the sacred writ of the religion, and built Pyatthada pagoda, his work of merit, but did not finish it because the people were ill paid and ill directed. He bequeathed these words openly in history<sup>4</sup>:

*'Sīlavā sīlasampanno natthi na me na vijjati'.*"

Now, the puzzle is twofold: (1) Is the bequest connected with his failure in building the pagoda? (2) What does the bequest in Pali exactly mean?

It is not difficult to solve the first question. After going through the whole passage a little more carefully one can readily give the answer in the affirmative. The bequest containing a sad note was but a reflection of his failure of the pagoda construction. It was customary for a Buddhist monarch in Brma to build a religious edifice, usually a pagoda, especially after his ascension to throne. To a devout king like Kyazwa "who emulated his father's piety"<sup>5</sup>, the custom was all the more significant. So he tried to build one, but it was never completed. The Chronicle ascribes the failure to his devotion to religious studies and ill management. Whatever the reasons, he was naturally frustrated and his frustration led to the utterance of the Pali bequest.

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<sup>1</sup> U Kala *Mahāyazawingyi*, Vol. 1, p. 276. Edited by Prof. Pe Maung Tin und Saya Pwar for the Burma research Society and printed by the Hanthawaddy Press, Rangoon, 1960.

<sup>2</sup> Maung Htin Aung: *A History of Burma*, p. 64, Columbia University Press, New York and London, 1967.

<sup>3</sup> This is taken from Harvey with a slight modification. *History of Burma*, pp. 59—60, Octagon Books Inc. New York, 1967.

<sup>4</sup> Professors Pe Maung Tin and G. H. Luce: *The Glass Palace Chronicle*, Burma Research Society, Rangoon.

<sup>5</sup> D. G. E. Hall: *Burma*, p. 24, Hutchinson's University Library, London, 1950.

In fact, Dr Htin Aung has already stated to this effect. In his opinion, the king never completed the construction "because there was no one skillful enough to supervise the construction, and he could not pay the labourers adequately. He would not stoop to completing the temple with forced labour and said proudly: 'In my life, I have done nothing except deeds of virtue'.<sup>6</sup>" There fore it would not be unreasonable to take that the two incidents are related to each other.

The second question is rather tricky. The bequest is curious in its composition and meaning, and it therefore should not be overlooked. As a matter of fact, it is important inasmuch as it reveals an aspect of the king's mentality.

But before tackling this question let us have a look at what *Hmannan Yazawin* has to say in this connection. The account of Kyazwa given in *Hmannan*<sup>7</sup> is almost the same as that in *Mahāyazawingyi* of U Kala. *Hmannan* was written in 1829 and finished two years later<sup>8</sup>. *Mahāyazawingyi* was written during the reign of King Nyaungyan otherwise known as Tanninganwe Min (1714—33)<sup>9</sup>. So the latter was about a hundred years earlier than the former. And as most of the words in the two accounts are identical, it is not unlikely that the compilers of *Hmannan* copied the account in *Mahāyazawingyi*. But *Hmannan* contains a somewhat different bequest:

"*Balavasīlasampanno natthi me samo.*"

A comparison of the two versions of the bequest shows that *Hmannan's* Pale is shorter by three syllables which must have been dropped casually or purposely. Many of the remaining syllables however are the same in the two versions.

As for the translation of *Hmannan's* Pali bequest we have two: one by Professors Pe Maung Tin and Luce and the other by Dr Htin Aung. The translation of the two learned Professors is: "I care for nought save the fulfilment of strong virtue<sup>10</sup>." Dr Htin Aung's, as have been mentioned above, is: "In my life I have done nothing except deeds of virtue<sup>11</sup>." To be honest, either translation is not a happy one. Of the two, the former seems to be better, but it leaves some room to be improved. The latter is not a translation at all; it is not even a free translation. At best, it appears to be repetition of the former in different wordings. As such neither serves our purpose.

The bequest as given in *Hmannan* however should not present any difficulties in translating it. It simply means: "There is no one equal to me being

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<sup>6</sup> *A History of Burma*, p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> *Hmannan Mahāyazawindawgyi*, Vol. 1, p. 334, Pyigyimandaing Press, Rangoon, 1972.

<sup>8</sup> Introduction, *Hmannan*.

<sup>9</sup> "During the reign of Sanay Min's son, Tanninganwe Min, who reigned from 1714 to 1733, great works of liter ry merit were produced throughout the kingdom. Among the famous were U Kala, who wrote the first history of Burma in polished prose, . . .". *A History of Burma*, p. 151.

<sup>10</sup> *The Glass Palace Chronicle*, p. 156.

<sup>11</sup> *A History of Burma*, p. 64.

endowed with strong virtue." It is but a proud bequest! In this vainglorious statement the king is praising himself and contempting others. Is it the true statement of the king? Taking into consideration all the descriptions of his nature as mentioned in the chronicles, it is doubtful that the pious king had actually made this kind of statement. In Harvey's word, he "was even more devout"<sup>12</sup> than his father. "He resigned all business to his son Uzana and spent his hours with the monks memorizing the Tripitaka scriptures and writing devotional works for the palace ladies"<sup>13</sup>. According to *Hmannan* and *Mahāyazawingyi* for that matter, "he had compassion on all the people, both laymen and monks, as though they were children of his bosom"<sup>14</sup>. It is therefore difficult to think that such a king had ever proudly bequeathed. Besides, self praise (*attukkamaṇsa*) and contempt of others (*paravambhana*) are some of the things that a good Buddhist is supposed to avoid according to Buddhist scriptures<sup>15</sup>. It is all the more unthinkable therefore that a king of Kyazwa's standing who had not only mastered the Three Piṭakas but also studied with the noble Order seven times a day should have been so ignorant of the Buddha's teachings and so proud to have made such a statement. The bequest in *Hmannan* therefore is nothing but a misreading or an unsatisfactorily modified version of the one mentioned by U Kala.

Coming back to the bequest in U Kala's Chronicle, the number of syllables and the punctuation suggest that the line is the first or second two *padas* of a *gāthā* (verse), each *pada* having eight syllables: (1) *Sīlavā sīlasampanno* and (2) *natthi na me na vijjati*. But in getting to the exact meaning of the line its prosodial factors need not be taken into consideration. Even the context can be laid aside for the time being.

Now as it stands in the Chronicle and though it is of two *padas*, it can be divided into three parts or sentences: (1) *Sīlavā sīlasampanno natthi*, (2) *na me*, and (3) *na vijjati*. The translation in English then should be "(1) There is no one who is of virtue, who is endowed with virtue, (2) I have none, and (3) he does not exist".

In translating it, the tricky point lies with the second sentence or the second and the third combined. As for the second sentence itself one is tempted at first glance to translate it as "there is no one other than myself (who is virtuous)". This however is not to be accepted as the usage in that sense is grammatically not correct. Though *me* can be taken in the ablative of *aham*, "I", and as such meaning "than me", there is no real adjective whether in the stem, i. e., in the basic form or in the comparative. It cannot be connected even with *sīlavā* or *sīlasampanno* of the first sentence either. The former is just a noun and the latter, though in the form of the past participle, is used here also as a noun.

<sup>12</sup> *History of Burma*, p. 59.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *The Glass Palace Chronicle*, p. 115.

<sup>15</sup> The P. T. S. edition of the *Majjhimi Nikāya*, Vol. 1, p. 402, and 406.

Again, if one takes the sentence *na me* in combination with the last sentence *na vijjati* the translation would be: "It is not that the virtuous does not exist to me." The meaning will then amounts to "it is not that I do not have the virtuous" or simply "I do have the virtuous." This translation is totally uncalled for as it runs against the statement in the first sentence which clearly is in the negative.

The first translation therefore sounds good. But is it really satisfactory? Why should there be three parts of the statement all in the negative just to make one and the same point? It appears clumsy to use three negative sentences for the same purport in so short a line. Although the first sentence is clear, the following two are confusing. The Chronicle ascribes the bequest to the king himself, and if so, surely a man of high learning like King Kyazwa would not have composed something that is not free from *vyākīṇṇadose*, "the fault of making confusion".

It is not improbable therefore that the Chronicler himself has made a mistake in quoting the line from a source or sources of previous writers. When U Kala wrote the chronicle he had before him a number of historical and literary works which provided him with a good deal of material. But one cannot say definitely that U kala had made use of that material always correctly. In fact, as the editors of the *Mahāyazawingyi* have observed, it cannot be assumed that there are no erratic statements made owing to the author's absent mindedness<sup>16</sup>. Or successive scribes through the generations have made a mistake in copying the chronicle. As a matter of fact there are a number of examples of words that are misread or miscopied in Burmese literature. If a word in Burmese can be mistaken for something else, at is all the more likely that a Pali word or a phrase or a sentence is treated wrongly. The editors themselves have noticed certain contradictions or inconsistencies in different versions of the same when they undertook the task of editing it<sup>17</sup>. What then is the real and correct line of King Kyazwa's bequest?

Once the clumsiness of the Pali is accepted, it should not be difficult to re-discover the original, so to speak. My attempt at 're-discovering' the same is as follows: the part *na me* should be corrected as *sa ve*, "he indeed", and it must be connected with the following part *na vijjati*. Then it would read in one full sentence: *sa we na vijjati*, "He (i. e. a virtuous person) indeed does not exist".

The correction erases the clumsiness of the composition without changing the metre or the meaning at all. Prosodially speaking, *na me* and *sa ve* have the same sound qualities, and the metre remains unchanged whatever type it is. As for the meaning it retains the same sad note. "His measures to suppress the laxity of conduct among certain sections of the clergy and to wipe out banditry were not successful. Public opinion against any seizure of

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<sup>16</sup> Introduction, *Mahāyazawingyi*, p. kha. 17. Ibid.

monastic land forced him to return the land<sup>18</sup>." His frustration seemed to have reached its climax when he had to leave his work of merit unfinished. Reflecting upon this series of failures he made a bequest which embodied his pessimistic philosophy<sup>19</sup>:

*"Sīlavā sīlasampanno  
natthi sa ve na vijjati."*

"There is no one who is of virtue, who is endowed with virtue."

"He indeed does not exist."

There could also be a simpler corection. Instead of changing *na me* to *sa ve*, we can change or improve *na me* as *sa me*, "He . . . to me". Then the whole second line or rather sentence would be: *Sa me na vijjati*, "He (ie, a virtuous person) does not exist to me".

The benefits accrued from either of these 're-discovered' lines are better composition and clearer meaning. Better composition because there are only two negatives instead of three. Clearer meaning because the second sentence emphatically supports the first and the whole line does not allow any extra word to creep in to make the reader confused.

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<sup>18</sup> A History of Burma, p. 64. Perhaps the land he had previously taken belonged to the Ari sect whose members did not follow the Theravāda tradition.

<sup>19</sup> Professors Pe Maung Tin and Luce call him philosopher. *The Glass Palace Chronicle*, p. 155.