

**Editorial Note:**

Henry Burney was a scholar, soldier, and diplomat well-known for his numerous contributions to the early British study of Burma as well as the source for equally numerous first-hand observations of the people and country. The following article was published in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 4 (vol. 4, July, 1835, pp. 400-404).

M.W.C.

**Notice of Pagan, the Ancient Capital of the Burmese Empire.**

**Lieut.-Col. Henry Burney**

H. C.'s Resident In Ava

The celebrated Venetian traveller, MARCO POLO, (see MARSDEN'S edition of his Travels, pages 441 to 451,) has given us an account of the war between the Tartars and the people of Mien (the Chinese name for Burmah), which occurred some time after 1272, and led the former to take possession of the then capital of the latter nation. SYMES and CRAWFORD, in the Journals of their Missions to Ava, as well as HAVELOCK and TRANT in their accounts of the late war, have described the extensive remains of Pagan, the former capital of the Burmese empire, lying between Prome and Ava, with its innumerable ruins of temples and columns. Perhaps the following account of the destruction of that city, translated from the 5th volume of the large edition of the Royal Chronicles of the Kings of Ava, (*Maha Yazawen wen dan gyee,*) may be deemed curious. *Pagan*, also called *Pouk-gan* and *Arimaddana*, is stated to have been founded by a king Thamu-dirit, A. D. 107, shortly after the destruction of the *Thorè Khettara* or Prome empire, and the king Narathihapade, in whose reign the Chinese took possession of the city, was the 52nd from the time of its foundation,

“In the Burmese year 643, (A. D. 1281,) the Talain Wareeroo killed the noble Aleimma, who was lord of the city of Mouttama (Martaban), a part of the empire, and set himself up as king there. In the same year, the emperor of China deputed ten nobles with 1000 horsemen, to demand certain gold and silver vessels, on the ground that king Anauratha Men Zau<sup>1</sup> had presented them. Some histories assert that they came to demand a white elephant.

The Chinese envoys conducted themselves in a disrespectful manner in the royal presence, when his majesty ordered the whole of the ten nobles and 1000 horsemen to be put to death. One of the ministers, Nanda Peetzeen, respectfully addressed the King, saying,

---

<sup>1</sup>This King of **Pagan** is said to have invaded China about A. D. 1040, and gold and silver flowers or ornaments are the emblems of tributary subjection among all the **Indo-Chinese** nations.

'Although the envoys of the emperor of China are ignorant of what is due to a king, and have conducted themselves in a disrespectful manner, yet if it seemeth well to your glorious majesty, a report of their conduct should be made to the emperor of China. If it pleaseth your majesty to have patience, and issue such orders as may promote the interests of the country, each orders should be issued. To put ambassadors to death has not been the custom during the whole line of our kings. It will be proper then for your majesty to forbear.'

The king replied, saying,

'They have treated with disrespect such a sovereign as I am; put them to death.'

The officers of government, fearing the royal displeasure, put the whole of the Mission to death, without a single exception.<sup>2</sup>

When the emperor of China received the intelligence of the execution of his envoys, he was exceeding angry, and collecting an army of at least six millions of horse and 20 millions of foot, sent them down to attack Pagan; the king of which, Narattheehapade, as soon as he heard of the coming of this force, placed under the generals Nanda Peetzen and Yanda Peetzen 400,000 soldiers, and numerous elephants and horses, with orders to proceed and attack the Chinese army. The two generals marched to the city of *Nga-young-gyan*, and after putting its walls, ditch, and fortifications in a proper state of defence, opposed the Chinese army at the foot of *Bamau* river, killing, during three months so many of that army, that not a grass-cutter even for its elephants and horses remained. The emperor of China, however, kept reinforcing his army, and replacing those who were killed, by sending 200,000 men, when he heard of the loss of 100,000 men, and 400,000, when he heard of 200,000. Hence the Burman army was at last overpowered with fatigue, and the Chinese crossed the river and destroyed *Nga-young gyan*.

As the *Nats* or spirits attached to either nation were fighting together in the air, four of the Pagan *Nats*, namely, *Tebathen*, (the guardian of one of the gates of Pagan city,) *Tsalen wot-thaken young Nat*, *Kan shyee young Nat* (guardian of the long lake or tank), and *Toung gye yen Nat* (lord of the foot of the mountain), were wounded by arrows. In the new *Yazawen*, *Tebathen Nat* is styled *Thanbethen*. On the very day on which the stockade of *Nga-young-gyan* was taken, the *Nat Tebathen* returned to Pagan, and entered the house of the king's teacher, on whom he had always been accustomed to wait. The king's teacher was asleep at the time; but the *Nat* shook and awakened him, and said,

'*Nga-young-gyan* has been destroyed this day. I am wounded by an arrow, and the *Nats Tsalen-wot-thaken*, *Kan shyee* and *Toung gye yen* are also wounded in the same manner.'

---

<sup>2</sup> There is some kind of tradition at *Ava*, that the Chinese envoys insisted upon appearing in the royal presence with their boots or shoes on.

The priest and king's teacher called one of his disciples, a young probationer, and sent him to the king to report the loss of *Nga-young-gyan*. His majesty inquired how this circumstance was known, when the young probationer declared, that the *Nat Tebathen*, guardian of the *Tharabha* gate, had just arrived from *Nga-young gyan*, and reported the matter to the king's teacher, who had thus learned, that that place had been destroyed on that very day.

"The king then summoned a council of his ministers and officers, and addressed them as follows;

'The walls of the city of *Pugan* are low, and enclose too small a space to permit all the soldiers and elephants and horses to remain comfortably within, and defend them. I propose therefore to build a strong wall, extending from the eastward, from the village of *Balen*, in the upper part of the river, straight down to the southward, taking in the village *Yonatha*. But it is not possible just now to procure bricks and stones quickly; if we break down some of the temples, and use the bricks, we shall be able to complete this wall most expeditiously.'

Accordingly, 1000 large arched temples, 1000 smaller ones, and 4000 square temples were destroyed. During this operation, a sheet of copper, with a royal prediction inscribed on it, was found in one of the temples. The words were as follows:

'In the city of *Pugan*, in the time of the father of twins, the Chinese destroying, will be destroyed.'

The king thereupon made inquiries among the royal women, and learnt, that a young concubine had just given birth to twins.

As his majesty now believed, that even if he built the intended fortification, he would be unable to defend it, he caused 1000 boats with figure heads and war-boats, to be made ready, and embarked in them all his gold and silver and treasures; a thousand cargo boat's, also, he loaded with paddy and rice; in a thousand state boats lie embarked all his ministers and officers, and in the gilded state boats, his concubines and female attendants. But as the boats could not accommodate all the royal concubines and female attendants, who were very numerous, the king said,

These women and servants are too numerous) to be all embarked in the boats, and if we leave them here, the Chinese will seize and take possession of them; tie their hands and feet together, therefore, and throw them into the river.'

The king's teacher however observed,

'[I]n the whole circle of animal existence the state of man is the most difficult of attainment, and to attain that state during the time of a Buddha, is also most difficult. There can be no occasion for your majesty to commit the evil deed of throwing these people into the water. Such an act will be for ever talked of even among kings, and will be registered in the records of the empire. Let your majesty therefore grant permission for any person to take such of the royal female attendants as cannot be embarked in

the royal boats, and by so doing, your majesty will be said not only to have granted them their lives, but to have afforded them protection.'

The king replied, 'Very true,' and set at liberty 300 of the female servants of the interior of the palace, who were taken and carried away by different inhabitants of the city.

The king then embarked in his gilded accommodation boat, and retired to the Talain city of Bathein (Bassien).

Nanda Peetzeen and Yanda Peetzeen, after the loss of *Nga-young-gyan*, retreated and built a couple of stockades on the eastward slope of the male mountain, where they again resisted the Chinese. Both the generals, holding some *fixed quicksilver*<sup>3</sup> in their mouths, leaped 15 and 16 cubits high in the air at a time, and attacked the Chinese; but whilst fighting in this manner, an arrow, which had been discharged by one of the *Nats* of the two countries, who were contending in the air, struck Nanda Peetzeen, and threw him to the ground lifeless. In consequence of this event, and the Chinese army being very numerous, victory was unattainable, and defeat again ensued. The Chinese pursued vigorously, and the Pagan generals retreated, keeping their force as much together as possible. On arriving at *Pagan*, and finding that the king and the whole of the population had left that city and fled to the *Talain* country, the army followed them to *Bathein*.

The Chinese continued the pursuit until they reached *Taroup*<sup>4</sup> *maur*, but their army, owing to the great distance which it had marched, and its great numbers, began to experience a scarcity of provisions; and was induced to turn back from that place.

In the Burmese year 646 (A. D. 1284), *two pat* or quarters wanting to complete the 27th lunar asterism, the king Naratheeha-pade fled in fear of the Chinese. Hence he is styled *Taroup-pye-men*, the king who fled from the Chinese."

After remaining five months at Bassien, the King, hearing that the Chinese had retreated from Pagan, made arrangements for returning thither. On his way up the river, it is recorded on one occasion, his cooks having been able to serve him up a dinner of only 150 dishes, instead of the 300, to which he had always sat down every day, he covered his face with his hands and wept, saying, 'I am become a poor man.' Shortly after on his arrival off Prome, he was poisoned by his own son, the governor of that place.

The building at *Pagan*, which MARCO POLO calls 'a sepulchre of the king,' must have been one of the large Buddhist temples, containing some relics of *Gaudama*. The body of a deceased king of Ava is usually burnt within the palace enclosed, and the bones and relics carefully collected in some vessel, and thrown, into the *Irawádi* river.

Like the early kings of England, named *Rufus*, *Beauclerk*, *Lackland*, *Longshanks*, &c., most of the Burmese kings are distinguished by some *sobriquet* or particular appellation. A king,

---

<sup>3</sup> Among the Burmese alchemists, fixed, or as they call it dead, quicksilver, if an object of great desire, owing to the *miraculous* power which it is said to confer on the possessor.

<sup>4</sup> Chinese Point, the same as SYMES'S *Tirroup-mion*.

Narathu, who was killed by some *Kulas* or natives of India from Chittagong, about the year 1171, is styled *Kula-gya-men*, the king who fell or was killed by *Kulas*. Another of *Toungu*. or *Toungugu*, who was taken prisoner and carried away from *Toungugu* to *Syriam*, by the celebrated Portuguese chief, PHILIP DE BRITO and NICOTE, about the year 1612, called *Kula-yamen*, the king whom the *Kulas* obtained or seized. See Modern Universal History, vol. 7th, page 118.

In the Sketch<sup>5</sup> of the remains of Pagan, the large pagoda on the *proper* right, is called *Ananda*; it was built by a king Kyan-zeet-tha, who reigned between A. D. 1064 and 1093, and was repaired by the father of the present king of Ava, in 1795, when Captain SYMES visited the place. The pagoda on the high point of land, washed by the river, is called *Langa Nanda*; it was built by Anauratha-zan, who reigned between A. D. 1017 and 1059.

---

<sup>5</sup> We regret extremely that the number of plates in the present No. precludes the admission of the sketch to which the author alludes.—Ed.