

**Translator's note:**

This travelogue was published in *Wachirayan*, a semi-official journal whose contributors included King Chulalongkorn, his brothers and other senior Thai officials. The author of this work, Chao Fa Naritsara Nuwattiwong (Prince Naris), was a younger brother (aged 26) of King Chulalongkorn. He was the Director of Public Works in the Thai government and an officer in the Thai army. In November 1888, he set out on an official tour of Burma and went as far inland as Mandalay.<sup>1</sup> Less than three years earlier, when King Thi-baw was still on his throne, no Thai official could have imagined such a journey. Indeed, the author vividly describes the prevailing Thai view of the Burmese government as one of abhorrence and a lingering desire for revenge, in retaliation for the Burmese invasions of the eighteenth century.

For the amusement and edification of readers of *Wachirayan*, who were the élite of Bangkok in his day, he began to write an account of his journey. This article takes the reader to Rangoon and then up the Irrawaddy as far as Min-hla. Prince Naris planned to continue the narrative of his river journey from Min-hla to Mandalay and back, adding an account of recent political events leading up to the British annexation of upper Burma. After completing this first article, however, he apparently abandoned the project, and the full account of his journey never materialised. He may, however, have written an official but confidential military and political report when he returned to Bangkok, and that report may be in the archives of the Ministry of Defence.

This article was reprinted, together with four similar travelogues, in a volume entitled *Doi san rüa me pai yurop khòng krom phraya damrong thiao müang phama phra khiao kaeo khòng krom phraya narit pai müang toeki khòng krom phraya damrong thiao india khòng krom phra nakhòn sawan* [A Voyage by Mailboat to Europe, by Prince Damrong; A Journey through Burma and a Journey to the Sacred Tooth Shrine, by Prince Naris; A Trip to Turkey, by Prince Damrong; and a Journey to India, by Prince Paribatra] (Khurusapha Press, Bangkok, 1961).

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1. I have not consulted the original publication in *Wachirayan* and compared it with the reprinted version. This article was written between the author's late-1888 journey to Burma and the opening of the Rangoon-Mandalay railway line (see paragraph 27). K.B.

Even though incomplete, it may be of some value to historians. It reflects the attitudes, prejudices and admitted ignorance of the Thai élite vis-à-vis the Burmese at the end of the Burmese monarchy. It may also contain some minor factual observations useful to historical research.

K. B.

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## A JOURNEY THROUGH BURMA [IN 1888]

**H.R.H. Prince Naritsara Nuwattiwong**  
**Translated by Kennon Breazeale**

1       What is the landscape of Burma like? What all goes on there? What kinds of activities do the people of this national group engage in? Each and every one of my readers, if I correctly divine your minds, must want to know about the landscape of Burma, all that goes on there and the activities of the people in that country, because the Burmese are a large nation, and their homeland is contiguous with that of the Thai. The two peoples really ought to treat each other as friends and be supportive of each other—which would be greatly beneficial to both. But they have not acted in that way. To the contrary, they have been divided as enemies and have inflicted harm on each other in a variety of ways. These facts are recorded in many old writings, such as our royal annals.

2       The reason for the great abhorrence and desire for revenge that the Thai tended to feel towards the Burmese in general is that the Burmese attacked and captured Ayutthaya and caused widespread disorder throughout our homeland. Since an inborn passionate nature resides within each person, the Thai were of one mind in wanting to pay the Burmese back. But as it happened, the Thai found no opportunity to fulfil this wish and thus could not rid themselves of this abhorrence and desire for revenge. Subsequently, even the people who were born at a later time detested the Burmese, even though they themselves were never thrown into disorder because of what the Burmese did and even though they had no knowledge of what the Burmese looked like or how they acted. They did know what the Burmese had done to the Thai who were our forebears and fellow nationals, because the literate ones all read about the past and the illiterate ones all heard accounts of past times. This was what scratched at their hearts and always made them itch to pay the Burmese back. So long as this desire remained unfulfilled, the desire for revenge did not disappear.

3 It was this abhorrence of and vengefulness towards the very name of the Burmese nation that made me want to see what the Burmese look like, what goes on in that country and what the landscape is like. For these reasons, having been there myself in the Year of the Rat, tenth in the decade, the Lesser Era year 1250 [AD April 1888 – April 1889], and having observed what could be observed, during a single visit, of all that goes on in that country, I shall, in keeping with my readers' desires, relate to all of you what I discovered and witnessed. The reading of this work, when you are at leisure, will provide you with amusement and enhance your knowledge about things you never knew.

4 It will be necessary for me to provide a somewhat lengthy description of the geographical features of Burma, so that my readers can clearly perceive the extent of the country's population and what commercial goods it has. I fear that these descriptions will not be necessary for those readers who do not care to know about such matters. Were I to omit them, however, it would not be beneficial to the readers who do need to know them. For this reason, I must apologise to the readers who do not need detailed geographical descriptions. Please bear with me and skip across to what you do need.

5 Now I shall describe my visit to Burma and give an abbreviated account of my itinerary, starting out from Bangkok on Tuesday, the tenth day of the waning moon in the eleventh month of the Year of the Rat, tenth in the decade, the Lesser Era year 1250 [30 October 1888]<sup>2</sup>. I travelled by sea on the mail steamer, arrived at Singapore on Saturday, the fourteenth day of the waning moon [3 November], and stayed there four days. I left Singapore on Wednesday, the fourth day of the waxing moon in the twelfth month [7 November], arrived at Pinang Island<sup>3</sup> on Friday, the sixth day of the waxing moon [9 November], and stayed there for seven days. I left Pinang on Friday, the thirteenth day of the waxing moon [16 November], arrived at Rangoon<sup>4</sup> on Tuesday, the second day of the waning moon in the twelfth month [20 November], and stayed there for two days.

6 Here I shall give a detailed account of my itinerary from Rangoon up to Mandalay, which is a Burmese capital. I started out on Thursday, the fourth day of

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2. At the time of this journey, the lunar calendar was still the official calendar of the Thai government. It was replaced (beginning 1 April 1889) by the western calendar of twelve months, although with April still counted as the first month of the Thai year. Western-calendar equivalents have been added in brackets by the translator. K.B.

3 The author used the Thai name by which Pinang has always been generally known to the Thai: Kò Mak, meaning 'Betelnut Island'. K.B.

4. Imitating the Burmese pronunciation, the author replaces the initial *R* in the name Rangoon with a *Y*. He adds parenthetically an amusing Thai equivalent of the name (*yang kung*), which appears in nineteenth century political documents and which in Thai literally means 'to roast shrimp'. K.B.

the waning moon in the twelfth month [22 November]. At dusk I boarded the mailship *Bilu*, a side-wheeler steamboat with a flat bottom and shallow draught, which was moored at the company's<sup>5</sup> landing, and slept on board. At the third watch [about midnight to 3 o'clock in the morning] the boat left the landing and sailed down-river. It did not go down as far as the sea, but took a short-cut along a connecting waterway and moored at the river-mouth known as China Bakir. Some of my readers who have not seen the detailed map that has been made of Burma will be unable to understand what I am saying here. Maps that have not been made specifically in detail will be too small in scale to show the waterway along which I was travelling, thus making it difficult for you to understand my description. For this reason, permit me to give just a bit more explanation about the route, so that you can understand just a little more easily.

7 Rangoon and Mandalay are not on the same river. The Rangoon River lies to the east, and Mandalay's river (which is called the Irrawaddy) lies to the west. The two river-mouths flow into the sea about 150 kilometres apart. Along the coast halfway between the two, there is another river-mouth called China Bakir. It is at the confluence of two waterways, one of which connects to the Rangoon River and the other to the Irrawaddy. The Irrawaddy is a great river. Even the upper reaches of the Rangoon River connect to the Irrawaddy, but that is not a suitable route for the mail boats to sail on. They must therefore back-track down-river and enter the Irrawaddy either by skirting the seacoast or by passing along the connecting waterway, coming out at China Bakir and then entering the waterway that connects to the Irrawaddy. Since the mail boats are of shallow draught and cannot withstand the wind and waves on the open sea, they therefore divert their course along the short-cut into the connecting waterway and make a stop at the China Bakir river-mouth.

8 As soon as it was dawn on Friday, the fifth day of the waning moon of the twelfth month [23 November], the boat set out and went up along the waterway that connects to the Irrawaddy. The river is big and wide – about 40 leagues [1.6 kilometres] wide on average – along the stretch where I was passing that day. In some places sandbanks were protruding out from the shore. The river on average is only 8 cubits [4 metres] deep. On both banks there are villages, each of about twenty or thirty dwellings in the form of small huts. There is a village at every bend or two along the river. A few fruit trees are planted in these villages on the flat ground out at the edge of the river-banks. Most are mangos and bananas, although there are a few areca palms and coconut palms. Judging from their ages, they seem to have been recently planted – within the last four or five years. The

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5. The Irrawaddy Flotilla Company provided regularly scheduled transport by steamers on all the major inland waterways at this time. K.B.

local people along this stretch make their living as fishermen. I saw no trading boats. I saw only small boats belonging to villagers who were out cutting fuel wood. The mail boat that plies along here has to stop momentarily in each area to change pilots. At just after 5 o'clock in the afternoon, we reached the village of Yan-dun. The boat moored alongside the landing, and I spent the night on board.

9 It was after 5 o'clock in the morning, when it was light enough to see the way, that the paddle-wheeler set out from Yan-dun and went up along the waterway. On Saturday, the sixth day of the waning moon in the twelfth month [24 November], there were more large sandbanks along the stretch of river after departing Yan-dun than on the previous day. The river-banks extend about two arms-spans [4 metres] above the water. The countryside consists partly of paddy fields and partly of thickets of trees. The houses in the successive villages became more and more numerous—up to 100 or 200 dwellings in each. Some of the local people along this stretch grow tobacco, some grow cotton and some are fishermen.

10 We encountered about twenty Burmese trading boats that were 4 to 5 arms-spans [8-10 metres] in length. These large trading boats resemble our own *lao*-type<sup>6</sup> boats, but the Burmese boats are just a little more spacious in appearance. The small boats for fishing and gathering firewood are the same as our very own royal processional boats for *kathin* [end-of-Lent bhikkhu-robe-presentation] ceremonies, only rather small. They are the size of our *pha-ma* boats and have a bulwark above the bow, the same as our *pha-ma* boats.

11 Our term *pha-ma* [pronouncing *ma* with a high tone] actually should be *pha-ma* [pronouncing *ma* with a falling tone and meaning 'Burmese']. In the past our *pha-ma* boats must have been the same type as these 'Burmese' boats I have mentioned, except that they gradually diverged from each other in construction and have thus become somewhat different in shape. One can none the less see that they are hardly very different.

12 Along this stretch after leaving Yan-dun, the boat had to stop and change pilots at every large village.

13 It was after 10 o'clock in the morning when we reached Henzada. The boat moored alongside the landing, discharging and taking on board passengers and cargo. This place has a monastery and about 500 dwellings for the local people. There are two strange wooden buildings with corrugated zinc roofs—probably the

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6. The generic term 'Lao' was used by the central Thai well into the twentieth century in reference to the inhabitants of the upper Chao Phraya basin as well as the Lao of the central and upper Mekong. The author is not referring to a boat of the type used by the Lao people of the Mekong basin but to the native boats used by the Tai-Yuan (Müang or Northern Thai) on rivers such as the Ping. K.B.

homes of Europeans. All the others are houses of bamboo. Their population here numbers about 3,000. After remaining at the mooring for about 30 minutes, the boat left the landing and went on its way along the waterway.

14 There were many large sandbanks from Henzada onward. They extended in some places as far as the eye can see. The banks everywhere are as much as 3 arms-spans [6 metres] or more in height. The dwellings are set apart at a distance, and there are twenty or thirty of them per village. There are many deserted monasteries. The villagers make a living primarily as fishermen. There are some fruit trees—a few of each kind—in the villages. Other than that, there is nothing but open fields or undergrowth. The paddle-wheeler stopped to change pilots for every stretch between large villages. At dusk we arrived at Mya-naung, and the boat moored there overnight.

15 On Sunday, the seventh day of the waning moon of the twelfth month [25 November], the paddle-wheeler left Mya-naung and went on its way along the waterway. Along this stretch of the route, the countryside is partly open fields, partly hills and partly mountains. In one place the cliffs drop precipitously straight down into the water. There is a Buddhist monument on the mountain top. Both large and small niches are carved into the rock in the face of the cliff, from the water's edge upward, and each niche houses a Buddha image in one of the four mudras: that is, sitting, reclining, standing or walking. I would estimate that there are no fewer than 400 or 500 of them. The dwellings of the local people in this area are no different from the stretch that I already described. The villagers make their living partly by fishing and partly by growing tobacco.

16 It was after the noon hour when we reached Pye. The boat made a stop there, moving in and mooring alongside the landing. The name of this town is one that is familiar to us Thai, but we modify the pronunciation to 'Prae'. Our pronunciation of the name, despite the modification, is still better than that of the English, who are actually in possession of the town. They call it 'Prome'.

17 In the afternoon, I walked up to take a look at the town. Pye is laid out along the east bank of the river. The dwellings of the local people are in a long line extending about 80 leagues [3.2 kilometres] along the river and about 40 leagues [1.6 kilometres] inland. There are streets throughout. Some are old streets that have been improved, and others have been newly constructed. Most are covered with crushed rock. Farther on, behind the groups of houses, are the paddy fields. When Pye became British, the original palace structures were still in existence. I was told that the palace was surrounded by a wooden palisade and that the palace buildings were all of teak wood – the same as our own wood-walled buildings.

They were old and in very poor condition, and none of them were actually of any use. The British administrators therefore divided off the whole palace area and sold it to someone who wanted to buy it. The new owner then pulled down the old structures and has built new houses there. It was thus not very long ago that the palace passed out of existence.

18 Along the river-bank road where I was taking my walk, the post office and a clubhouse are at the boat landing itself. Farther along are a school and then the government office building, which houses also the lawcourt. Beyond these buildings are a succession of brick houses and wooden houses in which Europeans reside.

19 My readers can probably imagine clearly what all there is in Pye, from what I have already stated, because the things that I have mentioned by name are the ones of interest. But anyway, I shall explain somewhat more in detail so that my readers will understand.

20 The boat landing where people go ashore and go aboard consists of a large and aged boat, which is fixed in position at the river-bank. Two wooden planks extend out from the boat to the edge of the bank. When the mailboat arrives, it moors alongside this fixed-position boat. Disembarking passengers go aboard the fixed-position boat and then clamber along two wooden planks to the edge of the river-bank. They then have to climb up another level, which is more than three arms-spans [6 metres] high. That is, they have to climb the river-bank itself. And if they stumble, they are going to get a bath and be hurt as well!<sup>7</sup>

21 The clubhouse that stands directly above this point is a wooden building with three rooms of smallish size. I cannot actually think of anything with which to compare the size of this clubhouse. It is just a bit larger than the pavilions at our Royal Chapel. Its floor is about a hand-span [25 centimetres] above ground level. When I peered inside, I did not see anything except torn mats lying in disorder. Anyone seeing the place with no one to tell him about it would never think it was the meeting place for some association. He would think that it was just a guardroom of some sort or other.

22 The waterworks structure stands on a site that has the appearance of an old monastery, including a bodhi tree, two leogryphs made of brick and a pile of broken bricks scattered about. The place is overgrown with some kind of vegetation or other, but there is a pathway leading inside. The waterworks

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7. Most of the author's readers were familiar only with the river-banks of the Chao Phraya, which are scarcely higher than the level of the water on the river. The much higher river-banks of the Irrawaddy must have seemed strange to them. K.B.

structure consists of tall brick walls surmounted by the watertank, which serves as the roof. It is a bit larger than the tall one at our Khun Nang Landing. Beneath it is the pumping machinery. To describe everything here would be rather tedious.

23 Other things besides these are much the same as what I have already stated, except for the government offices, which are spacious and a bit showy. The government office building is a long one without decoration. In appearance it resembles our Ratsadakòn Phiphat Hall before it was modified and expanded. I walked on as far as the telegraph office and then turned along the road that leads to the centre of town. The houses are in a thick cluster and all of bamboo.

24 When I reached the Shwei San-daw reliquary stupa, I went in to pay homage. This stupa is an important national monument. It stands on a small hill, the height of which, from the foot up to the base of the stupa, is about 20 arms-spans [40 metres]. The stupa is about 15 arms-spans [30 metres] high, from base to pinnacle, and the entire structure is covered with gold. The enclosure that encircles and surrounds the ambulatory terrace of the stupa is filled with various large and small Buddha images that have been placed there. At intervals round the front beyond the enclosure are columns from which the temple bells are suspended. There is a constant stream of people going inside to pay reverence and to strike the great bells, which sound forth, day in and day out, with deep reverberations. At both the front and rear of the monument, are staircases extending from the enclosure down to the foot of the hill. At the foot of the front staircase is a statue about 10 metres tall of a leogryphe—something that the Burmese are fond of building. The villagers come to the steps on the front side. Along the entire length at both sides of the staircase, they sell candles, incense sticks, gold leaf and a variety of items for paying reverence. Mostly everything within the precincts of this stupa is decayed and in poor condition. The pious villagers have collected funds for repairs but have not got enough money to make repairs throughout the precincts. They will probably restore only the stupa itself.

25 After taking a look all round the stupa precincts, we went out and along the road at the end of town and came to the railway lodgings. There are many buildings for both lodging and storing goods. One building has been converted into a fortified structure, with gun slits pierced through the walls. A trench has been dug, and defensive earthworks have been thrown up. This building provides the police with a stronghold for encounters with Burmese rebels, who tend to band together to cause various kinds of trouble such as destroying the railway trains.

26 Even nowadays the rebels are always snatching the belongings of passengers on the trains that run between Rangoon and Pye. Passengers have to be

very careful, and people are constantly complaining about things disappearing. Quite recently, one passenger aboard a night-time train was murdered by a rebel, who took away all the passenger's belongings and covered the corpse with a blanket—as though it were someone asleep! During the period that I was in the country, I was told that they were still unable to find the culprit or make an arrest.

27 This railway line was built specifically up to Pye. The line that will go up to Mandalay is under construction northward from Rangoon by way of Pegu and Toungoo, while in the north it is under construction southward from Mandalay—each side converging on the other. When I was there, the construction work had not yet linked up. I was subsequently informed that it has been finished and that the line has been put in service.

28 I looked about Pye until the time was up. I then returned to the moored *Bilu* and spent the night on board.

29 On Monday, the eighth day of the waning moon of the twelfth month [26 November], the paddle-wheeler left Pye at 7 o'clock in the morning and went up-river. The land along both banks in this segment is mostly hilly and mountainous. The banks rise about 5 arms-spans [10 metres] above the level of the river. The houses of the local people are made of bamboo and are in groups of twenty or thirty, with distances of about 50-60 leagues [2.0-2.4 kilometres] between them. Some of the villagers in this area make their living by growing tobacco, some by growing beans or nuts and some by cutting a species of small bamboo.

30 It was past 11 o'clock in the morning when the boat reached Thayet-myo, where it moored alongside the landing to load and unload cargo and passengers. There are only a few Chinese- and European-style buildings here, and some other buildings are under construction. For the most part, though, there are only the bamboo-type houses that I mentioned already. At the northern end of this village is a large fort, which the British built after they captured lower Burma. They agreed on a division of territory between lower and upper Burma at this point, and hence built the fort as a stronghold for defence at the point where the territories met. I had thought that I would go up and take a bit of a look at the layout of this fort. But I was unable to go. After making enquiries, I found out that it is a long walk and that I would probably not return before the departure time of the boat. The boat remained there about 30 minutes and then left the landing and went up-river. When the boat got up to the northern end of the village, I saw the fort that I have described but had no way of knowing what it was like because of the distance. I could see only its white walls and the green grass planted there.

31 The geographical features of the route above Thayet-myo resemble those

of the stretch above Pye. It was after 3 o'clock in the afternoon when the boat passed the sandy bend at Sin-baung-we. In 1885 the British marched up to the pass in the hills above this sandy bend and attacked upper Burma. The Burmese troops were lying in wait and had their first engagement with the British soldiers there. Along the segment of the route above here, the larger houses of the villagers tend to be fenced in by sturdy enclosures made of wooden pilings, each the size of two clenched fists [about 40 cm in diameter]. These parts are infested with rebels, and the enclosures are therefore strongly built, to make it difficult to enter and pillage.

32 About 600 leagues [24 kilometres] above Sin-baung-we, one comes to the Bhaddanaga ['Magnificent Serpent'] Fortress, which was built by Italian engineers for a Burmese king named Min-don. It stands above the ridge on the east bank of the Irrawaddy. This fort appears to occupy a strategic site, and they say that it was very strongly built. When the British troops marched up and attacked [in 1885], however, the Burmese put up no defence. Instead, they abandoned the fort and fled. If no one had told me, I would never have known that it was a fort, because the British used explosives to demolish it completely. The only remnants are a couple of sections of whitish walls that can be seen from the boat. After 5 o'clock in the evening, we reached Min-hla, which is about 80 leagues [3.2 kilometres] beyond the fortress.

33 There is an old fort at the river's edge on the west bank here in Min-hla. The brick walls enclosing it were built on a square plan, and there are earthworks in the interior. The walls are about 3 arms-spans [6 metres] high. Apparently there was no crenellation, but I cannot say for certain, because I saw the traces of openings pierced in the walls for guns. These apertures, however, are not cleanly cut, and one could even say that they had been gouged out. Also, the spacing between apertures is uneven. Actually, there is no need to conclude whether there was any crenellation. Even if there had been any, or even if there were not, the crenellation would have been useless in either case, because the parapet (or crenellation) was very low. It looks as though it would have shielded the soldiers who went up to stand on duty on the earthworks only up to their knees. The British soldiers who were posted to this fort had to erect a fence above the parapet and create an additional level, because it was so easy to fall off! The area of the fort is about 1,600 square arms-spans [6,400 square metres]. I saw the roofs of two insignificant little buildings inside. The Burmese put up a stiff resistance at this fort against the British the second time.

34 There are more than 300 houses here, all of bamboo. The boat stopped here, and I spent the night on board.

35 The accounts of the Burmese encounters with the British from Sin-baung-

we up to Min-hla are really rather amusing. But I must put these accounts off and not yet talk about them here, so that I can combine them with a later section, in which I shall discuss political affairs in Burma.<sup>8</sup>

36 At dawn on Tuesday, the ninth day of the waning moon of the twelfth month [27 November], the paddle-wheeler set out from this place and went up-river. The segment from Min-hla to the main channel of the river is about 120 leagues [4.8 kilometres], and there were lots of sandbanks extending out from the river-banks. The land is partly flat and partly hilly. The local people in this vicinity make a living partly by cutting consignments of bamboo and partly by building boats.

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8. Prince Naris intended to continue his narrative in subsequent articles in *Wachirayan*, but he never published any of the continuation. Judging from this passage, a report by Prince Naris on the 1885 Anglo-Burmese war and events in upper Burma during 1886-8 may be in the archives of the Royal Secretariat and the Ministry of Defence in Bangkok. K.B.