

How “Mrauk-U” was translated into Monkey’s Egg

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1. Introduction

The kingdom of Rakhaing or Arakan was sub-divided into four regions. Northern Arakan was called Dhanyawaddy, the Ramree Island was called Ramawaddy, Thandwe Region in the south was called Dwarawaddy and the Man Aung Island was named Megawaddy. Since almost all of the capital cities were in the north except for the very first legendary Dwarawaddy Dynasty at Thandwe, generally, the capital city was also named Dhanyawaddy.

The last Capital City of Arakan or Rakhaing Kingdom was named Mrauk-U and established in 1430 A.D. by King Saw Mun or Min Saw Mun (Man Saw Muan in Rakhaing pronunciation and later Rakhaing pronunciation will be added in parenthesis). This city was also known to foreigners as Arakan City or Yakhaing Myo (Rakhaing Mro) as well as Dhanyawaddy.

After the Burmese conquest in 1784 this city became the Residence City of the Burmese Viceroy¹ then and the Burmese called that city with their own pronunciation Myauk-U. Only after the British annexation of Arakan in 1826, British rulers changed the capital from Myauk-U (Mrauk U) to the small island of Sittwe (Site-twee) on account of sickness among their troops stationed at Myauk-U (Mrauk U). Since that time Myauk-U (Mrauk U) was called Myo Haung (Mro Haung) meaning Old City and declined eventually to a small town.

Myauk-U (Mrauk U) could be roughly translated either as 'The Holy City in the North' or the First (Capital) City in the North'. It can also be translated as 'The First Accomplishment' according to a famous legend; however, it became 'Monkey-Egg' because of Burmese pronunciation.

The Burmese normally do not enunciate the sound 'Ra' but only the sound 'Ya' for both scripts or alphabets 'Ra' and 'Ya'.² The Arakanese differentiate these two sounds properly. For the Arakanese people 'Mrauk' is 'the North' and 'Myauk' is 'Monkey', however, in the Burmese pronunciation both, i.e. 'North' as well as 'Monkey'; are homonyms 'Myauk'.

¹ In fact he was the "Myowun" of Dhanyawaddy appointed by the Burmese king. Myowun is a ruler of a town or a province on behalf of the king, hence, equivalent to a governor or a viceroy. The meaning of viceroy given by the Oxford Dictionary is: "A person governing as the deputy of a sovereign". The meaning given by the Webster Dictionary is: "The governor of a country or province who rules as a representative of his king or sovereign". Dr. A. Judson too, translated Myowun of Rangoon as 'The Viceroy of Rangoon'. Since Dr. Judson was an American, that means a native speaker of English language, I took the liberty and used his translation though the meaning of viceroy as well as governor general given in modern English-Burmese Dictionaries is Bayinkhan Choke. This term is a later development. Maurice Collis, on the other hand, used the term 'the Burmese Governor of Arakan'. The meaning of governor given in modern English-Burmese Dictionaries is Bayin Khan.

² Ironically, the Burmese metropol Yangon became Rangoon to foreigners because of Rakhaing or Arakanese pronunciation. After the conquest of lower Burma in the mid 18th century, the Burmese king Alaung Phaya changed the name of a port city called Dagon, which traditionally belonged to the Mon Kingdom, to Yangon. The pronunciation according to spelling should be Ran-Kon, which can be literally translated as 'all the quarrels are finished' or 'all of the enemies are gone'. The literal pronunciation of that name should be 'Ran-Gon', however, since the Burmese normally do not enunciate the sound 'Ra' but only the sound 'Ya' for both scripts or alphabets 'Ra' and 'Ya', they called the town 'Yangon'. A foreign ship captain asked an interpreter, who happened to be an Arakanese or Rakhaing, about the new name of the port city. The interpreter said in the Rakhaing or Arakanese pronunciation 'Ran-Gon'. Hence, the town was called Rangoon in English and Rangun in German.

Whether Min Saw Mun (Man Saw Muan) named that city after the legend 'The First Accomplishment' or 'The Holy City of the North', nobody knows nowadays. In this article, the present author intends to clear out why this city became 'Monkey-Egg' and how a fabricated myth was created.

2. History:

In the year A.D 1404 the king of Arakan was Min Saw Mun (Man Saw Muan) and the capital city was Longkyet (Longkrat). He liked the very beautiful wife of a minister and requested that minister, his wife to be presented to the king and in exchange the minister would receive two pretty maids of honour. When the minister refused, the king offered to give four maids of honour as an exchange, but all in vain. Hence, the king took the minister's wife by force. Committing adultery with a married lady is always a big scandal for a Buddhist, especially for a king. The husband of that lady and her brother went to Ava, the Burmese capital, and requested Min Gaung (Man Gaung), the Burmese king, that he should overthrow the disgraced Min Saw Mun (Man Saw Muan) of Arakan. The Burmese kings of the Ava Empire, especially for King Min Gaung (Man Gaung), automatically considered Arakan as their vassal state because Arakan was feudatory to the Pagan Empire of the Burmese, and apart from that Min Gaung was a war-like king. During the reign of his father King Swa Saw Ke, the young prince Min Gaung personally did lead the Burmese invasion armies to Pegu, the Mon kingdom ruled by King Razadiriz.

So, in the year 1406, Min Gaung (Man Gaung), the king of the Burmese, sent his warrior son Min Ye Kyaw Zwa (Man Ree Kyaw Zwa) with a big army. Min Saw Mun (Man Saw Muan), the king of Arakan fled the kingdom and took refuge in Gaur, the capital of the Sultanate of Bengal. In this way Min Saw Mun (Man Saw Muan) became the last king of the Longkyet (Longkrat) Dynasty and was given a nick name by later historians as "the King who took refuge in the Land of Kalas (Indians)".

The Burmese let their viceroy, a son in law of the Burmese king Min Gaung, rule Arakan. The Arakanese king's younger brother Min Kayi (Man Kari), "Duke of Thandwe", the crown prince then, went to Pegu, the Mon capital, and requested the

Mons, archrival of the Burmese, for help. With the help of Razadiriz (*Raja di Raja*), king of the Mons, he liberated Longkrat, killed the Burmese viceroy. He also sent Min Gaung's daughter to Pegu as a gift to the Mon king. He could rule Arakan on behalf of his brother, but only for a short period. The second Burmese invasion in A.D 1408 headed by Min Ye Kyaw Zwa (Man Ree Kyaw Zwa) followed. This time the Burmese armies invaded Longkrat, Thandwe and the Kingdom of the Mons simultaneously. The Mon armies in Arakan had to go back to defend their own kingdom. The Arakanese king's younger brother Min Khayi (Man Khari), the prince regent then, had to take refuge by the Mons while his elder brother took refuge by the Sultan of Gaur.

Min Saw Mun (Man Saw Muan) stayed in Gaur for more than 22 years. With the help of the Sultan of Bengal he regained his throne in A.D 1430, and built the new capital of Mrauk U, while the Burmese were very busy having wars against the Mons. Myauk-U (Mrauk-U) could be roughly translated as 'The Holy City of the North' as well as 'The First Accomplishment'.

3. The legend:

U San Shwe Bu³ referred to a legend as follows:

In order to arrive at a clear understanding of the events that led to the first naming of the place "Mrauk-U" which gave its name to the present city, it is necessary for us to go back nearly five centuries from the time Min Saw Mwan built the city in 1430 A.D.

Sula Taing Sandra (951-957 A.D.) the ninth king of Wesali was shipwrecked off Cape Negris on his return from Yunan. Before undertaking this dangerous journey he left his ring with his queen Sanda Devi with an injunction that if he did not return the country was to be governed by a person on whose finger the ring fitted. When the news of the king's unfortunate death reached Wesali the queen assembled all the ministers of state and informed them of the king's last command in regard to the government of the

³ U San Shwe Bu: Journal of Burma Research Society, vol.6 Part 3. 1916.

country. By mean of the ring a systematic search for a suitable person was made. But as nobody could be found to suit the much coveted throne, the minister in their despair had to ransack the outlying districts in the confines of the kingdom which were peopled by the wild hill tribes such as the Chins, Mros, Thets and the Prus. Eventually they came upon two Mro brothers and a son of the younger brothers searching for fish in the river. When the ring was tried on, to the great surprise of the ministers, it fitted all three of them. So they were all brought into the royal city. The elder brother A-Mra-Thu was then crowned king (957-964 A.D.) and the younger became the crown prince.

Everything went on smoothly for a time until one day, by quite an accident, the king became aware of the love intrigue that existed between the queen and his brother. Being greatly disturbed in mind by the fear of assassination he resolved to murder the Crown Prince. So one favourable night pretending to be first asleep by the side of his consort he suddenly sat up in bed and gave vent to a terrific yell. Sanda Devi woke up with a start and on questioning him the reason of his strange conduct she was told that in a dream his household gods, who felt themselves shamefully neglected and outraged by his sudden change of fortune, threatened him with the most horrible death. In fact they actually rehearsed in the dream the fate he was shortly to undergo in real life. He then got up and dressed himself saying that he was determined to perform the usual sacrifices that very night.

He forthwith summoned his brother to whom he related the whole dream, informing him at the same time his resolve to carry out the wish of the gods. So according to the custom of his ancestors he got together a white bull and a white buffalo. He told his younger brother to lead the animals out of the city and that he would follow with all articles necessary for the ceremonial. When they came to a very lonely and unfrequented spot A-Mra-Thu the king treacherously shot his brother with a poisoned arrow killing him on the spot. When day broke he returned to the palace in a profusion of tears telling the astonished courtiers that his brother had met with an unfortunate accident which proved fatal. The monarch was a consummate actor. His grief was so well simulated that it took in everybody except one solitary person, his nephew Pai

Phru, the son of the deceased. This shrewd Youngman knew all about his father's illicit passion. Piecing together the various facts of the case he arrived at the true conclusion fratricide. Warned by this act of treachery on the part of his uncle who was quite capable of fixing on him as the object of further revenge, he silently withdrew from the attraction of the court, resolved to lead the life of a hunter in the unknown solitude of some distant forest.

Just about this time the Prus who lived in the mountainous regions lying to the north east of the kingdom heard of the death of Sula Taing Sandra and of the accession to the throne of a Mro chief who wedded the widowed queen. They thought it was the most opportune moment for an invasion. Headed by a very powerful chief an army of 90,000 soldiers descended the heights, on conquest, bent. When this mighty host reached the eastern bank of the Lemro river (about four or five miles from the present city Mro Haung a general halt was ordered with the object of reconnoitering the country and devising means for crossing the stream. Meanwhile the people of Wesali were quite ignorant of the presence of so dangerous an enemy. There was nothing to disturb the harmony of their simple lives. But prince Pai Phru in his new role of hunter while tracking game along the western bank of the stream at which the enemy halted, suddenly saw a great concourse of people on the opposite bank. After a short time he became convinced that they were some enemy. Instead of running away and giving the alarm he boldly decided to remain and to act single-handed. He got hold of a small dug-out and crossing over to the enemy related to their chief of the story of the king's treachery and his own misfortunes. He moreover swore that the sole object of his life was revenge and that as the opportunity for its fulfillment had then arrived he would undertake to convey the whole army across the river and lead them on to the capital (Wesali) and to certain victory. Naturally the Prus were greatly delighted at this unexpected piece of good fortune. They implicitly believed the young prince and because of his topographical knowledge left everything in his hands.

The work of transporting the army then commenced in real earnest. The boat was small, only four or five at a time could be conveyed across. There were no others available.

Each time the precious cargo reached the opposite bank the prince led them to a lonely spot and murdered them, for he was quite a giant in strength and size. This silent murder went on for the space of seven days and seven nights. On the morning of the eighth day the Pru chief seeing that more than three fourths of his army had crossed over, ascended a high hill to see what his men were doing on the other side. To his great surprise he only saw the corpses piled up in innumerable heaps. For a moment he was paralysed. He did not know what to do at first. When calm reason asserted its sway, he decided to abandon his scheme of conquest and run for dear life. He called together his men and told them everything, representing that it was far wiser to flee to the security of their mountain homes than to face so dangerous and crafty an enemy. Then they ran. Meanwhile Prince Pai Phru hastily gathered together all the Arakanese who lived in the adjoining districts. The Prus were chased and captured with all their effects. They were then brought to the place where the present city (Mrauk-U or Myo Haung) stands and were all put to the sword. So in commemoration of this event and because it was the spot on which his first great undertaking was crowned with success prince Pai-Phrus named the place "Mrauk-U" ("Mrauk" means accomplishment and "U" means first).

In Arakan the old pronunciation is still preserved in spite of the corrupted form Myauk-U (Mrauk-U) that crept in with the Burmese conquest in 1784.

To explain this later perversion a very silly story was invented in later times. A female monkey is supposed to have mated with a peacock causing the former to lay an egg on the spot which afterwards on that account came to be known as "Myauk-U" "Myauk" being a monkey and "U" an egg,- a version obviously absurd and wholly in keeping with the best traditions of legendary Greece and Rome.

3. 2. "Monkey's egg", a fabricated story

The following story was most probably invented by the Burmese with their own pronunciation. Most probably, this story was invented even before the Burmese occupation of Arakan because there were historical connections between the

Arakanese and Burmese Kingdoms like Ava and Mrauk-U, Mrauk-U and Toungoo, Mrauk-U and Hanthawaddy and so on.

In the jungle not far from the place where Mrauk-U City was constructed later, there was a female monkey. Since she was alone she became very lonely. One day she met a peacock in the jungle and they cohabited. Later, the female monkey conceived and laid an egg. A human son was born out of that egg and he became a mighty prince. Later he built a city near that Jungle and since he was born from an egg laid by a monkey, the city was named Myauk-U meaning 'Monkey's Egg'.

Well, I have to give a similar remark like U San Shwe Bu that the story inventor had a very good fantasy, like in the Greek and Roman Myths.

3.3. A Hear-Say Story

One of the hear-say stories stated; once a British Colonial Officer (most probably Maurice Collis) asked his Burmese clerk in Burmese with a very strong English accent, "What is the meaning of Myauk-U?"

That Burmese clerk translated literally as he heard, 'Myauk' meant Monkey and 'U' meant Egg and the clerk told Maurice Collis the above-mentioned invented story of a female monkey and a peacock. Because of that 'misunderstanding' or the 'unscholarly answer', the 'Holy City of the North' or 'The First Accomplishment' Mrauk-U became 'Monkey-Egg'.

Once, Maurice Collis translated the poem called 'Thingyan' (Thangran) or 'Water Festival' written by the famous Arakanese Poet, Uggā Byan. In fact, it was a Radu or poetry on 12 months written by Uggā Byan. For the month of Tagu, which is the first month of the Arakanese and Burmese Calendar in which the Water Festival or the New Year Festival is celebrated, he translated 'At the south of the Golden City of 'Monkey-Egg' instead of 'At the south of the Golden City of Mrauk U.

In the late 50's, U Shwe Mra, the then Chief Secretary in U Nu's Government wrote many articles about Arakan in the Guardian English Newspaper and he had explained about 'Monkey Egg'. U Shwe Mra's son, U Maung Maung Mra is a former classmate of the present author. During my last visit in Rangoon I asked U Maung Maung Mra about his father's articles, unfortunately, none of them could be found.

4. Conclusion

The last Capital City of Arakan or Rakhaing Kingdom was named Mrauk-U and established in 1430 A.D. by King Saw Mun or Min Saw Mun (Man Saw Muan), but the Burmese called that city with their own pronunciation Myauk-U.

Myauk-U (Mrauk U) could be roughly translated either as 'The Holy City in the North' or the First (Capital) City in the North'. It can also be translated as 'The First Accomplishment' according to a famous legend; however, unfortunately, it became 'Monkey-Egg' because of Burmese pronunciation. Just to verify their own pronunciation and to explain their version, a very silly story was invented.

Later, Arakan was conquered by the Burmese, and later the whole of Burma became a British Colony. Many foreigners heard the Burmese Version of Myauk-U and their fabricated story and therefore this city was wrongly translated as 'Monkey-Egg'.