

THE EARLY USE OF THE BUDDHIST ERA IN BURMA.

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At pages 474—481 of the April number of the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, and also at pages 850—860 of the July number, is an interesting controversy on "The revised Buddhist era in Burma," carried on between Dr. Fleet and Mr. Blagden, and the latter has asked me to intervene. Most willingly do I comply with his request.

The thesis laid down by Dr. Fleet and questioned by Mr. Blagden is this: That the reckoning with the initial point in B. C. 544 was devised in Ceylon, was put together in its complete form just after A. D. 1165, and was carried to Burma in the decade A. D. 1170—80.

At pages 256—257 of the *Indian Antiquary*, Volume XXIII, 1894, I have discussed the Burmese eras and the mode of reckoning them. There are three eras, namely, the Era of Religion, which began in 544 B. C.; the Śaka Era which began in 78 A. D.; and the Chinese Era, now current, which began in 638 A. D. The Śaka Era was established in its own second year, after wiping out 622 ($544 + 78 = \text{Dodorasa}$) years of the Era of Religion; and the Chinese Era was established after wiping out 560 (Khachha-pañcha) years of the Śaka Era.

There appears to be strong evidence to show that the Era of Religion or the Nirvāna Era, which began in 544 B. C., was known to the Burmans long before the 12th century A. D. When they adopted the Saka as well as the Chinese Era, the year was reckoned in its equivalent of Anno Buddhae. Further, at pages 49—50 of the Kalyani Inscriptions (Rangoon edition), precise dates are given of three principal events: Anno Buddhae 1601, Sakkarāj 419 = Anuruddha or Anawrata conquered Thaton. Anno Buddhae 1708, Sakkarāj 526 = Siri-Sanghabodhi-Parakkamabāhu King of Ceylon, reformed Buddhism. Anno Buddhae 1714, Sakkarāj 532 = Maha-thera Uttarājīva set out for Ceylon.

In order to convert a year of Anno Buddhae into a year of the Christian era, we have to deduct 544 from the former; and in order to turn a year of Sakkarāj into a year of the Christian era, we have to add 638 to the former. It will thus be seen that, in Burma, it is customary, in all important documents, to record dates in Anno Buddhae as well as in Sakkarāj, the one acting as a salutary check on the other.

The Myazedi Inscription, which is referred to by the learned controversialists, is the first lithic record yet found in Burma, which is inscribed in the Burmese character. It has four faces, each of which is engraved in a different language, namely, Burmese, Talaing, Pali, and in an unidentified language. Mr. Blagden notes that there are two copies of the quadrilingual epigraph, and Dr. Fleet doubts its being a contemporary record because it states only the year of the accession of King Kyanzittha, namely 1628 Anno Buddhae (1084 A. D.), and omits the month and day of the erection of the Pagoda. As regards Mr. Blagden's query, the following account will show why unlike the majority of other lithic records, two copies of the same inscription were made.

The stone, now in the Pagan Museum, appears to be the original. It was found at the foot of a cross-legged image of the Buddha which is on the north face of the Myazedi Pagoda. The Palace of the King being situated to the north of the Pagoda, its northern face would afford the nearest approach to Royal worshippers. The workmanship of the inscription is neat and clear, and the letters are finely cut. The stone is hard and is closely grained. The letters as compared with those on the second, are smaller, and on the face of the inscription recorded in Pali, 20 letters take up a space of 12 inches. The stone is cubical in shape. Its length, covered by letters, is 3 feet and $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and its breadth or thickness is $1\frac{1}{2}$ feet.

The second stone, which is an exact replica of the first, and which is now conserved on the platform of the Pagoda, is soft in grain, and several layers have been peeled off. The letters are larger in size, 20 letters on the Pali face covering a space of 2 feet 2 inches. Its height is 4 feet 8 inches, breadth 1 foot $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and thickness 1 foot and half

an inch. It was found close to the remains of a Library, which is to the north-east of the Pagoda.

The above circumstances explain why there are two exact copies of the epigraph. One, the original, was set up close to the Image, whose construction it commemorates. The second, which is a copy of the original record, was put up in the Library for safe custody. In the case of three or four other inscriptions found at Pagan, duplicates have also been discovered. This fact disposes of the alleged unique peculiarity of the Myazedi record.

Dr. Fleet's objection may be met at once by saying that the Myazedi inscription only gives the year of the Era of Religion, because it records a past fact, namely, the year of accession of King Kyanzittha, and because the Era was common to the four communities, using the four scripts of the epigraph. It is not customary for the Burmans to incise on stones, which are not contemporary records, or to make forgeries of lithic records for the simple reason that the epigraphs declare the relinquishment of property and its dedication to a sacred purpose, and not its acquisition for a temporal or utilitarian purpose.

It now remains to consider the great historical value attached to the Myazedi Inscription, and how it may be utilized in revising the chronology, given by Phayre in his *History of Burma* of the reigns of the four Kings of Pagan, Anawrata, Sawlu, Kyanzittha, and Alaungsithu. Phayre based his work on the Hman Nan Yāzawin or Mahā Yāzawin, which was compiled in 1829, during the reign of King Bagyidaw (1819—1837). As these chronicles were compiled under Royal patronage, their chronology is generally accepted to be correct throughout Burma, although it does not coincide with the dates given in the older records, both historical and epigraphic. Assuming that the Myazedi Inscription is a contemporary record—there are no reasons to the contrary—King Kyanzittha, otherwise called Śrī Tribhuwanā-ditya-dhamma-rāj, ascended the throne in 1628 of the Era of Religion corresponding to 1084 A.D. He reigned for 28 years, that is, up to 1112 A. D. The corresponding dates in Sakkarāj will be 446 and 474. These

latter figures correspond in a remarkable degree, with those given in the "Jātā bon Yāzawin" or the Chronological Tables based on the Royal horoscopes. As the Burmans, in common with the Hindus, set a great store by Astrology and horoscopes, these tables appear to afford us trustworthy chronological data. Relying on the Myazedi Inscription as well on these tables and the older records, Phayre's dates may be revised as follows:

Name of King.	COMMENCEMENT OF REIGN.			Length of Reign.	Remarks.
	Year of Religion.	A. D.	Burmese Era.		
Anawrata ..	1588	1044	406	33	
Sawlu ..	1521	1077	439	7	
Kyanzittha ..	1628	1084	446	28	
Alaungsithu ..	1656	1112	474	75	

Mr. Blagden appears to mistake Alaungsithu for Kyanzittha in his later article; Kyanzittha's title is "Śri Tribhuvanāditya-dhamma-rājā, and he reigned from 1084 to 1112 A. D. Alaungsithu's title is "Sri Tribhuvanāditya-pavara-pañḍita-Sudhamma-rājā-Mahādhipati Narapati-Sithu," and he reigned from 1112 to 1187 A. D. If the dates given above are accepted, Burmese chronology, so far as it relates to the four Kings, will rest on a firmer basis, the elucidation of Burmese history by the light of Talaing epigraphs, which Mr. Blagden has so kindly undertaken to do, will proceed more satisfactorily.