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# TAYTŪ(大都) the Ancient Name of Peking in a Burmese Lithic Inscription of Pagan, dated 1284 A.D.

by U WUN

Near the end of the thirteenth century A.D. there was a Buddhist monk in Upper Burma by the Sanskritic name of Syaṅ Disāprāmuk. Presumably he was a native or resident of Halingyi (*Hanlari*, an old fortified Pyu city, recently excavated) near Shwebo, or of nearby Thitseintgyi (*Sacchim*). Consequently and in all likelihood he was a Pyu (extinct to-day) and who could speak the current Yunannese language.

In those days the peripheral kingdoms of the powerful Mongol Empire were periodically invaded, ravaged, subdued and colonialized by the “peace maintaining”<sup>1</sup> Turko-Mongol hordes of Khubilai Khan. Here, to illustrate the Mongol incursions, part of a memorial submitted by Ch’ên T’ien-hsiang (陳天祥), hsing-t’ai (行臺) of Honan may not be out of place to be quoted.

“Moreover, since we started expeditions against Japan (“Kingdom of Dwarfs”), Chanch’êng (Champa), Chiao-chih (Tongking), Chao-wa (Java), and Mien Kingdom (Burma), down to the present day, nearly 30 years have passed; and we have not seen the gain of a foot of territory, or a single person added to those subject to China. And when one reckons the money and wealth wasted, and the number of soldiers killed or wounded—alas, how can they be counted!”<sup>2</sup>

In 1283<sup>3</sup> the Turko-Mongol armies descended the valley of the Irrawaddy towards Pagan. King Narathihapate<sup>4</sup> of Pagan, after trying to strengthen the fort, took fright and had time to vacate the city and take refuge near Prome<sup>5</sup>. There he consulted with his loyal and wise minister Anantapicañ-mahāpuw and at the latter’s advice he sent the venerable monk Syaṅ Disāprāmuk<sup>6</sup> on a peace mission to Peking. After his return from a successful mission the venerable one made pious works with the rewards the King conferred on him. In memorial of them he made a record on a stone slab<sup>7</sup>, still extant at Pagan. A literal translation of the relevant part of this inscription is as follows:

“647 Burmese Era (=1284 A.D.), Migasī Year. The Great King stayed at Lhāṅkla, west of

Prome. He ordered Anantapicañmahāpuiw(=Anantavijaya-mahābala), “Get yourself acquainted with the movements of the Turko-Mongol armies.” Anantapicañmahāpuiw said, “This affair is very serious. We have not had the chance to send an emissary. Nor is there any one here who can make a gold writing<sup>8</sup>. If only Syaṅ Disāprāmuk were with us he would be able to carry out the mission.” Being thus petitioned the Great King sent for and entrusted me with the task. I (went and) stayed at *Sacchim* and *Hanlañ*. I made a gold writing and submitted it to the King of the Mongols. The King of the Mongols said, “This gold writing was not submitted by the King (of Pagan). This is one submitted by the ministers only.....” The Mahārac (=Mahārāja) of Pagan said, “Kings customarily do not oppress (arrest and imprison) envoys. We do will make you our envoy.” So saying he made a gold writing and dispatched me. I (went and) arrived in the Mongol territory. The King of the Mongols had already sent down to Sañtway prañ (=the city of Tagaung) Prince Sucuttakī (雪雪の斤)<sup>9</sup>, 20,000 troops, Puññadhammikā-mahāthī, Sṛidhammikā-saṅghāthī, and monks from 70 monasteries to encamp there with the express purpose of dispatching them to Pagan. “They (the Turko-Mongols) do not come in accordance with diplomatic etiquette. They must be dismissed, ” so saying (the King of Pagan) stayed them. I got there. The monks who were there offered me gifts and presents and beseeched me thus, “His Majesty solemnly longs for your reverence. The Emperor is very generous too. Kindly implore Him not to let us promote Religion at Pagan.” I proceeded beyond the Pagan territory where they were encamped, and I kept Lent at Yachañ (押赤)<sup>10</sup>. In the month of Tañchoñmhun (approximately November) I ascended to TAYTŪ (大都)<sup>11</sup>. I arrived there in the month of Plasuiw (approximately January). The King of the Mongols was very pleased and we exchanged greetings. Affairs of state were not touched upon. Only at the end we discussed politics. Saying, “Paṇḍit, with my 20,000 troops and mahāthī, saṅghāthī and monks please go (to Pagan) and promote the Religion”, he entrusted me (with missionary work). I proceeded to tell him, “Mahārac, all these troops and the reverend ones will be in stable equilibrium only when there is paddy. Is not paddy the root of a State’s wealth? These troops, after eating minced pith of toddy-palm trees, will die with stomach ache! The surviving monks also, not daring to enter the city, will flee to the jungle and certainly die there. Is it not the case in which Your Majesty has been victorious? The gardener waters the trees and let them grow. He never nip the shoots and sprouts. When the trees bear fruits he eats them. Please first water the State of Tampratit (*Sanskrit-Pali* Tāmradvīpa, Tambadīpa). Though the State is small its Religion is very noble. Is not Your Majesty a person who aspires to Buddhahood? Kindly let not the

Religion of Father Gotama be ruined. Your dominions are very numerous and extremely vast. The State of Tampratit is just a small one. For reason of its Religion it is sacred to the Bodhisats. Please let not the troops enter it. As for me I shall (go back) and grow crops beforehand. When the crops have been harvested let them march in.” When I thus told him the King of the Mongols said, “In these words (of your reverence) there is something for my benefit too. May you, oh Paṇḍit, go and collect the monks who have been wandering (in an unknown land). And may you grow crops too. When crops have been harvested may you let me know.” In this way I could come back (to Pagan). And thus time was gained too.”

In the above inscription the Pyu monk Syan<sup>o</sup> Disāprāmuk of Hanlañ or Sacchim mentioned the name of the capital of Khubilai Khan as *Taytū*. According to Dr. Gordon H. Luce *Taytū* is (大都 Ta-tu) or (太都 T'ai-tu), “great capital”.<sup>12</sup> It is interesting as well as surprising to note, in my humble opinion, that this name has come down to this day, not in its original form as used by the Reverend Syan<sup>o</sup> Disāprāmuk, but as a Burmese translation loan-word: *PRĀN-KRĪ*: (pronounced *pyeiji*:) “the great capital”, i.e. China.

#### NOTES

1. MSEA, p.127, lines 16, 17.
2. ESBH(S), p.80.
3. (a) HB, p.67, (b) ESBH, p.135, (c) MSEA, p.129, (d) CTT, p.5.
4. The story of King Narathihapate may be read in (a) GPC, pp.158–179, (b) HB, pp.60–70, (c) ESBH, pp.136–139, (d) ESBH(S), 69, (e) MSEA, p.129, (f) *PP*, JOUFS, 17 and *DP*, JOUFS, 18, (g) CTT, pp.4–6, (h) OBEP, vol.1, p.89. Dr. G.H.Luce says, “Moreover, the term *Taruk* (which I take to be ‘Turk’), appropriate in the name Tarukple(Tarukplyi) for the king who in 1284 fled from the Turko-Mongol armies...”
5. ESBH, p.137.
6. (a) HB, p.68, (b) *NPB*, p. 69, (c) ESBH, p.137, (d) CTT, p.6.
7. (a) SIP, pp.126–130, (b) IB, Portfolio III, Plate 271, (c) There is a rubbing of the inscription in the Burmese Department of Osaka University of Foreign Studies.
8. ESBH(S), p.81. “For their written characters submitted to the Throne, they used gold leaf to write on.” *Yüan-shih*.
9. ESBH, p.185, Note 101.
10. ESBH, p. 185, Note 97. “Ya-ch’ih city, capital of the Wu Man (Black S. Barbarians, on the brink of Tien-ch’ih (the Lake of Tien).”
11. ESBH, p.185, Note 98.
12. ESBH, p.185, Note 98. “Ta-tu (or T’ai-tu), “great capital.” See *Yüan-shih*, ch.58.

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(with abbreviations in brackets)

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