Notice of Pugan, the Ancient Capital of the Burmese Empire.

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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. Pugan, 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 Thorê 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 Aleamma, 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 Zau¹ 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,

¹This King of Pugan 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.²

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, Naratheehapade, 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 shye 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 shye and Toung gye yen are also wounded in the same manner.’

² 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-ghan, 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\(^3\) 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 Pugan generals retreated, keeping
their force as much together as possible. On arriving at Pugan, 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\(^4\) 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 Pugan, 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 Pugan, 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,

\(^3\) 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.

\(^4\) 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 Syriaam, by the celebrated Portugueze chief, PHILIP DE BRITO and NICOTE, about the year 1612, called Kula-ya-men, the king whom the Kulas obtained or seized. See Modern Universal History, vol. 7th, page 118.

In the Sketch of the remains of Pugan, 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, wasted by the river, is called Langa Nanda; it was built by Anauratha-zan, who reigned between A. D. 1017 and 1059.

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