



Notes:

During his stay at Rangoon in the summer of 1826, Crawford drew up his account of this town, although it was not published until he included it in his account of his embassy made to the Burmese court in 1827, which was published in 1829. As Crawford explains: "The following account of Rangoon was collected by me while I resided there in civil, charge of Pegu, a period of more than six months."

M.W.C.

Account of Rangoon in the Summer of 1826

John Crawford

This place is situated about twenty-six miles from the sea, on the eastern branch of the Irawadi, five miles below the junction of the Lain and Panlang rivers, and about two miles above the Syrian river. It lies on the left bank, and on a reach which runs nearly due east and west. The town and suburbs extend about a mile along the bank of the river, and are in depth about three-quarters of a mile; but the houses are very unequally scattered over this area. The fort, or stockade, is an irregular square; the north and south faces of which were found to measure 1145 yards; the east, 598; and the west, 197. On the north face there are two gates and a sally-port; on the south, three gates and three sally-ports; on the east, two gates; and on the west, one gate and one sally-port. The stockade is fourteen feet high, and is composed of heavy beams of teak timber. It has in some places a stage to fire musquetry from, in the parapet over which are a kind of embrasures, or loop-holes.

On the south side there is a miserable ditch, and in one situation a deep swamp, both overgrown with *Arums*, *Pontiderias*, the *Pitsia stratiola*, and other aquatic plants. Over the ditch there is a causeway, and over the marsh a long wooden bridge, connecting one of the gates with a large temple and monastery.

Rangoon and its suburbs are divided into eight wards, called, in the Burman language, *Yat*, superintended by an officer called the *Yat-gaong*, whose business it is to maintain watch and ward within his division. The palisaded fort, or stockade, which is properly what the Burmans denominate a town or *myo*, is composed of three wide and clean streets running east and west, and three smaller ones crossing them and fronting the gates of the south face. The most populous part of the town is the suburb called *Taklay* (*Tatklé*), immediately on the west face of the stockade.

In August 1826, I directed a census of the houses and population to be made, and found the former to amount to 1570, and the latter to 8666, excluding all strangers. This gives between five and six inhabitants to each house. During the administration of the last Burman viceroy, in a census which was made, the houses amounted to 3250, which would give a population of near eighteen thousand inhabitants. On this occasion, however, I am told, that the number of houses was swelled by including in the list all the villages and hamlets of the neighbourhood.

Almost all the houses of Rangoon are composed of the cheapest and frailest materials, and are peculiarly liable to destruction by fire. In March 1826, I saw the whole suburb of *Taklay* burned to the ground in a few hours, from the accident of a pot of oil boiling over. In less than a month it was not only reconstructed, but, from the circumstance of many of the inhabitants having returned after the peace, the houses were far more numerous than before the accident.

Rangoon is written, in the Burman language, *Rankong*, and pronounced *Yangong*, which is a compound epithet meaning "peace effected." This name was given to it by *Alomptra*, who made it the capital of *Pegu* and the principal sea-port of his dominions, after the destruction of *Pegu* and *Syrian* in 1755. Before that time, it was a petty village, and was called *Dagong*, after the great *Pagoda*, or *Shwe Dagong* (*Golden Dagong*). Inconsiderable as its

population is, it is at present the second city in the Burman dominions.

The environs of Rangoon are sterile, uncultivated, and not very interesting; although the situation, under institutions more favourable to industry, possesses capabilities of great improvement. The ground from the river face continues to rise gradually for two miles, until reaching the great Dagong Pagoda, where it appears to be seventy or eighty feet above the level of the Irawadi. In the vicinity of this temple, the ground is broken into ravines: amongst these are several marshes and a small lake, or rather extensive tank, formed by throwing a bank across the gorge of a wide ravine. The view from the temple is extensive and picturesque, comprehending many reaches of the river.

The elevation of site possessed by Rangoon secures itself and its environs from the inconvenience of being inundated by the periodical rains, as is the case with the low lands nearly throughout the whole Delta of the Irawadi. The climate, upon the whole, is temperate and agreeable for a tropical one, and it is certainly salubrious; for the mortality amongst our troops unquestionably arose not from climate, but want of shelter, of wholesome food, and of ordinary comforts.

In the vicinity of Rangoon there are scarcely any works of utility, and none of embellishment, save those dedicated to religion; viz. the Sidis, or monuments in honour of Buddha, and the Kyaongs, or monasteries. The only useful works are two narrow roads leading from the southern face of the stockade to the great temple: these, which are paved with brick, were constructed within the last twelve years chiefly by a Mohammedan merchant of Rangoon, who had embraced the religion of Gautama. From the town to the great Pagoda, the country is covered with innumerable monuments of various sizes,—some long in a state of dilapidation, and others entire,—before the British invasion. These are all of the same form, a form which has been aptly compared to a speaking trumpet standing on its base. The lower part of a temple, or Sidi, is commonly a polygon; and the shaft, or upper portion, is round,—the apex being ornamented with an iron net, in form of an umbrella, called, as I have more than once stated before, a “Ti.” The building is of solid brick and mortar, with the exception of the small chambers, in which are deposited the relics of Gautama,

most commonly consisting of little images of this personage, of gold or silver, deposited by the founders.

The great temple, or Shwe Dagong, is of the same structure with the rest, but richly gilt all over. The height of this, which is really a noble object, is said to be one hundred and seventy-five cubits, or about two hundred and seventy-eight feet. In the enclosure which surrounds it is an immense bell of very rude fabric: the inscription upon it imports that it was cast by the late King forty-one years before our visit.

The Shwe Dagong Pagoda has long enjoyed a higher reputation than any other religious edifice in the Burman dominions: this it owes to the legend which supposes it to contain "eight true hairs of Gautama," brought as a trophy from Western India, many centuries ago, by two merchant brothers. The Pagoda is in fact, what is not common with religious edifices in Ava, a place of pilgrimage; and is frequented by many strangers, especially Shans, during the vernal festival in the month of March, when a great fair is held near it: it is also the only temple frequented as a common place of worship by the inhabitants of Rangoon and its vicinity; the others being resorted to only by their own founders, or their relatives and descendants.

During our occupation of Rangoon, there were two considerable markets in the place, which, after the restoration of peace, were abundantly supplied with fine fish, poultry, and very tolerable venison, besides an abundant supply of the necessaries of life, according to the Burman scale of estimating them.

Rangoon is the chief, and indeed almost the only port of foreign trade in the Burman dominions. Its situation is extremely convenient for this purpose: its distance from the sea, as already mentioned, is but twenty-six miles; and although the navigation be somewhat intricate, the difficulties are not so great as not to be readily conquered with the assistance of tolerable pilots. Of the vast number of ships which frequented it during its occupation by the British, a period of more than two years and a half, one only, I believe, suffered shipwreck. These were of every size, up to twelve hundred tons burthen. With the exception of that of Bassein, it is the only navigable branch of the Irawadi. Over this last-mentioned place, which is in other respects a more accessible, safe, and convenient port, it has the advantage of an uninterrupted communication at all seasons with the upper provinces—a

circumstance which has naturally diverted to it nearly the whole foreign trade of the kingdom.

The site of Rangoon has many advantages for ship-building. At neaps, there is a rise and fall of the tide of about eighteen feet; and at springs, of twenty-five to thirty. The distance of the principal teak forests is at the same time comparatively inconsiderable, and there is a water conveyance for the timber nearly the whole way. Ship-building has in fact been conducted at Rangoon ever since the year 1786, and in the thirty-eight years which preceded our capture of it, there had been built one hundred and eleven square-rigged vessels of European construction, the total burthens of which amounted to above thirty-five thousand tons. Several of these were of from eight hundred to one thousand tons burthen. Under the direction of European masters, the Burmese were found to make dexterous and laborious artisans; in this respect, greatly surpassing the natives of our Indian provinces. Of the commerce conducted at Rangoon, I shall take occasion to render an account in another place.

