

No. 16.—THE "PYU" INSCRIPTIONS.

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Although very little progress has been made in the decipherment and interpretation of these records, it seems worth while to state briefly how the matter stands at present, before I offer such suggestions as I can make for the further prosecution of this line of research.

The study of "Pyu" epigraphy begins with the Fourth Text of the Myazedi inscription of Pagan, which was discussed in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society for April 1911. From a comparison of that text with the corresponding Pāli, Burmese and Talaing versions, the greater part of the "Pyu" alphabet was ascertained and a number of "Pyu" words were identified, some with certainty, others with more or less probability. From these data and from the syntax of the language, so far as it was exemplified in that one text, the inference was drawn that the language was a Tibeto-Burman one that had been in contact with Talaing. It was therefore provisionally assumed to have been the vernacular of the Prome district in ancient times, and the name "Pyu" was attached to it as a convenient label.

Subsequent discoveries have tended to confirm these inferences. A number of other records in the same language have been found at Prome or its immediate neighbourhood. The "Pyu" inscriptions of which copies have been forwarded to me comprise the following:—

- (1) the Bèbè Pagoda inscription ;
- (2) the Kyaukka Thein inscription ;
- (3) three or four short inscriptions on votive tablets and the like ;
- (4) the inscriptions on urns found near the Payagyi Pagoda ; (all the above were found at or near Prome) ;
- (5) the Amarapura inscription (removed to that place by a Burmese king) ; and
- (6) an inscription found (I believe) at Pagan, of which only a photograph has been sent to me. I am informed that the reverse of the stone bears another inscription in Chinese characters, apparently unconnected with the "Pyu" one.

Nos. 1, 2 and 6 are so dilapidated that at present practically nothing can be done with them. The records included under No. 3 are more legible but they are very scrappy, while No. 5 contains a fragmentary text which up to now has yielded no new information that I can understand. No. 4 seems to offer the best opening for study. It comprises the inscriptions engraved on five urns, four large stone ones and a smaller one made of earthenware. Some of these urns were found to contain ashes and were probably used for the purpose of burying the cremated bodies of individuals of some local importance.

On these five urns there appear to be seven distinct inscriptions. Indicating the stone urns by the letters A to D and the earthenware one by the letter E, the corresponding inscriptions can be conveniently referred to as A, B1, B2, C, D1, D2 and E. B2, which follows immediately on B1, is in faint letters many of which are hardly legible ; it appears to contain 18 (or 19) *aksharas* and to have little in common with the other records. E has only 11 *aksharas* and has also little in common with the rest. D2 is a long record of (apparently) 17 lines, *viz.* 8 lines of "Pyu" text, a final line of what appear to be merely ornamental flourishes and 8 interlinear rows of faint symbols differing from the "Pyu" letters. In this last peculiarity it resembles Nos. 1, 2 and 5 and at present I cannot explain what these symbols stand

for. They are clearly not essential, for they do not occur in the shorter inscriptions¹. Perhaps they are merely ornamental. D2 has little in common with the other inscriptions and it is engraved on the bottom of its urn. The other urn inscriptions are engraved horizontally round the several urns.

The four inscriptions A, B1, C and D1, are all of one type and I propose to make a detailed comparison of them here. Their resemblances and differences will probably turn out to be matters of importance. For, be it remembered, "Pyu" is a language of which as yet only a very small number of words have been identified, and when one is invited to decipher and interpret inscriptions in it which, unlike the Myazedi one, are not accompanied by translations in other languages, one finds oneself face to face with the difficulty of not knowing how to begin or where to seek for clues. It seems to me that our best chance of interpreting these records is to ascertain what is essential or "common form" in them so as to be able to distinguish it from what is accidental or individual. Every new record of this class that may turn up in the future will help us to draw this important distinction. Then, when we are tolerably certain of the general intent and purport of the essential words, a comparison with the known Tibeto-Burman languages ought to give us clues to their exact meanings. But we ought first to be fairly clear as to the *sort* of meanings that we should look for.

This is particularly necessary in the case of quasi-monosyllabic languages, where there are always a number of words that have several distinct meanings in different contexts, an inherent ambiguity which is only imperfectly met by differentiation of tone. "Pyu" appears to fall into this class. It is not strictly monosyllabic, but largely so, and it apparently rejects final consonants altogether, thus immensely reducing the possible number of its syllabic combinations. I am still of opinion that the dots or little circles resembling *anusvāra*, *visarga*, and their combinations, used in the "Pyu" script, represent tonal marks. If that is correct, the "Pyu" tones must have numbered half a dozen or more. In any case it is necessary to reproduce these diacritical marks in our transcription, or we should be mixing up quite a number of distinct words.

There are other difficulties in connexion with these inscriptions. They are, it is true, engraved for the most part in clear and fairly well preserved characters of the same archaic, South Indian type as the "Pyu" text of the Myazedi inscription, and most of the letters are easily recognizable. But some of them are only doubtfully identified as yet. There appear to be several that resemble one another rather closely and are difficult to distinguish, particularly those which in the Myazedi inscription I have provisionally read as *ḍ*, *ḍ*, and *ḷ* (and there may possibly be a *ṭ* and *ḷ* amongst them also). Further the compound *akṣaras* are not always easy to decipher, the subscript forms of the letters being different from the isolated forms and by no means easy to identify. Also there is a strong resemblance, amounting almost to identity, between the lower portions of the letters *k*, *r* and subscript *ṛ*. Accordingly the transcripts which I now propose to give must be regarded as tentative and subject to such further correction as subsequent enquiry may show to be necessary. To emphasise this point I put into parentheses such letters as I consider doubtful for want of certainty of identification. Square brackets, on the other hand, will serve to indicate places where the reading is conjectural because the stone has suffered damage. In order to show clearly the points of resemblance and difference amongst the four inscriptions I place the corresponding words directly in the same vertical lines. The actual text of each of these four inscriptions (and also of B2) begins with the three paragraph marks which appear at the beginning of the Myazedi inscription.

¹ They seem to occur sporadically in No. 6 and, to a small extent, in the Myazedi inscription.

TEXT.

Plate A	tdaꣳ ḥāꣳ u hi t(r)a hna (ka) harivikrama ¹ ḥāꣳ
„ B1	tdaꣳ ḥāꣳ u (bhū) s(n)ūꣳ [s]ihavikrama ḥāꣳ
„ C	tdaꣳ ḥāꣳ u hi sūriyavikrama ḥāꣳ
„ D1	tdaꣳ ḥāꣳ u hi sūriyavikrama ḥāꣳ uv(ḡ)ꣳ
Plate A	sniꣳ (ṇ)a sū kni (de) hñi
„ B1	sniꣳ hrā sū (de) hñi
„ C	sniꣳ (ṇ)a sū (de) (p)ī (ṇ)a
„ D1	ḥāꣳ k(d)i° ḥāꣳ [tā] ti° (p)ī° sniꣳ (hau)ꣳ sū pī (ṇ)a
Plate A	ti ^{c2} phvṇ (t)pū p(l)ā ta (k)i° (kha) u sniꣳ sniꣳ p(l)ā sū
„ B1	ti° phvṇ p(l)ā ta (k)i° (kha) u sniꣳ sniꣳ p(l)ā sū
„ C	ta (k)i° (kha) u [su]iꣳ sniꣳ tr[u sau] ³
„ D1	ta (k)i° (kha) u sniꣳ
Plate A	tā (de) kni ti° phvṇ t(k)o ti° tdaꣳ ḥāꣳ u ru (k)lēꣳ yā
„ B1	p(l)ā (de) t(k)o ti° phvṇ (t)pū ti° tdaꣳ ḥāꣳ u ru (k)lēꣳ yā
„ C	p(l)ā tiꣳ tdaꣳ ḥāꣳ u ru (k)lēꣳ yā
„ D1	ḥāꣳ u ru (k)lēꣳ yā

Where so much is uncertain it seems hardly worth while to discuss the doubtful letters at length. The word *de* may perhaps be *le*, or something else. The word *bhū* might conceivably be *ro*, *re* or *nū*; *tā* may be *vā* or even *re*, and so on. There is very little to guide one in these doubtful cases, when the language is as good as unknown. I am not sure whether *ti°* just before the last *tdaꣳ* ought to have two dots after it or one: the texts appear to differ. In *C pīna* looks like *mīna*. The letter *ñ* is also very like *j* in several of these words.

It appears from these inscriptions compared together that they have the following common elements: (a) the phrase *tdaꣳ ḥāꣳ u . . . ḥāꣳ*, which includes the easily recognizable proper names **Harivikrama**, **Sihavikrama** and **Sūriyavikrama**, (b) the phrase beginning with *sniꣳ* and ending with *ta ki° kha u sniꣳ*, and (c) the final phrase *ḥāꣳ u ru klēꣳ yā*. What are we to make of it all? It appears from the Myazedi inscription that *tdaꣳ* means "king" and *ḥāꣳ* is a general honorific word, prefixed to the names of august personages (and worshipful objects, such as the statue of the Buddha mentioned in that inscription). What the next few words stand for I do not know. In the Myazedi inscription *hi* appears to mean "to die" and "death", but I am by no means sure that it is the same word here. In view of the unintelligible variant in B1 and the additional *tra hna ka* in A, I have my doubts. Perhaps these are partly names or titles of the personages commemorated. It is plain that on the strength of the first phrase we are justified in speaking of a dynasty reigning at Prome, which used "Pyu" as its official language and affected Indian names ending in *vikrama*. But very likely its members had "Pyu" names as well. The honorific *ḥāꣳ* was apparently capable of being suffixed as well as prefixed to the royal name. The words *uvḡ* to *pī* in D1 are beyond me at present. I merely point out that the first word occurs in l. 3 of the Myazedi inscription. Possibly it should be read *u vḡ* and in that case the *u* would be the genitive affix. It would then be tempting to conjecture that *vḡ* meant "queen", as it accompanies the word *mayaꣳ* in that context. If we read *uvḡ*, perhaps the word means "his." But in any case I think we may conclude with great probability that

¹ [There is a sign resembling an *anusvāra* above, and a *virāma* below the *akshara ma* in *Harivikrama*, —S. K.]

² [Looks like *tni°*—S. K.]

³ This looks more like *sau* in my rubbing than it does in the plate, but I am very doubtful of it.

Dl commemorates some near relations of Sūriyavikrama, whether his consort be among them or not. The string of words (with honorifics) after his name, for which there is no parallel in the other records, seems to indicate that much. Besides Sūriyavikrama's own urn is C, and no man requires more than one coffin. It is tempting to interpret *pli*^o as meaning "grandchild", on the strength of l. 24 of the Myazedi inscription; but this last has *pli*, not *pli*^o, which is a doubtful reading anyhow.

I pass on to the next phrase. In the Myazedi inscription *sni*⁸ means "year", and I am confident that it has the same sense in our urn-inscriptions. *A priori* it is reasonable to assume that it would be closely associated with numerals, and I note that that is the case here. In Bl it is followed by *hrā*, which in the Myazedi inscription represented "eight". In Dl it is followed by *hau*⁸, which we might perhaps read *ho*⁸ and which in any case reminds one of the word *ho*⁸ that stood for "three" in the Myazedi record. Later on in A there is a word *tā*, which in the Myazedi record meant "one." The inference is that the corresponding unknown words are also numerals. Among them there is one which constantly appears in the same relation to the other words, though these change. The constant is *sū*, and assuming "Pyu" to use a decimal system, we must conclude that *sū* means "ten". For reasons that will presently appear, it cannot be "a hundred" nor is it likely to be "twenty."

At this point a digression becomes necessary. M. George Cœdès has published¹ a very kind appreciation of my paper on the "Pyu" text of the Myazedi inscription and drawn my attention to the fact that the symbols in ll. 1-2 thereof which I had read *cū jha e* are not "Pyu" words of number as I had supposed but the conventional symbols employed in some ancient Indian inscriptions to represent 1000, 600, and 20, respectively. I accept these identifications the more readily as I had myself felt (and suggested in a note)² that my *e* might after all possibly be the old numeral symbol for 20. I can now confirm M. Cœdès' view, as I have compared the original rubbings (which are much larger and also clearer than the plate published with my paper in the *Journal*) with Bühler's *Indische Palæographie* (Pl. IX) and find that the symbols, including that for 600, correspond. But with regard to *hrā* I am not so sure. M. Cœdès would also make of it a conventional symbol. But the symbol is *hra* not *hrā*. And what has a tonal mark to do with a numeral figure? Secondly, *hrā* is used in l. 7 of the Myazedi text in connexion with an entirely different form of 20, which I conjecturally transliterated *shū* but now propose to identify with the *tpū* (or *npū*?) of A and Bl. This I take to be a genuine "Pyu" word for "twenty", not an Indian numerical symbol. Thirdly, *hrā* is apparently used in Bl as a multiplier of *sū*, ten. Therefore I still think that I may have been right in taking *hrā* to be a "Pyu" word and a relative of the Burmese *rhach*, of genuine Tibeto-Burman descent.

To return to the other numerals in our four inscriptions. There is no internal evidence as to the values of the unidentified ones not yet mentioned. The following table is therefore to be considered as based largely on conjecture tempered by a general comparison with the forms of numerals in other Tibeto-Burman languages³ :—

1	tā	5	na, pīna	9	tko
2	hni	6	tru	10	su, (sau)
3	hau ⁸ , (ho ⁸)	7	kni	20	tpū
4	plā	8	hrā		

¹ *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, 1911, pp. 435 f.

² *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1911, p. 383.

³ Compare as a handy reference *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1913, pp. 316 ff.

The vowel *au* is used in the Myazedi inscription as a variant of *ū*; but I must admit that it is odd that both *sū* and *sau* (which is, moreover, a doubtful reading) should appear in such a short document as C. Also the word *tru* is not quite certain, that portion of the rubbing being by no means clear; it might conceivably be *tra*, though I prefer the reading *tru*. I assume that "five" has two forms, the shorter one being used as a multiplier. If these more or less hypothetical conclusions are correct, these inscriptions have by a fortunate concurrence of circumstances given us a series of "Pyu" numerals which is complete so far as it goes and seems to be in general agreement with the numerals of other Tibeto-Burman languages. But further confirmation will of course be necessary before we can accept it as definitely established in every particular.

As *sni̯* means "year" it seems reasonable to suppose that *de* (or *le*, or whatever the true reading may be) and *phvy* stand for other divisions of time, probably "month" and "day" respectively: for they also are followed by numerals, or words which we have found to form part of the numerical combinations used in connexion with *sni̯*, or words used alternatively to such words. I take *ti°* to be a postposition meaning "in", but I admit that there is some doubt as to this, and its use here seems rather capricious and irregular. The phrase *ta ki° kha u sni̯* common to all four texts is evidently a formula describing the type of year intended. As it is a constant it can only refer to some characteristic or quality common to all the years previously mentioned, and the most natural view of it would seem to be that it defines them by reference to some fixed point, in other words it denotes some era. Then follows another chronological phrase beginning with *sni̯*. This is wanting in D1 and I take it to refer to the ages of the deceased persons commemorated in these epitaphs. If urn D contained the mingled ashes of several members of the family, that might be a good reason why this phrase is not found in D1. At any rate these numerals have no constant relation to the preceding sets of numerals, and they are too high to be probable lengths of reigns.

Let us now tabulate these chronological data. Assuming the first set of numbers to be referable to some fixed point or era, the inscriptions will fall into the order D1, C, A, B1. There is of course nothing in the texts (so far as we can understand them at present) to determine *what* fixed point or era is implied. But let us assume, for the sake of convenience, that it was the ordinary Burmese era of 638 A.D. We can then make out the following chronological table:—


- (1) year 35 (673 A.D.); Sūriyavikrama's relative or relatives died;
- (2) year 50 (688 A.D.), 5th month; Sūriyavikrama himself died, aged 64 years;
- (3) year 57 (695 A.D.), 2nd month, 24th day; Harivikrama died, aged 41 years, 7 months and 9 days
- (4) year 80 (718 A.D.), 2nd month, 4th day; Sihavikrama died, aged 44 years, 9 months and 20 days.

From this it is obvious that the three personages named could very well have been grandfather, father and son occupying the throne of the Prome monarchy in lineal succession. Of course we are not entitled to assert that this really was the fact: but as a working hypothesis it seems to be consistent with the evidence at present available.

So too as to the era, the most one can say is that it is not an impossible one. But there is very little to guide us as to the age of these inscriptions. We know that the Myazedi record is only about 800 years old, yet its alphabet does not differ very materially from that of our urn-inscriptions. But then it shows signs of great archaism, the leading instance being the anchor-shaped subscript *y*, which was obsolete in India after the 4th century. This argues such a conservative attitude on the part of "Pyu" scribes that I cannot understand how anyone can profess to date their inscriptions by palæographical evidence alone. We know from history that the Burmese of Pagan conquered the South somewhere in the 11th century and therefore one is naturally disposed to date the Vikrama dynasty of Prome before that

period (unless they were merely local chiefs, vassals of Pagan). Besides, the alphabet of the urn-inscriptions does look slightly older than that of the Myazedi record. On the other hand M. Finot has pointed out¹ that the form of the letter *r* with the lower hook joined to the main shaft indicates a date not earlier than the 6th century. This leaves us a margin of about 500 years wherein to locate the Vikrama dynasty, and vague as it is I regret to say that at present I can suggest no more definite solution of this chronological problem. It is of course a perfectly reasonable inference from the archaic type of the alphabet that the introduction of Hindū civilization into the Prome district goes several centuries further back than the probable period (7th or 8th century?) of these urn-inscriptions.

There remain for consideration the concluding words of our texts. It will be noticed that there is complete agreement among them as to the last five syllables. Plainly the phrase has something to do with the common purpose of all these epitaphs. As the word *yā* appears from the Myazedi inscription to be a demonstrative meaning "this," I conjecture that the phrase is descriptive of the urns or their contents. The essential words are of course *ru kleṣ* (or *uru kleṣ*) or whatever else the right reading may be. These are qualified by the honorific *bāṣ* (or *tdaṣ bāṣ*). For it is not quite certain, first, whether *tdaṣ* (which does not appear in DI) goes with what precedes or with *bāṣ*, secondly, whether *u* is the genitive particle or the first syllable of a word *uru*.² Either way I imagine the phrase to mean something like "these are venerable (or royal, or worshipful) remains (or corporeal relics)", or "this is a royal funeral urn", or something of that kind. Here there is scope both for conjecture and for comparison. I have, I fear, already indulged in more than enough of the former and my want of acquaintance with the Tibeto-Burman languages disqualifies me from adequately using the latter method.

But it has struck me that *ru* or *uru* is curiously like the Burmese  "bone", a word which I understand is applicable to the ashes of cremated persons. And if we could find out what *kleṣ* means, the sense of the phrase could be determined. Unfortunately the characteristic peculiarity of "Pyu" already referred to makes comparison very difficult. The language apparently tolerates no final consonant and therefore the word *kleṣ* might conceivably correspond to almost any Burmese monosyllable beginning with *ky* or *kr*, and there are many such. Until the older forms of Burmese have been studied and it has been ascertained in what cases *ky* (or *kr*) goes back to a primitive *kl*, as it does in some words, or until a number of other Tibeto-Burman languages have been drawn into the comparison, any suggested explanation must remain highly conjectural. It is also, of course, by no means probable that Burmese will give useful clues for every "Pyu" word; it may often be necessary to look for them in other members of the family.

Here I must leave the subject, at any rate for the present. It will be obvious to everybody that there is a very great speculative element in the suggestions I have ventured to put forward. My object in throwing them out is to stimulate enquiry among those who are more competent to pursue this line of research than I can ever hope to be. I trust that I have put my hypotheses in such a form that they can be checked by Tibeto-Burman scholars and I leave to them the task of confirming or refuting them, as the case may be, according to the balance of the evidence that may be brought to bear on these questions. But I venture to think that some of the results of my examination of these urn-inscriptions will stand the test of future research and that it will be found that these texts consist, broadly speaking, of phrases conveying pretty much the personal, chronological and other information, which my tentative analysis claims to have detected in them.

¹ *Journal Asiatique*, 1912, Series X, Vol. XX, p. 133.

² If (as seems most likely) *tdaṣ* goes with *bāṣ*, I think *u* must probably be taken as a particle: *tdaṣ bāṣ u* = "H.M. the King's."



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