

Kyansittha and the Indic words in Myanmar from Mon

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Mon writing on stone has been discovered in Old Siam (Thailand), Laos, and Old Burma (Myanmar). The earliest Mon epigraphs, which date back to the 6th century A.D., are rather short. The Old Mon inscriptions found in Thailand (Dvāravatī) are mostly short and fragmentary. But the longest and most interesting Mon inscriptions are found at Pagan, which was known at that time as Arimaddanapūra—the first kingdom of the Myanmars.

It is interesting that these rich Mon records were composed not by Mons but by the Myanmar kings, particularly king Kyansittha. And to this day the Pali and Sanskrit vocabulary in the Myanmar language still shows the Old Mon influence.

1. Kyansittha

Kyansittha became king of the Myanmar kingdom of Pagan in 1084 and ruled for 28 years. He never engraved in his own Myanmar language, but always in Old Mon, found on more than a dozen big stones, most of them having four faces. His son Prince Rājakumār was the first Myanmar to engrave in the Myanmar language, putting it with Pali, Pyu, and Mon on a four-faced stone in 1113 A.D. at Pagan.

Kyansittha had a love for the Mon people, and because of his love affairs with a Mon princess Mañçandā he had to flee in the reign of King Aniruddhadeva (1044-1077). When Saw Lu became the Myanmar king in 1077 Kyansittha was recalled, but because of his amour with the Mon queen he was sent, not against the Mons, but to the south to defend the country from the Khmers, who under King Suriyavarman I (1002-1059) had overrun the Mon kingdom of Dvāravatī.

G.H. Luce theorized that in 1084 Nga Ramankān, the Mon governor of Pegu, marched north with a strong army and fought against the Myanmar king Saw Lu at Pyidawthakyun. Saw Lu was killed, and the Mons advanced farther north to capture the Myanmar capital. At the height of the crisis Kyansittha, a Myanmar general, met with elements of the Mon royal family at Mt. Popa who were organizing a rebellion on their own, and promised those Mons that if they would help him he would give the hand of his only daughter princess Treylokacūlāmañidevī to the Mon prince Nākasamān, the great grandson of King Manūhā. He also promised that his successor would not be his own son but a son of the union of his daughter and prince Nākasamān. So those Mons joined forces with Kyansittha and drove out Nga Ramankān's army, and Kyansittha became king of Pagan. Luce's

theory has now been validated by the discovery of some Pali and Mon records written on terracotta votive tablets at Pagan. Two of those tablets are in Old Mon by the Mon queen Mahādevīcūlāmaṇi. Another is in Pali by Kyansittha's daughter Treylokacūlāṇidevī. And another is by the Mon prince Nākasamān, beloved son-in-law of Kyansittha bearing the title Treylokasiṅghavijaya.

Besides writing only in Mon, Kyansittha built all his temples in Pagan, the Myanmar capital, in the Mon style, such as the Nagayon, the Abeyadana, the Ananda, and others, which contain Mon legends together with colourful glazed plaques illustrating the Jataka tales. And below the Buddhist paintings on the inner walls of the temples there are Mon ink inscriptions.

Kyansittha's origins are obscure. He did not mention any connection with the previous two kings, and his statement in the Mon inscriptions about his parents is legendary.

His chief monk was the well known Mon monk Dhammadassī, also known as Shin Arahan. He stated in his records, in Mon, that the Lord Mahāthera Shin Arahan was his spiritual teacher who possessed many virtues and was like the charioteer of the law. Kyansittha's religious sincerity is shown, for example, in the story about the Colī (Tamil) prince who came to Pagan. King Kyansittha preached to him that apart from the Three Gems (Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha) nothing else can give great happiness to man in this world and the worlds beyond. Then the king wrote about the grace of the Three Gems on leaves of gold with vermilion ink and gave it to the Colī prince. Immediately the Colī prince together with all his followers were converted to the true faith. The Colī prince was very grateful to the king and showed his gratitude by presenting the king with his virgin daughter in full beauty, and other gifts including a wish-fulfilling tree.¹

Kyansittha was sensitive to feminine charms, as shown, for example, in his inscription "...from the seven cities, virgin daughters of princes, adorned with gems of various kinds, shaded with white umbrellas, brilliant as the brilliance of jewels, fragrant as the fragrance of jasmine flowers, splendid as the splendour of Alambusa, the spouse of the god-king Indra, all shall attend him [i.e. Kyansittha]."

Regarding his victory and his reign Kyansittha wrote (in Mon), "All His Majesty's desires shall be fulfilled immediately. When raiding enemies come up to destroy Pagan, and all the four castes of people living there are carried off downstream, then by the strength, energy and power of the king they shall swiftly ascend upstream and take their warm pleasure again at Pagan. By his benefits and his loving kindness which is even (or the same)² as a hand the king shall wipe away the tears of those who are parted from their loved ones. By his benefits and his compassion which is even (or the same) as water the king shall wash away the nasal mucus of those who are sick at heart. With his right hand the king shall give to all his people rice and cakes, and with his left hand ornaments and clothing. All the people of his kingdom shall be very comfortable like children resting in their mothers' bosoms, so shall the king keep watch and guard them with benefits. All

¹All transcriptions and translations herein are my own. Blagden's translations are longer and more detailed.

²O.M. *dmas* > M.M. *smah* 'like; equal, even'.

the people, be it the faults of mother or father, sister or brother, husband or wife, good friend or trusty companion, or the faults of one another, they shall openly declare their faults, they shall not conceal their faults, because they desire purification.”

Regarding the prosperity of his kingdom Kyansittha wrote (in Mon), “During his reign mushrooms, bamboo shoots, flowers and fruits shall abound. Poor people who find it hard to get rice and clothing, the king shall give them rice and ornaments and fine apparel. Young children who are learning to eat cakes with their fingernails shall behave nicely like their elders. Throughout all the kingdom the rain shall fall yearly a hundred and twenty times. The people shall have plenty of elephants, horses, water buffaloes, cattle, pigs, goats and fowls. The toys of the young princes and the children of the ministers shall be of gold and silver only. The people shall make the doors, the door-flaps and the ridges of their roofs with brass only. Poor old women who sell pots and pot lids shall get high prices and become rich. Those who lack slaves shall get plenty of slaves. Those who lack cattle shall get plenty of cattle. Farmers who excel in planting and harrowing shall fill their barns and granaries with paddy, millet and all other grains. Every day when the king gives instructions to his people, the sound of the people’s approval, their praise and their acclamation shall be like the sound of a great rainstorm at midnight.”

Finally, the Mon inscriptions describe Kyansittha as “When Lord Buddha’s religion attains 1628 years [i.e.1084 A.D.] the god-king Indra comes down from his abode in heaven and approaches the hermit-god Vishṇu to invite him to be reborn as king Kyansittha at Pagan, saying ‘My lord, in order to fulfill all your works I, king Indra holding thunderbolts shall be at your service up in the heaven. Down below is the mighty and admirable Nāga king who coils a thousand-fold. In all ten quarters, the four Regents of the world shall keep watch and shall give all support. The whole people of the four castes, together with the king, shall live peacefully in the walled city of Pagan, which cannot be shaken by any enemy. During my lord’s reign, if any great enemy should come, a good omen of victory, an auspicious constellation shall appear before your Majesty, and you shall ride upon a noble steed that has swiftness even as the steeds that are the breed of the clouds and shall fight and shall shine like the noonday sun in autumn. To those who intend evil, with good intent my lord shall soften their hearts. To those who speak evil, my lord shall exhort them to speak good. The bar of the gate of heaven, which is made of gold and adorned with gems, with wisdom which is as even as a hand my lord shall draw it open for all mankind. My lord shall instruct all the people at all times, saying “Do good works! Do good works!” The wisdom and eloquence of Sarasvatī shall always be present in the mouth of my lord, and only decrees which are completely in accordance with the law shall issue from my lord’s mouth at all times.”

As for words of praise, the Old Mon inscriptions say, “In a palace like the Vejayanta Palace in heaven, fit for delights, the jewelled diadem of the city of Pagan, the brave king, who is glorified by all, shall enjoy the splendour and fullness of royalty. All the women who dwell in the city of Pagan shall see the king’s glory and magnificence and shall stand at the river ports and wharfs and on the roads and lanes and at the crossroads saying, ‘Such glory, such grandeur are

because the king did meritorious deeds in the past. That is why the king obtains them now.' So shall they praise the king and go their way."

2. Mon inscriptions and vocabulary

Two of these unique four-faced stone pillars, measuring seven feet by three feet, lie in two sheds at the eastern entrance of the great Shwezigon pagoda in Nyaung-U and are complete. It was a strange historical miracle, when Myanmar writing was in its infancy, that such a rich quality of Mon literature could have been composed by a Myanmar monarch. It is in prose, but it sounds prophetic, flowery and poetic in essence. It was written in Mon fashion as a prophecy of Lord Buddha foretelling the previous life stories of the king as well as his present life and how his kingdom was prosperous, how good were the king's activities towards his people.

Luce (1950:8-9) remarked, "Old Mon is one of the finest languages I know. The form is prose but the matter is pure poetry. The Mons had suffered terribly at Lopburi by the Saivite Khmer king Suriyvarman I, but Kyansittha made them his partners at Pagan and the Mon language burst into song." Shorto (1971:ix) stated, "The records of Mon cover a period from the sixth century to the present day, and over that span of time display extensive phonological, grammatical and lexical changes. It is not unfair to suggest that they yield an opportunity for the study of linguistic evolution which is unparalleled in South-East Asia."

Before the Pagan Mon inscriptions the Indic words are found mostly in their original Pali or Sanskrit forms, but after the 11th century most of the Indic words are deformed to some extent, though some retain their original spelling. By the time of Modern Mon they have changed very much. The Myanmars, who adopted the Mon script, retained the Mon forms and have continued using Indic words in the Old Mon form. They also borrowed Old Mon words. (Reciprocally, Modern Mon has borrowed many Myanmar words.) And the Nyahkur people of northeast Thailand, the descendants of the Dvāravahī Mons, still have many words almost identical with Old Mon. Table 1 illustrates the Indic words in Old Mon which spread to Old Myanmar.

Table 1. Indic diffusion to Myanmar via Old Mon

Indo-Aryan (Sanskrit/Pali)	Old Mon	Old Myanmar	Meaning
P. akkhara	akkhara	akkharā	alphabet / script
P. agga	agga	agga	superior / chief
S / P. ajapāla	ajapāla	ajapāla	goatherds banyan tree
S. aṅgiras	aṅgīrasa	aṅgīrasa	illuminous body / brilliance of body / body issuing rays ³

³Buddhists believe that Lord Buddha Gotama or Sakyamuni Bhagavā issued six different colour of rays from his body. Old Mon records say: *aṅgīraso skyamuni* = *Lord Sakyamuni* having brilliance of body who has compassion upon all beings, who is exalted beyond all beings, who is even as maned lion, preached, made manifest and showed forth all the coming into being of King Śrī Tribhuvanādityadhammarāja (Kyansittha). See C.O. Blagden's edition in *Epigraphia Birmanica* V.I, p.112. H.L.Shorto failed to enter this Skt. word in his *Dictionary of Old Mon* (1971, SOAS)

Indo-Aryan (Sanskrit/Pali)	Old Mon	Old Myanmar	Meaning
S / P. anāgata	anāgata	anāgata	future time
S / P. anubhāva	anubhāw	ānubhow	supernatural power / energy
P. anumodana	anumodanā	anumodanā	rejoicing
P. antarāya	antarāy	antarāy	danger / peril
S / P. apāya	apāy	apāy	hell
P. abhidhamma	abhidhamma	abhidhammā	3rd of the three Buddhist texts in seven books
P. abhisekha	abhisekha	abhisik	coronation/ anointing/ crowning
S. amrita	amruit	amriuk	immortality / nectar
S. amātya	amāt / amāt	amat	minister of state
S. arahanta	arahan	rahan:	noble monk / high monk
P. arahant	arahan	rahan:	-----do-----
P. ariya	ariy	ariya	-----do-----
P. Alambusa	alambusa	alambusa	Indra's consort
S. / P. akara	akara	akai	shape / form / appearance
S. / P. akāśa/ākāsa	akās	ākāsa	sky
S. ācārya	ācār	charā	teacher / learned person
S / P. ādi	ādi	ādi	beginning / starting
P. āyuka	āyuk	āyu	life / duration of living
S. udyāna	udyān	uyyāñ	garden
S / P. upāya	upāy	upāy	stratagem / expedient
S. ekarāja	ekarāt	ekarāj	king / monarch
P. kaññā	kañā	kañā	virgin
S / P. kāla	kāl / kāla	kāla	time
P. kinnara	kinar	kinnarā	mythical being with bird body and human head
P. kriyā	kiryā	kriyā	article / things / ornaments/ decorations
S. kuśala	kusuiw	kusuil	merit / good deed
P. kusala	kusala	kusala	-----do-----
S. kalaśa	klas	kalasa	water-pot in ritual / flower-vase / jar
P. kalasa	klas	kalasa	-----do-----
S / P. gati	gati	gati	path / course / passage / likeness in quality (Old Mon) / there are four <i>gati</i> not to follow and called four <i>agati</i> in Code of Laws
S / P. gāthā	gāthār	gāthā	stanza / verse
S / P. guṇa	guṇ / gun	guṇ / gun	virtue / grace / favor
P. cakkawāla	cakkawāl	cakkawā	universe / world
S. caṅkrama	caṅkram	caṅkran	walk up and down
S / P. campaka	caṅgā	caṅka:	Champac flower with fragrance in many colours
P. cammakhaṇḍa	caṅmakhan	cammakhan	leather mat used by ascetic in forest
S / P. carita	carit	cārita	conduct / character
S. cākrawāka	cākawāka / cakarwāk	cakkawak	ruddy goose
P. cuti	cuti	cuti	to die / death
P. cetiya	ceū	ceū	stupa / pagoda
S. caitra	cetra	citra	first lunar month
P. chaddanta	chaddan	chaddan	high class elephant

Indo-Aryan (Sanskrit/Pali)	Old Mon	Old Myanmar	Meaning
S. jambudvīpa	jambudīp	jambū dip	one of the 4 continents lying south of Mt. Meru / Sineru / it is known as rose-apple island / our world
P. jambudīpa	-----do-----	-----do-----	-----do-----
S / P. jāti	jāti	jāti	origin / descent
P. ñāṇa	ñān	ñān	knowledge
P. tattadesa	tattades	tattadesa	hot or parched land / Myanmar kingdom now called Bagan / Pagan
P. tāla	tāl	than:	palm-tree / a length of this tree (Thai adopted as tan)
S. tejas	tejas	tejo	power / brilliance / splendour / glory
S. sthāna	thān	thāna	place / station / abode / department
P. thāna	thān	thāna	-----do-----
S. sthāpana	thāpanā	thāpanā	to enshrine / storing / keeping / laying
P. thera	thera	thera	senior monk
S. diśā	dis / desa	desa	cardinal point / outward direction / quarter / country
P. diśā	des	desa	-----do-----
S. deśanā	desanā	desanā	discourse / propound / preach
P. desanā	desanā	desanā	-----do-----
S. dravya	drabya / drap	drap	property / treasure / wealth / goods
S. dharma	dhar / dharmma	dhamma	rule of conduct / code of laws / duty / doctrine
P. dhamma	dhamma	dhamma	-----do-----
S / P. dhātu	dhāt	dhāt	relic
S. nakṣatra	nakṣat	nakkhat	lunar / mansion / omen
S / P. naraka	narak	narai	hell
S / P. nāga	nāga / nāk / nek	naga:	serpent / big snake
P. nāgara	nāguir	naguir	city
S. nāḍī	nāḍī	nāyī	hour / clock / unit of time = 60 minutes
S / P. nānā	nānā	nānā	various
S / P. nimitta	nimit	nimit	omen / sign
P. pakati	pakati	pakati	original state
P. paññā	paññā	paññā	wisdom / knowledge
P. paṭisandhi	paṭisan	paṭisandhe	conceived / pregnant
S / P. paṇḍhita	paṇḍhit	paṇḍhita	scholar / learned person
S / P. paraloka	paralok	paraloka	outer world
S. pariṣad	parisat	parissat	assembly / audience / mass of people
P. piṭakattaya	piṭakat	piṭakat	Buddhist scriptures
S. puṇya	puṇya / pun	phun / phun:	merit / good deed
P. puñña	puñña	puñña	-----do-----
S / P. pūjā	pujāw	pūjow	offer / ritual gifts homage / worship
P. porisāda	porisāt	porisāda	name of cannibal in Jataka

Indo-Aryan (Sanskrit/Pali)	Old Mon	Old Myanmar	Meaning
S. prajñā	prajñā/ pradñā	prajñā	wisdom / knowledge
S. praśnā 𑀧𑀺𑀢𑀺	prasnā 𑀧𑀺𑀢𑀺	prassanā 𑀧𑀺𑀢𑀺	problem / question /dispute ⁴
S. prātihārya	prātihār	prātihā	miracle
S. prāsāda	prāsād / prāsāt	prāsāda prassad	palace / pavillion
P. phalasangama	phalasangama	phalasangama	realisation of attainment of (Buddhahood)
S / P. bali	bali	bali	offering to god
S / P. buddha	buddha	buddha	Lord Buddha
S / P. bodhi	bodhi	bodhi	Bodhi tree under which Gotama attained enlightenment
S. bodhisatva	bodhisat	bodhisatta	future Buddha
P. bodhisatta	bodhisat	bodhisatta	-----do-----
S / P. bodhisambhāra	bodhisambhāra	bodhisambhāra	attainments for Buddhahood
S / P. brahmā	brahma / brum	brhmā	Brahma (god)
P. bhāsā	bhāsā	bhāsā	language
P. bhikkhu	bhikkhu	bhikkhu	monk / priest
S / P. bhava	bhava / bhau	bhava	existence / life /incarnation
S / P. maṅgala	maṅgal	maṅgalā	prosperity / auspicious
S. maṅḍikā	manik	maṅḍikā	ruby / gem
S. mānuṣa / mānuṣya	mānus / mānih	manussa	human being / man
P. mānusa	mānus	manussa	-----do-----
S / P. mahā	mahā / mhā	mahā	great / senior
P. mahāthera	mahāthe	mahāthe	senior monk
S / P. mahāyāna	mahāyān	mahāyān	greater vehicle /Northern school of Buddhism
S. mahāsamudra	mahāsamud	mahāsamuddarā	sea / ocean
S / P. māra	mār	mā	great enemy of Buddha / Devil of Buddhist / Evil One / god of death
P. micchādiṭṭhi	micchādiṭṭhi	micchādiṭṭhi	heretic / heresy / heterodox ideas / unorthodox
S / P. mukha	muk	mukh	face / gate / porch
P. mukhapāṭha	mukhapāt	mukhapāṭh	divine speech /verbal recital of Buddha / mouth
P. mettākaruṇā	mettākaruṇā	mettākaruṇā	love and compassion / pity / affection
P. moggaliputta-mahāthera	same	same	name of senior monk presided over 3rd Buddhist Council in India
P. mālika	mlir	mule:	jasmin
P. yasa	yas	yasa	fame / glory
P. ratana	rat	ratana	gem / precious stones / anything precious / jewel
S / P. rasa	ras	rasa	essence / sap / savour / flavor / taste / delicacy

⁴Mon scholars both in Myanmar & Thailand did not know this Skt. word *praśnā* which Old Mon had adopted as *prasnā*. So they wrote in their books using *pradñā* for this word *prasnā* wrongly. Therefore, old records are most valuable in correcting the mistakes written by modern writers. Skt. 𑀧𑀺𑀢𑀺 > OLD MON 𑀧𑀺𑀢𑀺 > Myanmar 𑀧𑀺𑀢𑀺

Indo-Aryan (Sanskrit/Pali)	Old Mon	Old Myanmar	Meaning	
S / P. S	rājaguru rāmayaṇa	rājaguru rām	rājaguru rāma	royal preceptor hero king Ramayana in epic
S. S / P.	riṣi rūpa	riṣi rūp	rase, rup	hermit body / form / shape / image / appearance
S. S / P. S / P. P. P.	lakṣaṇa loka lokapāla lokiya lokuttara	lakṣan / laksan lok lokpāl lokī lokutuiw	lakkhaṇā loka lokapāla lokī lokuttarā	sign / bodily mark world / universe guardian god physical world beyond this world / outer realm / heaven
P. S. S / P. S.	vajira vajra vivāda viśvakarman	bajir bajra biwāt bissukar Mod.Mon,bīkaw	wajīrā wajīrā wiwāda bissukā / pissukā	thunderbolt / diamond -----do----- quarrel / dispute architect / builder
S / P.	vihāra	wihār / bihār / pihār	wihāra	monastery / speech
S.	vyādeśa	byādes Mod.Mon,pyah duih	byādes / byādess / byādiss / byātīt / Mod. My.byādit	predict / foretell injunction / command/ order / prophecy

Time and space limitations preclude my giving here a full account of all the Sanskrit and Pali vocabulary found in Old Mon, though the wall paintings and the glosses are still in a good state of preservation, and such an account needs to be undertaken. But this present article gives a sample, showing how Old Mon was an intermediary in the Myanmar acquisition of Indic vocabulary, and see the appendix.

ဘုဒိပ် / ဘုဒိတ် = BYĀDIP / BYĀDIT →

Modern spelling. Certainly its etymology is not Pali but Sanskrit Vyādeśa. Two Dictionaries of Myanmar Orthography show its origin as Sanskrit without any note or explanation. 1.U Tun Myint's Pali derivatives of Myanmar Words. 2. Myanmar Orthography Dictionary by Myanmar Literary Commission, Education Dept., Myanmar

APPENDIX

Derivation of Myanmar *byādit* from Sanskrit *vyādeśa* 'prophecy' via Mon.

SANSKRIT		OLD MON		OLD MYANMAR / DEVELOPMENT
vyādeśa ꠘꠞꠄ꠆	→	byādes ꠘꠞꠄ꠆	→	byādes ꠘꠞꠄ꠆
		↓		↓
		pyah diuh ꠘꠞꠄ ꠆ꠢꠞ		byādess ꠘꠞꠄ꠆ꠞ
		Mod.Mon spelling		↓
		↓		byādiss ꠘꠞ꠆ꠞꠞ
		/pyah təh/ Mod.Mon pron.		↓
				byātit, byātic ꠘꠞ꠆ꠞꠞꠞ / ꠘꠞ꠆ꠞꠞꠞ
				↓
				byādip, byādit ꠘꠞ꠆ꠞꠞꠞꠞ / ꠘꠞ꠆ꠞꠞꠞꠞ
				Modern Myanmar

Very few scholars in Burma and Thailand have been aware of the etymology of this important word which is derived from Sanskrit, not from Pali. Oddly enough two recent widely used dictionaries by learned Myanmars say that it is derived from Pali *byāditta*, despite the fact that Pali has no such word. Two other modern dictionaries do show it as Sanskrit but without any note or explanation. The Sanskrit > Mon derivation shown above is attested both on stone and in ink.

⁵The Lokahteikpan temple was built by Alaungsithu (1113-1160), the son of a Mon prince and a Myanmar princess. The inscriptions in this temple have Old Mon and Old Myanmar languages side by side, and is the only one among numerous temples to have bilingual writing.

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