

THE ENDEAVOURS OF MYANMAR KINGS FOR PREVENTION AND EXTINGUISHING OF FIRE

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Abstract

Fire plays important role in daily life of the people. Fire can cause either useful or hazard. If the fire is not put into use systematically it could give bad benefits, sometime human's lives were lost. Therefore protection and prevention of fire is needed. Most of the ancient kingdoms of Myanmar are situated at the centre of Myanmar where the climate is hot and dry. Under the reigns of Myanmar kings, houses were built with bamboo, nipa palms and reed matting, even royal palaces were made of wood. These things are inflammable materials and could make dangerous. Because of the carelessness, fire broke out often and several numbers of dwellings including palaces, houses and monasteries were destroyed. Therefore, Myanmar kings passed the Royal Order to prevent and to extinguish fire. This paper examines and analyses the endeavours of Myanmar Kings to prevent and protect outbreaks of fire. It also evaluates how they could carry out to rescue the victims of fire and their efforts for preventing outbreak of fire were effective or not.

Keywords: fire, prevent, extinguish, outbreak, Myanmar Kings

Introduction

Fire-prevention was among the numerous administrative works of ancient Myanmar kings. In particular, the outbreak of fire was very common in Upper Myanmar where the royal capital was located. As lack of the preventive measures could affect the economic and social endeavours of the State, Myanmar kings made efforts to prevent the outbreak of fire.

Fire Outbreaks

Fire broke out for various reasons. Most of them were due to carelessness. In Bagan period, fire broke out in May 1225. Phon The Thukhamain Inscription stated that:

On 2 waxing day of Kason 587 Myanmar Era, the year of the outbreak of great fire which burned at the Bagan Capital, Phonthe Thukhamain, a wealthy person ...¹

Moreover, in Nyaungyan Period, fire broke out on 13 March 1689,² and had lost several numbers of dwellings in a region including royal palace. Moreover boats in the river had also burnt. After the accession of King Badon, he thought Inwas no longer secure. So he shifted the capital to Amarapura in 1782 AD. There, the palace was burnt down due to carelessness on 13 March 1810. It was big to the extent that a new city had to be built. This fire started from the house of a Chinese named 'NgaShweKyi' at the Chinese town in the western part of Amarapura city. It spread very quickly to the palace, scorching down some buildings in the precincts of the palace.³ As the treasure-chamber and the palace city were swallowed by the fire, the properties worth

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¹ ရှေးဟောင်းမြန်မာကျောက်စာများ (Ancient Inscriptions of Myanmar), Vol I, Yangon, Printing and Publishing Corporation, 1972, p. 174

² မုခ်နန်းရာဇဝင် (Glass Palace Chronicle), Yangon, Sarthugyi Press, 2008, p. 748 (Hereafter cited as *Glass Palace*)

³ U Tikkhadhammalankara and Dr. Than Tun မြန်မာ့ရက်စွဲသမိုင်း (Dates of Historically Important Episodes of Myanmar), (3r Edition), Yangon, Seik Ku Cho-cho Sarpay, 2012, p. 129, (Hereafter cited as *Dates*)

many millions were lost.¹ 3000 visses of silver coins had to be spent on the construction of the burnt palace. This sum of money was equivalent to 166.67 visses of gold². In terms of the current gold price, it can be said that this palace was built at the expense of many millions of kyats. As the saying “The fire which starts from rubbish can be burn down the spire of the palace’ goes, some valuable Myanmar cultural heritages were lost due to the negligence.

It is found that during the reign of King Mindon, fire often broke out due to the carelessness of courtiers. Although the courtiers were prohibited from smoking pipes and cheroots not only in their houses but also while walking along and crossing the paths and at the turnings, they did not follow it. Therefore a great fire broke out on 8 April, 1861, starting from a burning cheroot on the floor of the glass chamber.³ Again, fire broke out twice while king Mindon was emphasizing the manufacturing of modern weapons after the two Anglo-Myanmar wars⁴-one starting from the explosion of a gun-powder barrel on 23 April 1867 and the other from a Kerosene lamp on 2 May 1874.

As the saying ‘When a forest-fire occurs, wild cats whack with an open arm over the crook of the elbow of the other arm folded across the chest’ goes, lootings were found associated with the outbreak of fire during the reign of King Mindon. The fire which started from the Magyin- bin ward at the top of the Zee-cho market on 3 May 1874 spread quickly to many places the south-eastern corner of the moat and the Chinese town. Over 1,000 houses, together with two children afflicted with small-pox, were burnt down. The residence of Myowun U Tha O was also swallowed by the fire⁵. During the fire, some people looted the properties of the fire-victims. Some friends of the latter came to their rescue. Out of those who came to assist the fire-victims, two were burnt. Myo-wun U Tha O, together with his men numbering over 40 or 50, arrested the looters and then put them in custody. Therefore, the possessions of the fire-victims remained safe. To recognize the gratitude of U Tha O towards them, the fire-victims gave away wood-posts, money, cane, rope, beams, lintels etc. to him. Thus it is known that, to the royal orders, lootings were found associated with the outbreak of fire during the time of Myanmar kings.

During the time of King Thibaw, the western cause-way of the Mahamui Buddha image was reduced to ashes when the Anauk-pyin ward of Mandalay was burnt down on 15 February 1879.⁶ Again, after the three beats of the drum over 2 p.m on 7 April 1884, a great fire started from the house of Nga Toe in Yadanabhumi ward. It scorched down the four cause-ways and other religious buildings inside the precincts of the Mahamuni Buddha image. The fire ceased just after five beats of the drum over 3 p.m. Thus, within over an hour, the gold crown, gold ear-ornaments and gold robes of the Mahamuni Buddha image were damaged due to fire. But, surprisingly, the Buddha image remained intact. Some chronicles mention that the Mahamuni Buddha image was burnt on the very day when the conveyance of the Mahamuni

¹ Dr. Than Tun မြန်မာသမိုင်းတွင်လောကီပညာအရေးပါပုံ (The Influence of Occultism in Myanmar History with special reference to Bodawpaya's reign 1782-1819), *Moe Journal*, No-9, Nov:2004,p. 139(Hereafter cited as *Influence of Occultism*)

² Dr. Toe Hla ကိုယ့်ထီး ကိုယ့်နန်း ကိုယ့်ကြံ့ခိုင်းနှင့်(With Our Own Sovereignty), Yangon, LinyadanaSarpay, 2005, p.56 (Hereafter cited as *With Our Own Sovereignty*)

³ Dr. Than Tun,နယ်လှည့်ရာဇဝင်(Itinerating Chronicle)(Three Volumes), Yangon, Pyisone Press, 2004, p.215(Hereafter cited as *Itinerating Chronicle*)

⁴ *Dates*, p. 333

⁵ Ludu U Hla, သတင်းစာများသည်သမိုင်းကိုပြောနေကြသည်(The Newspapers Telling History), Second edition, Yangon, Gyipwayay Sarpay, 2011, pp. 352-354 (Hereafter cited as *Newspapers*)

⁶ *Itinerating Chronicle*, p. 220

Buddha image from Rakkhapura kingdom entered its 100th year.¹ It is known by the royal order issued on 16 January 1885 the gold which melt down from the Mahamuni Buddha was cast into lumps under the close supervision of ministers and 5450 ticals of gold were gotten. These gold lumps were pressed into thin plates and made Shwe-pa-zwun robes. Then the robes were offered to the Mahamuni Buddha image.²

A fire also broke out in the royal jail, when the country was thrown into disarray during the reign of King Thibaw. It so happened that the prisoners rose in revolt on 21 September 1884, when the jail was on fire. While the guards were extinguishing the fire, the prisoners with the leadership of a great robber Nga Yan Min looted the rifles, swords and spears from the guards and attempted to break through the jail. A convoy led by Taing-tar Myosa Mingyi came in time to the scene and arrested the rioting prisoners. Nga Yan Min and other 20 prisoners who tried to flee were shot dead. Crown-prince Mhaing-pyin Prince, who was then in the jail, was executed.³ It is said that this fire which occurred in the jail was arson. The outbreak of fire and social condition during the times of Myanmar kings can be known according to the royal orders.⁴ It is known that fire broke out 49 times or more. During the times of King Badon and Thibaw, fires out broke in a considerable number.⁵

In finding out the answers to the questions “Why loses were great by fire and why did fire catch easily,” It is found that the houses and the palaces were built of wood and bamboo during the time of Myanmar Kings. According to the documents available to the researchers, it is known that religious buildings were mostly built of bricks and palaces and houses, of wood during the reign of Myanmar kings. The Myanmars built the palaces of teak because they were skilled enough to decorate the palaces with wood-carvings. Therefore, as they were equipped with a good knowledge of wood carvings and glass mosaic, they used to construct the palaces out of wood from Bagan Period up to Konbaung Period when the Mya Nan San Kyaw palace was constructed by King Mindon.⁶

Most of the houses and palaces were constructed out of wood because wooden buildings were suitable for and resistance to the hot climate of Myanmar, wood was abundant and teak was easily carved by Myanmar sculptors.⁷ Besides, as the royal order saying “Let decayed roofs, walls and floors of the palace and other chambers be repaired with new wooden planks and nails by carpenters under their supervisors⁸” is found, it can be assumed that ruined parts could be detached easily. Therefore, palaces can be considered to have been built of wood. As palaces and royal residences were built of wood, they caught fire quickly when a fire broke out.

In the same way, houses of commoners were constructed out of woods, bamboo and thatches. Therefore, when a fire broke out, they caught fire immediately. What was worse, as

¹ (a) *Dates*, pp.370-371
(b) *Itinerating Chronicle*, p.227

² *Dates*, p.376

³ *Dates*, pp. 374-375

⁴ See Appendix 1

⁵ See Appendix 2

⁶ *Itinerating Chronicle*, p. 243

⁷ *With Our Own sovereignty*, pp.96-97

⁸ Dr. ThanTun, *The Royal Orders of Burma*, AD. 1598-1885, Part.V, A.D.1788-1806, Kyoto, The Centre for South-east Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1986, p.557 (Hereafter cited as *ROB-V*)

there was no specific fire-brigade at that time, losses were very great. Fire broke out in the greatest number in March, April and May, which are the hottest months of summer.

Preventions

According to historical evidences, 663 fire fighters were organized for prevention of fire in the reign of King Anawrahta (1044-1077).¹ There were Royal Orders on preventing fire during the Inwa Period. In 1367 King MingyiSwasawke promulgated that

Myowun, Myosaye, Htaungmhu, Htaungsachi must check and take the measure for preventing fire around the royal palace including inside and outside.²

It is known according to the royal orders that Myanmar kings undertook systematic, preventive measures against fire which was more dangerous than thieves and robbers. Regarding the prevention of fire, it is mentioned in the *Samvara* epic-poem composed by Ven. Maharatthasara thus:

“...The bronze drum is beaten four times... going round the residences of nobilities to warn them of the danger of fire...”³

The above stanza is considered as the earliest preventive measure against fire during the time of Myanmar kings. Another royal order on fire-prevention issued by King Tharlun on 9 December 1637 is found as follows.

“... There are elders and criers in the quarters of commoners. Let them cry for warnings day and night so that fire, big and small, cannot break out at their friends' houses. Let every house erect 5 or 10 lengths of bamboo in front of it. Let pots filled with water to their brim be put on the roofs of the houses. The oven-pit must be dug to a depth of 3 cubits. Let the fire in the oven be extinguished at 3 beats over 4 a.m. Let rice be cooked when the officers of Lat-ma Jail beat the drum at 2 beats over 3 p.m. But, let the oven-fire be extinguished over 3 p.m. There must not be any remnants of fire at the time when the drum is beaten. Let criers check with feathers of chickens whether there are still remnants of fire or not. If the feathers catch fire, the holder of the house must be sent to the court. Smoking of pipes and cheroots are prohibited on the street, at their turnings and inside the houses. If people are found smoking at these places, they must be caned 100 times. The criers must go round the quarter on inspection five times a day....”⁴

¹ အထွေထွေအုပ်ချုပ်ရေးဦးစီးဌာနအရာရှိများ၏ အထူးမွမ်းမံသင်တန်းပို့ချချက်စာစောင်၊ အတွဲ (၂)၊ (Lecture on Special Courses of General Administration Department, Vol. II), Yangon, Monywa Offset, 1994, p. 621 (Hereafter cited as *Lecture*, Vol. II)

² U AungSoe, မြန်မာနိုင်ငံမီးသတ်တပ်ဖွဲ့သမိုင်း (History of Fire Services Department), unpublished book, Yangon, Fire Services Department, 2006, p. 1

³ Dr. Toe Hla, စာပေမှတ်တမ်းများကပြောသောမြန်မာ့သမိုင်း (The Myanmar History told by Literary Records AD.1364-1885), Yangon, Lin-yadana Press, 2009, p.6 (Hereafter cited as *The Myanmar History told by Literary Records*)

⁴ (a) U TunNyo, (TwinthinTaikWunMahasithu) မဟာရာဇဝင်သစ် (MahayazawinThit, Dynasty of Naung-yan), Vol-III, Yangon, Khing Yee Mon Press, 1997, p. saw (Hereafter cited as *Dynasty of Naung-yan*)

(b) *The Royal Order of King Tharlun*, National Library, palm-leaf manuscript No. 1612, Gar (obverse- reverse sides)

(c) Dr. ThanTun, *The Royal Order of Burma* A.D. 1598-1885, Part. I, AD. 1598-1648, Kyoto, The Centre for South-east Asian Studies, Kyoto Universities, 1983, p.338 (Hereafter cited as *ROB-I*)

It is found that Alaungphaya(AD 1752-1760), like King Thalun, issued a royal order on fire-prevention. When Inwa was burnt down by the people of Hanthawady, King Alaungphaya built Ratanatheingkhacity in 1753. On the completion of the new city, his most important task was to take fire-preventive measures. Therefore, he issued a royal order on extinguishing and prevention of fire. According to this order, when Myowun beat a drum, the oven-fire must be extinguished. If not, the holder of the house must be sent to the office of Myowun.¹ Although no evidence on the outbreak of fire during the time of king Alaungphaya has been discovered yet, his royal order is found to be a systematic fire-preventive measure.

It is also noticed that when Myanmar kings were away from the capital on military expeditions or for uniting the people in the kingdom, they were worried for the outbreak of fire. King Alaungphaya endeavored to protect the capital from being sacked by the enemy as well as to take fire-preventive measures.

When the King Alaungphaya marched against Thailand on 13 January, 1758, he left behind his eldest son Crown-prince SiriSidhamma Raja in the capital as a security officer with a message including (1)to protect the capital from the danger of fire (2) to repress thieves and robbers (3) to provide sufficient water to the people (4) to make the donations of alms, meals and betelquid and (5) to propitiate traditional spirits² Even on the way to Thailand, he dispatched the letters to his elder son and Chief Consort to be vigilant against the theft and fire³ During his expedition, he ordered his men to clear away the rubbish inside and outside the camp,⁴ which could catch fire easily. His orders to urge his officers (like HtaungHmu etc.)to be vigilant against fire inside and outside the camp to extinguish the oven-fire after cooking at the camp, to kill commanding officers and their clerks, if remnants of fire were found on inspection with the feathers of chicken, to remove anything related to fire inside and outside the camp during the night and to ask half of the soldiers to keep vigil while another half were sleeping and to go on a patrol around the camp for 4 watches a night were very systematic military disciplines.⁵ King AlaungPhaya issued an order on 13 March, 1760 that whenever his men occupied a town, it must not be set on fire.⁶ If the town of enemy was set on fire, the people living in the town and neighboring areas would be killed. So this order reflected the humanitarian spirit of King Alaung Phaya.

King Shwebo toured Ukkalapa town on 23 October, 1841. It is found that, during his tour, Myowuns, Myo-Oaks and Ywathugyis at various towns and villages including Inwa, Sagaing, etc promised him to administer their regions well so that their people would be free from crimes and outbreak of fire.⁷

¹ Dr. ThanTun, *The Royal Orders of Burma*, AD. 1598-1885, Part.III, AD 1751-1781, Kyoto, The Centre for South-east Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1985, pp.204-205 (Hereafter cited as *ROB-III*)

² Dr. Than Tun, *အမိန့်တော်ထဲကသမိုင်း (The History in the Royal Orders)*, Yangon, Seik Ku Cho-choSarpay, 2011, p.66, (Hereafter cited as *The History in the Royal Orders*)

³ “Min Mon Mon”, *(မြန်မာမင်းလက်ထက်မီးမိန့်များ)* (*Royal Orders on Fire*), Working Daily(7.3.70) p.6

⁴ (a) *မင်းခုနစ်ပါး ၁၀၀၀ ပြည့် (1000th Years of Seven Kings)*, National Library, *pe* manuscript No.171
(b) *ROB-I*, pp.409-410

⁵ Dr. ThanTun, *The Royal Orders of Burma*, AD. 1598-1885, Part IV, AD 1782-1787, Kyoto, The Centre for South-east Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1986, p. 393, (Hereafter cited as *ROB-IV*)

⁶ *The History in the Royal Orders*, p. 34

⁷ Dr. ThanTun, *The Royal Orders of Burma*, AD. 1598-1885, Part .VIII, AD 1819-1853, Kyoto, The Centre for South-east Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1988, p.740 (Hereafter cited as *ROB-VIII*)

The Myanmar believed in occultism. They also believed in omens and random utterances as well as 'Thiaik-sar'(written prophecy). The Thaik-sars found during the time of King Badon (1782-1819) mention the dangers of fire thus:

“ ... Many people would get into trouble due to oppression of fire at Kyee-min capital in 1788...

Kyee-min Kingdom would be destroyed by a great fire in 1789.¹

The capital of Myanmar Kings would be reduced to ashes due to fire in 1809...”²

Therefore, to remove these dangers of fire, propitiation of Taung-myin Spirit and recitation of the Kammavaca, Parittas(Holy Discourses) and Supreme Qualities of the Buddha by invited Sayadaws were done in and round the capital.³

In doing so, the Vatta Sutta was recited by monks led by eight religious-title recipient Sayadaws to remove the danger of fire.⁴ Moreover, as summer had arrived in January and February, criers carefully announced the danger of fire at the palace and the residential quarters in its neighbours. King Badon also had the ruined roof of the corridor in front of the glass chamber replaced with a wooden roof,⁵ the treasure-chamber⁶ and the royal granary roofed with tiles ⁷and all the houses except the Anauk-yone removed from the patch near the wooden stockade behind the palace.⁸King Badon, regarding the prevention of fire, issued orders on 6 February 1783, 28 January 1785 and 27 January 1788 as follows:

“...The wind starts to come again. Go on fire inspection around the houses inside the palace-compound and the residential quarters in the town. Let a spike, a hook, length of bamboo and a pot full of water stand by in front of every- house.Let the ruined window-leaves and bamboo-mattings be replaced with new ones. There must not be rubbish (fuel). Thatch-roofs must be removed. Those who can afford tile-roofs must do so. These who cannot afford tile-roofs must change old roofs for new ones...”⁹

As the houses were close to each other, it was be very dangerous when fire broke out. So Myanmar kings announced laws on construction of houses. According to these laws, a person must build his house in the patch of land as permitted by the authority concerned. If he, going against the laws, built more brick-buildings, gardens, monasteries, pagodas, rest-houses, bridges, wells and ponds, these must be removed and he must be put in the jail for a month.¹⁰

¹ (a) Dr. Than Tun, မြန်မာ့သမိုင်းရာစုသမိုင်း (Tit- bits of Myanmar History), Yangon, Yon-kyi-chat Press 2005, p.50
(b) *Influence of Occultism*, p.133

² (a) *Influence of Occultism*, p.135

(b) *The History in the Royal Orders*, p.187

³ *ROB-V*, p.358

⁴ *Itinerating Chronicle*, p. 268

⁵ Dr. ThanTun, *The Royal Orders of Burma*, A.D. 1598-1885, Part .VI, AD 1807-1810, Kyoto, The Centre for South-east Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1987, p.687 (Hereafter cited as *ROB-VI*)

⁶ *ROB-V*, p.359

⁷ *ROB-V*, p. 331

⁸ *ROB-V*, p. 821

⁹ *ROB-IV*, p.244, p.413, and *ROB-V*, p.357

¹⁰ Dr.ThanTun, *The Royal Order of Burma*, A.D. 1598-1885, Part.IX, AD. 1853-1885, Kyoto, The Centre for South-east Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1989, p.624 (Hereafter cited as *ROB-IX*)

Moreover, the houses in the golden capital must not be walled with bamboo-mattings and the houses on the roads and in the streets must be built according to the sizes confirmed by the authority. Besides, the houses in the capital must be roofed with tiles,¹ the houses in rows in the capital must be made of bricks and the roofs, the floors and the walls of the houses with bamboo-matting roofs must be smeared with mud.²

The duties of the in-charge and clerks of the jail were to detain criminals with security and to prevent the outbreak of fire in the jail.³ Therefore, a drum was beaten for three watches a night to keep service-men of the jail vigilant against fire⁴. In this way, on fire-prevention the orders on fire-prevention issued by King Badon were found to be an important matter to bring about security of the people and rule of law.

During the reign of King Badon, the people used to light kerosene lamps and oil lamps in the residential quarters inside and outside the capital. To prevent the outbreak of fire, the king, therefore, issued a royal order thus

“...let lighted kerosene lamps and oil lamps be put in large terracotta sand-filled bowls. If much kerosene is spilt over the sand for a long time, it will easily catch fire. Therefore, let this oil-soaked sand be changed for new one from time to time.”⁵

As the kerosene lamps and oil lamps were put in the sand-filled bowl, even if they were aflame accidentally, fire could not spread to the floor of the houses. Thus, the royal order on fire-prevention issued by King Badon was found very-worthy.

As people were very often oppressed by fire, they voiced their opinions about the prevention of fire. King Mindon, having enquired about the opinions of the public through his officers, published newspapers with a view to developing his kingdom.⁶ The newspapers carried the suggestions about the public opinions regarding prevention of fire. The *Myanmar Thandawsint* published on Saturday, 23 May 1874 said thus:

“...Due to the danger of fire, well-to-do people should build their houses of bricks. Those who cannot afford to do so should move elsewhere. The houses at the corner of the roads should be built of bricks or those who can afford to build the brick enclosure-walls around their brick houses should exchange their houses for the ones at the corners of the roads. By doing so, fire, hampered by the brick enclosure-wall, cannot spread elsewhere. As a consequence, the poor will be free from the danger of fire. Otherwise, due to the frequent outbreaks of fire, the poor will lose their jobs or be too busy with reconstructing their houses to engage in their business. Therefore, this matter should be submitted to the king through officers...”⁷

¹ *Dynasty of Nyaungyan*, p. 80

² *ROB-V*, p.376

³ *ROB-IV*, p. 416

⁴ Dr.ThanTun, *The Royal Order of Burma*, A.D. 1598-1885, Part.VII, AD. 1811-1819, Kyoto, The Centre for South-east Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1988, p.342 (Hereafter cited as *ROB-VII*)

⁵ *ROB-VII*, p. 364

⁶ *ROB-IX*, pp.840-841

⁷ *Newspaper*, pp. 355-356

The Myanmar newspaper dated on 20 September 1872 also said thus:

“...There are many rich merchants in Mandalay. As each large brick-house is surrounded by many houses roofed with bamboo-mattings, if a fire breaks out, such brick-houses will not stand any longer. But, since fire breaks out in Mandalay annually, the poor get into trouble. If only people who can afford to build brick and wooden houses are permitted to live in Mandalay with tile-roofs, it will soon be possible. This is because there is an abundance of bricks, tiles and wood in Mandalay. The poor who cannot afford to build good houses should be transferred to the outskirts of the capital to which fire cannot spread easily...”¹

It is noticed that Myanmar kings not only took fire-preventive measures but also meted out due punishments to those who were heedless of fire, by issuing royal orders.

Punishments

It is found that the punishments on fire cases fell into three categories during the times of Myanmar kings. They were: (1)The punishment given to fire-criers for their less effort, (2)the punishment given to those who did not join other fire-fighters during the out-break of fire and (3)the punishment given to the fire-fighters who did not bring necessary fire-extinguishing implements.

During the reign of Myanmar kings, fire-criers were appointed to remind the people to make systematic use of fire.²Myowuns, Sayeis, Htaung-hmu, Htaung-sayeis, etc had to inspect the residential quarters within the five-taing radius of the palace to prevent the outbreak of fire.³ In case of a fire, Myowun had to inspect the scene and Atwin and Apyin Htaung-Hmus, Hhaung-sayeis, etc had to announce the outbreak of fire by beating drums only in the quarters where the fire broke out.⁴

Punishments given to those who did not make enough endeavours in crying out for the danger of fire were found. During the time of King Badin, a fire broke out on 4 January 1788. But the heads of the quarters did not cry out for the outbreak of the fire and extinguish the fire from the start. So the fire spread to many places. Therefore, at the order of the kings, the heads of the quarters inside and outside the capital were given flogging with the drums beaten round the capital.⁵ The Sayei-gyis of Prince Kanaung were also put in custody for not their enough cry for fire. Thus the punishments given to the fire-criers for the less effort in their work during the time of Myanmar kings are found.

Concerning the way of extinguishing fire and punishments given to those who did not engage in putting out fire and bring fire-extinguishing implements, there goes a stanza thus:

“...In the wide expanse of the kingdom, if a fire breaks out, people should come in force...destroy the walls of bamboo-mattings in the neighbourhood of the scene...bring down the thatch-roofs by bamboo spikes and hooks, ...put out the

¹ *Newspaper*, pp.251-252

² *ROB-III*, p.204

³ *ROB-I*, p.151

⁴ *ROB-I*, p.219

⁵ *ROB-V*, p.365

fire with water-soaked Longyis, water-sprays and the water continuously poured down from pots...thus does the fire cease...”¹

The stanza means that, in case of fire, people flocked to the burning house with pointed bamboo lengths, hooks and spikes, brought down the walls and roof with them and then extinguished fire with water poured from pots. Then, they had to demolish the walls and roofs of the neighbouring houses so that fire could not spread to neighbouring houses. Men and women came with pointed bamboo-lengths and pots² and, under the supervision of Wungis, Wunhtauks, Myo-sayei-gyis and Htaungmhu, fetched water from the moat and put out the fire.³ Just as the people tried to cease the fire, foot-soldiers and officers like Sinwuns, Myinwuns, etc had to come to the scene with their vehicles and accoutrements. Sinse-Thuye had to come with their own elephants and Myinse-Thuye with their horses. The king ordered that elephants and horses must stand by and that if fire broke out outside the capital, elephants did not need to stand by⁴. It is found that Mie-wun (Officer of fire-fighting) was appointed on 15 September 1784.⁵ It is learnt that there were four Negro service-men at the department of fire-fighting during the time of King Mindon.⁶

King Badon issued an order that people must bring swords and spears with them when they rushed to the scene of the outbreak of fire.⁷ It is said that people who came to the fire which broke out on 16 June 1795 were checked whether they brought with them swords or not, that those who did not were shackled in the log⁸ and that those who did not come to the scene were shackled in the log and died in the sun.⁹ Even if royal service-men such as Hmudaw, Matdaw, Suyeis and Sukaings did not come to the scene of the outbreak of fire and join other fire-fighters, they were also shackled in the log and died in the sun.¹⁰ If there was an outbreak of fire in the quarters inside or outside the capital, Myowuns, Htaungmus and Myosayeis had to arrest, interrogated and punished the offender¹¹ and if there was an outbreak of fire in villages, the case had to be decided by Myowuns, Sitkes, etc.¹² If the capital fell into chaos due to fire, the authorities must bring it under control as soon as possible and mete out due punishment to the offender.

The evidences discovered so far show that those who committed the case of fire were dismissed from their positions and then detained during the reign of King Mindon. A great fire occurred around the Se-shin market west of the palace in the capital at seven beats of the drum over 1 a.m, 21 February 1874 and swallowed 700 houses. Prince Makhaya and his retinue came to the scene and put out the fire. Although other Myowuns and Pyawuns came to the scene,

¹ *Myanmar History told by Literary Records*, p.6

² *ROB-V*, p. 541

³ *ROB-V*, p.364

⁴ *Newspaper*, pp. 342-344

⁵ *The History of Royal Orders*, p. 95

⁶ U MaungMaung Tin, [မြန်မာမင်းလက်ထက်တော်စာတမ်းများ] (*Papers during the Times of Myanmar Kings*), Yangon, Win NaingOo Press, 1982, p.64

⁷ Dr. Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885*, Part.II, AD 1649-1750, Kyoto, The Centre for South-east Asian Studies, Kyoto University 1985, p.153

⁸ *ROB-V*, p.541

⁹ *ROB-V*, p.853

¹⁰ *Dates*, p.333

¹¹ (a) *ROB-IV*, p.247

(b) *ROB-I*, p.421

¹² *ROB-V*, P. 363

Taung Myowun U Pe Si and Myauk Myowun U Tha O did not come . The fire ceased over 3.am. If the fire was extinguished in unison by Myowuns and Pyawuns, it could be ceased quickly. But as they did not do so, many houses and properties had to be lost. Therefore, Taung Myowun and MyaukMyowun were removed from their positions, clapped in irons and put incustody. ¹This was because the king's patience was worn out, as they did not come to the scene of fire, overlooking their duties. The Hluttaw also called Kani Atwinwun who did not come to the scene of fire. But, he did not turn up. So he was removed from the position. However, it was later found that he had been ill before the fire and that he could not come to the Hluttaw due to illness. So, the king, saying that extinguishing fire was the duty of Myowuns, Pyawun, security-men, etc only, restored him to the former position.² Besides, it is found that during the fire, the ministers who did not come to the Atwintaw, the Hluttaw, the Yonedaw and the Anauk-yone were punished by being shackled in the log and dried in the sun ³and that those who were due such punishment were very often released.⁴As a fire which started from the Chamber of Makyeekan Kadaw on 31 January 1720 spread to the main chamber of the palace, she was sent to Shwe Inn in Katha.⁵

It is found that, regarding the interrogation to monks about the outbreak of fire, king and monks came into conflict during the time of King Tharlun. It so happened thus: A fire broke out in Inwaon 29 April 1641. Another fire also occurred in 1642. Concerning it, some city-dwelling monks were called to the court for interrogation. For this, the Presiding Sayadaw of the the Pan-ya-aung-tat monastery sent a letter to the king, saying that monks should not be called to the court, that if other countries heard of this, they would think that the Sasana had disappeared in Myanmar and that if the officers wanted to interrogate the monks, they should do so at the monastery. Therefore, the king, to be in harmony with monks, issued an order that monks should not be called to the court, that they should be interrogated at their monasteries and that the case should be decided by ministers.⁶

There were Pitaka-taiks so that the Three Baskets of the Dhamma (Tipitaka) could be free from fire. It is observed that when a fire occurred on 5 July 1784 during the time of King Bodaw, officers could not bring the religious texts to a safe place. Therefore, they were given death-sentence.⁷ A grave sentence given by King Badon on the fire-case was found in the order issued by him on 12 April 1794. NgaMyat Taw, whose title was Maha-sirijeyasankhaya title, though a minister and a donor of the monastery committed the Three Baskets of the Dhamma written in golden ink, etc. to the charge of NgaKyawHtwe who lived at the Barkayar Monastery of Siridhaja-mahadhammarajadhi-rajaguru. So those religious texts were kept in the monastery. But, they all were burnt down when a fire broke out. Therefore, donor NgaMyat Taw and layman

¹ *Newspaper*, p. 342

² (a) *Newspaper*, p.284

(b)*Newspaper*, pp. 342-44

³ *ROB-VI*, p.720

⁴ *ROB-VI*, p.739

⁵ (a) Daw Ohn Kyi(Member of Myanmar Historical Commission) လက်ဝဲနေ့ရထား အလောင်းမင်းတရားကြီး အရေးတော်ပုံ (Latwe Anawrath Alaungmintayagyi Campaign), Yangon, 2011, p.9

(b) *Dynasty of Nyaungyan*, pp.140-41

⁶ *ROB- I*, p.427, pp. 440-442

⁷ Dr. Than Tun, မြန်မာသမိုင်းရှာတော်ဝံ (In search of Myanmar History), Yangon , Yon-kyi-chat Press, 2003, p.238 (Hereafter cited as *In search of Myanmar History*)

NgaKyawHtwe were executed.¹ It was the heaviest of all the sentences regarding fire cases. Although Myanmar kings meted out due punishment for the outbreak of fire, they carried out fire-relief and resettlement works of the fire-victims who faced social and economic difficulties.

Rehabilitations

Myanmar kings had done rehabilitation after fire outbreaks for any reason. On 13 March 1810, King Badon issued orders to do land-filling, logging and baking of bricks to reconstruct the palace which had been burnt down. The task of reconstructing the new palace was assigned to Minister NemyoThiha Thu.² The construction of the palace was scheduled to commence on 7 April 1810. The design of glass chamber was first to be drawn and the time of laying a foundation stone was to be started according to the astrologer under the supervision of Ye Hletaik Wun.³ Kyawse Taik-wun, Sayeis, Panbe-wun, Lin-zinBo, Thabye Hlathugyi, Head of the Arsenal and 575 Khasis were despatched to the Kyauk-ta-da Forest north of Yenantha Township in Kyawse Administrative Unit for logging. Each of them were given 9 coins (from the Kathaung Myaung Taik) for their provision.⁴ Moreover, a group of 700 people were sent to Ngwe-taung and Paw-in (near the Ohn-hlwat dam) to cut down and bring 1000 long logs to construct the palaces.⁵ Thit-su Wunthtauk Min HlaSiri, together with his men, was assigned the task of cutting down and sending long logs which were five cubits (seven and a half feet) in girth and 40 cubits (60 feet) in length.⁶ Copper tiles were made for the roofing of the palace.⁷ The implements for the gates and turrets of the palace-walls were made in Mingwin and then sent to the site of the palace.⁸ So people from Ayuddhaya city were also added to the labourer force to transport the logs to the capital.⁹ Workers were gathered to saw wood¹⁰ and 1000 saws were built to slew wood in time.¹¹ Ministers and officers who had Khasi slaves had to send one out of ten to the construction site.

It is found that a lot of money and human labour were used in the rehabilitation. Considering that the public had to incur the expense for the construction of the new palace, Mye-swun Wun (Land-officer) made the list of the houses in the kingdom and allotted the money to be collected from each district.¹² But, the definite amount of money paid to the construction of the palace by each district was unknown. As the king was worried for the outbreak of fire again, he ordered that, except the houses of night-sentry, those of ministers, princes, poor people, etc must not be within a distance of 200 tas from the wooden stockade west of the palace.¹³

¹ (a) *ROB-V*, p.455

(b) *The History in the Royal Orders*, pp.181-182

² *With our own Sovereignty*, p.59

³ *ROB-VI*, p.709

⁴ *ROB-VI*, p. 729

⁵ *ROB-VI*, 733

⁶ *ROB-VI*, p.750

⁷ *ROB-VI*, p.735

⁸ *ROB-VI*, p.707

⁹ (a) *In search of Myanmar History*, p.159

(b) *The History in the Royal Orders*, p. 69

¹⁰ *ROB-VI*, p.726

¹¹ *ROB-VI*, p.751

¹² (a) *In search of Myanmar History*, p.161

(b) *The History in the Royal Orders*, p.72

¹³ *ROB-VI*, p.701

It is noticed that King Badon resettled the fire-victims and provided them with necessary aids. He had them build their new houses. When they built the houses, he had the houses roofed with terracotta tiles which were immune to fire.¹ The people living outside the capital who were chaotic when elephants came during the fire were assigned around the city-gate according to the list and ministers and officers, inside the city-walls.² In other words, it can be assumed that the king built fire-victim camps.

King Badon is also found to have provided fire-victims with necessary assistance. On 13 February, 1788, he ordered his men to take out paddy from the royal granary and to give each house-hold two baskets of paddy, rice-pots and water-pots.³ He set aside the unburntpaddy in the royal granary for the provision of his servicemen and distributed the remaining paddy to the fire-victims. He also had Crown-prince to give over 6,000 baskets of paddy of his to his service-men whose houses were burnt down in the fire.⁴

King Badin not only built Pitaka-taiks and copied religious texts but also provided the four requisites to the monks whose monasteries were destroyed by fire. On 13 March, 1810, fire swallowed both the palace and monasteries. The king then listed the number of the monasteries destroyed by the fire, the number of the monks dwelling at those monasteries and the number of the canonical texts damaged by fire and ordered princes, ministers and the public to provide the fire-victim monks with the monasteries, alms-meal, etc so that they would not move elsewhere. Then, he had them submit the lists of their donation to him.⁵ Besides, he had the lists of the number of the stupas and Tipatakas damaged by fire and the estimated cost of reconstructing and recopying them submitted to him.⁶ Moreover, he ordered his men to make the lists of what had been burnt down at the Shwe-lin-bin Pagoda⁷ and the remaining gold, silver, copper, lead, charcoal, etc of other pagodas in the capital and to submit these lists to him.⁸ In addition, he ordered Shwe-taik-wun to sell over 50 visses of glass, etc burnt down by fire at the then prevailing prices and then to submit to him the money acquired from the sale.⁹ Furthermore, a royal order saying that the king would give the money to repair the Phaya-thone-su rest-house at the corner of the capital, which was damaged by fire and the money should be drawn out through the Hluttaw was found.¹⁰ Although it is not known where the burnt things of the pagodas and monasteries were kept, it is found that the rifles damaged by fire were used as pick-axes at quarries.¹¹

It is also found that King Bagan (1846-1853) repaired the religious buildings destroyed by fire. There are many religious buildings in Myanmar such as pagodas, cause-ways, monasteries, pavilions surmounted by a tiered roof. The monasteries are surrounded by enclosure-walls called

¹ ROB-V, p.418

² ROB-VIII, p.362

³ ROB-V, p.371

⁴ ROB-VI, P.704

⁵ ROB- VI, p.708

⁶ *In Search of Myanmar History*, p.212

⁷ ROB-VI, p.702

⁸ ROB-VI, p.714

⁹ ROB-VI, p. 728

¹⁰ ROB-VI, p.740

¹¹ (a) *In search of Myanmar History*, p. 160

(b) *The History in the Royal Orders*, p.70

‘fire-barrier’ so that they can be free from fire.¹ However, no matter how much the monasteries are surrounded by enclosure-walls, they succumb to destruction when fires break out. On 18 March, 1848, five monasteries were destroyed by fire. King Bagan, with the desire of perpetuation of the Sasana, then rebuilt 22 monasteries.² It is found that King Tharyawady (1837-1846) also provided house-hold items and utensils to the fire-victims, whose houses were damaged by fire on 16 July, 1840.³ Moreover, King Thibaw, through his Than-daw-sint Sayeigy and Myosagyi, supplied a quarter of a rice-bag and two silver coins to each house-hold of the fire-victims whose houses were destroyed by fire on 10 April, 1884.⁴

Conclusion

It is noticed that as ancient Myanmar was abundant in various species of timber such as teak, iron-wood, shorea obtusa, gmelina arborea etc, Myanmar peoples used to build the buildings of any kind of wood and bamboo. In general, poor commoners used to live in bamboo houses whereas wealthy people and high-ranking officers used to live in wooden ones. The palace and royal residences were also built of wood. Therefore, if there broke out a fire, it could spread very quickly to other houses. During Konbaung Period, the time of cooking was fixed and announced by criers, beating drums around the town. In cooking, wood and bamboo had to be used as fuels and kerosene for lighting lamps. There were various reasons for the outbreak of fire. The evidences show that a considerable number of fires, big and small, broke out during the times of King Badon, King Midon and King Thibaw. It is noticed that successive Myanmar kings paid a great heed to fire which was more dangerous than thieves and bandits.

It is known in light of royal orders that although there were not yet modern fire-extinguishing implements as today, Myanmar kings carried out systematic preventive measures against fire. If there was an outbreak of fire, not only did people lose their properties but also the king had to perform the task of rehabilitating the fire-victims. Fire can break out anywhere anytime-both during the times of Myanmar kings and today, Therefore, systematic fire preventive measures should be carried out and fire, used systematically. Fire-extinguishing implements should stand by to be able to put out fire immediately. Responsible personnel should call upon the people in villages and wards to keep ready fire-hooks, fire-cards, piles of sand, buckets filled with water, etc. The ovens in the kitchen should be kept systematic, children should not be asked to do dangerous jobs, easily combustible things should not be kept in the neighbourhood, and people should be prohibited from smoking on the roads. It is responsible for everyone to prevent the outbreak of fire in union, as the saying “Avoid the danger of fire and prevent fire before it breaks out” goes.

¹ Daw Ohn Kyi, *DawOhnKyi's Selected Papers Golden Jubilee Commemorative Journal*, Yangon, Myanmar Historical Commission, 2004, p. 45

² *Dates*, p. 264

³ *Ibid*, p. 236

⁴ (a) *Itinerating Chronicle*, p. 227
(b) *Dates*, p. 370

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Appendix I

The outbreaks of fire in the chronological sequence

Date	Time	Place	Losses	Cost of Losses
1 June, 1676		Nyaungsetan	Whole Nyaungsetan ¹	
24 March, 1689		Palepa to the palace through Wanbe Lake ²		
31 January, 1720		Chamber of ladies-in-waiting ³		
5 July, 1784			The Three Baskets of Dhamma ⁴	
4 January, 1788		Fire broke-out ⁵		
12 April, 1794		Bharkaya Monastery	The Three Baskets of Dhamma ⁶	
16 June, 1795		Outbreak of fire ⁷		
10 April, 1806	Night	East of Yoke-te Lu-ok NgaMaing's house	The hall built by Da-wai Bo ⁸	
13 March, 1810		Starting from Chinese NgaKyi's house ⁹	Palace-city, palace, and Treasure-chamber were burnt down	crores ¹⁰
30 March, 1810			The shwe-lin-bin pagoda was burnt down ¹¹	
1 April, 1810		NgaOo's house north of Pyi-min's house ¹²		
18 April, 1810	Night		The house near the pagoda of the Athe-wun ¹³	
27 April, 1810			Mi Min Pyu's house ¹⁴	
6 May, 1810	Night		The hut of Nga Shwe Aung, a service-man of Crown-prince ¹⁵	
15 January, 1812		The flame of fire just seen ¹⁶		
19 September, 1819		A big fire broke out ¹⁷		

¹ *Dynasty of Nyaungnyan*, p.115² *Ibid*, p.118³ *Ibid*, p.118⁴ *In Search of Myanmar History*, (Yangon), p.238⁵ *ROB-V*, p.365⁶ *ROB-V*, p.455⁷ *ROB-V*, p.541⁸ *ROB-V*, p.853⁹ *ROB-VI*, p.651¹⁰ (a) *Influence of Occultism*, p.139(b) *Tit-bits of Myanmar History*, p.56¹¹ *ROB-VI*, p.702¹² *ROB-VI*, p.706¹³ *ROB-VI*, p.720¹⁴ *ROB-VI*, p.730¹⁵ *ROB-VI*, p.739¹⁶ *ROB-VII*, p.281¹⁷ *The History in the Royal Orders*, p.135

Date	Time	Place	Losses	Cost of Losses
25 April,1821		Kon-tha south of the palace	Hluttaw, Sway-taw Monastery, royal clock-tower and the northern city-gate ¹	
16 July,1840	Over 3am	Akhadaw quarter in the Anauk-pin	About 2000 houses ²	
18 March, 1848		The western face of the capital	Five monasteries ³	
8 April, 1861		Starting from the floor of the glass chamber ⁴		
31 july,1861		Starting from the NgaShweHla's house in the Chinese town ⁵		
15 April 1866	Over 3 p.m	Starting from the top of the moat	Over 3800 houses were burnt down in Htee-dan, Thahtay-dan, Magyi-bin market, Bayingyi, Sagainge-dan,Nyaung-bin market, Oak-dan, Kwat-dan, san-dan, Than-dan, War-dan quarter ⁶	
23 April,1867	At 5 beats of the drum over 4 pm	Kyaung-dan north of the Swe-daw-sin ⁷		
28 March,1872		Store-houses in Shan-pwe quarter	Over 300 houses	Over 290,000 kyats ⁸
21 February, 1874	At 7beats of the drums over 1 am ⁹	Se-shin market west of the palace	About 7000 houses	
2 May,1874	About 3 a.m	Kon-dan quarter	Two children afflicted with small-pox were burnt down ¹⁰	
3 May,1874	About 2 p.m	Ma-gyi-bin market at the top of the Zee-cho market	Over 1000 houses	Two children afflicted with small-pox were burnt down ¹¹

¹ *Dates*,p.151² *Ibid*,p.236³ *Ibid*,p.264⁴ *Itinerating Chronicle*,p.215⁵ *Ibid*,p.215⁶ *Dates*,p.327⁷ *Ibid*,p.333⁸ *Newspaper*,p.297⁹ *Newspaper*,p.342¹⁰ *Ibid*,pp.355-356¹¹ *Ibid*,pp.352-354

Date	Time	Place	Losses	Cost of Losses
16 November, 1894		Near the wooden Stockade south of the See-shin market	About 100 houses ¹	
25 February, 1879		Anauk-Pyin	Over 200 houses, Shwe-yei monastery and the western cause-way of the Maha Muni Buddha image ²	
18 February, 1883		Starting from Pyae-taik Thandaw Sint Nga Myint's house ³		
25 march, 1883		A great fire broke out ⁴		
3 April, 1883		A great fire broke out ⁵		
3 April, 1883		A great fire broke out ⁶		
5 April, 1883		A great fire broke out ⁷		
16 April		A great fire broke out ⁸		
28 February, 1884		Lin-Zin quarter in the taungpyin of the capital ⁹		
1 April, 1884		Fire broke out seven times Anauk-pyin ¹⁰		
5 April, 1884		Fire broke out senentimes in Anauk-pyin ¹¹		
5 April, 1884	About 4 beats of the drum over 1 a.m	Pyi-gyi-kyat-tha-yay quarter and the western Guard –officer's house west of the wodden stockade	Over 2500 houses and nearly 3000 houses ¹²	
5 April, 1884		Fire broke out seven times elsewhere on the same day	5 granaries with 92000 baskets of puddy , 6700 houses of service-men and non-service men and 54 monasteries ¹³	
7 April, 1884	About 3 beats of the drum over 2 p.m	Yadanabhumi quarter	All the case-ways and pavilion surmounted by a tiered roof were burnt down ¹⁴	

¹ Newspaper, pp.371-372

² *Itinerrating Chronicle*, p.220

³ Ibid ,p.223

⁴ Ibid ,p.223

⁵ Ibid ,p.223

⁶ Ibid ,p.223

⁷ Ibid ,p.223

⁸ Ibid ,p.223

⁹ Ibid ,p.227

¹⁰ Ibid ,p.227

¹¹ Ibid ,p.227

¹² *Dates*, p.370

¹³ U MaungMaung Tin, *ukef;abmifqufr[m&mZ0ifMuD;(Great Chronicle of Konboun Dynasty)*, Vol III, Yangon , Yarpay Press, 2004(4th printing), p.637

¹⁴ *Dates*, pp.370-71

Date	Time	Place	Losses	Cost of Losses
8 April, 1884		Ywa-haing market quarter	The shrine-hall of the Maha Muni Buddha image ¹	
14 April, 1884		The South-western corner of the royal city ²		
19 May, 1884		Pho-daw-toe Asu-taung ³		
25 May, 1884		The northern edge of the Chinese town of the Chan Aye Tharzan quarter ⁴		
21 September, 1889		The jail was burnt down	Leader of robbers and 20 prisoners died. Maing-pyin prince was executed ⁵	
19 February, 1885		Starting from the house of Ngakyay, a service-man of Pyi-lon-an Royal boat in Pyin-shwe-bon-shein quarter west of Chan-aye-yha-zan quarter ⁶		

Appendix II

The number of the outbreaks of fire during the times of Konbaung kings

Title of king	Number of the outbreak of fire
King Badon(1782-1819)	14
King Sagaing (1819-1837)	1
King Tharyawady(1837-1846)	1
King Bagan (1846-1853)	1
King Mindon(1853-1878)	9
King Thibaw(1878-1885)	23

¹ *Itinerating Chronicle*, p.227

² *Ibid* p.227

³ *Ibid* p.228

⁴ *Ibid* p.228

⁵ *Dates*, pp.374-375

⁶ *Papers during the Times of Myanmar Kings*, p.95