

## **DON PAULO OR FR. P. ABBONA IN MYANMAR HISTORY**

Aung MyoTun\*

### **Abstract**

The general aim of this paper is referred to the Franco-Myanmar relation and the Italian-Myanmar relation including the Italian-Myanmar treaty. The main purpose is to describe the activities of Fr. P. Abbona in Myanmar politics in late Konbaung period. In writing this paper, the datas, evidences extracted from the Myanmar chronicles, Peripatetic history, written by Dr. Than Tun, the papers, published by the Roman Catholic Church and other historical papers and books were used. Moreover, the advices of Fr. Joe Du and Fr. Peter Sein Hlaing Oo were taken into consideration in this paper. Three outcomes of this paper are Christian missionary priests who became important in Late Konbaung politics due to the then current situation, Fr. P. Abbona's activities and advices led to the progress of Myanmar politics and diplomacy and King Mindon himself realized that the building of the country entirely depended on the foreign relations. Fr. Paul Abbona served not only an advisor but also diplomat for Myanmar kings. This research paper is a paper evaluating Don Paulo called Fr. P. Abbona who took an active role in Myanmar politics in Late Konbaung period.

**Keywords;** advice, Fr. P. Abbona, Myanmar, relation, paper,

### **Introduction**

Fr. P. Abbona was one of the Oblate missionary priests who reached Myanmar on 20 August 1840. He severed King Tharawaddy and King Mindon as an advisor and a diplomat. His activities led to the progress of foreign relations between Myanmar royal governments and France and Italy. Myanmar kings were necessary to establish the foreign relations with the help of not only foreigners but also the missionary priests. Fr. P. Abbona discussed with British to stop the Second Anglo-Myanmar War. King Mindon began to give him in charge of the diplomatic affairs. Later, he actively engaged in implementing the Italian-Myanmar Treaty. As a result, French and Italian engineers took part in building the Myanmar forts and the industrialization of the country. Fr. P. Abbona's advices paid the way for the building of the peace between the Myanmar royal government and the British. On the other hand, most of the Myanmar monarchs adopted the religious toleration upon the alien religions such Christianity, Muslim, Hinduism and other religions. Fr. P. Abbona's primary aim was to minister the Catholics in Myanmar and to train and teach them to be catechists. However, Myanmar current situation pushed him into Myanmar politics. His advices and activities resulted in building of the country and in keeping peace with the British. Thus, Fr. P. Abbona came to play an important role in political, economic and social affairs during the reign of King Mindon.

### **Don Paulo Or Fr. P. Abbona in Myanmar History**

Fr. Paul Abbona who was known to Myanmar history as Don Paulo was born at Monchiero, Italy in 1819. He reached Moulmein in 1840. He persistently studied the Myanmar language and culture for one year. The Oblate missions of Turin, Italy were begun to be sent to Myanmar from 1840 onwards.<sup>1</sup>Fr. P. Abbona was an Italian Oblate missionary priest. Fr. P. Abbona was one of the Roman Catholic missionaries who engaged in Myanmar politics. He served King Tharawaddy and King Mindon as an advisor and a diplomat. His activities were clearly seen in Myanmar

---

\* Dr. Lecturer, Department of History, University of Mandalay

<sup>1</sup> Kaung, U, "1824-1853 Roman Catholic and American Baptist Mission," Burma Research Society, Fiftieth Anniversary Publications No.2, Journal of Burma Research Society, JBRS, Rangoon, 1960 (Hereafter cited as Kaung, "1824-1853 Roman Catholic and American Baptist Mission," Burma Research Society) p.136

politics besides the missionary works. Therefore, this research paper was divided into three parts such as political, diplomatic and socio-economic atmospheres.

## 1. Political Atmosphere

In 1829 Fr. F. Cao was appointed the Vicar Apostolic of Ava and Pegu.<sup>1</sup> In 1830 he reached Ava and stayed for eight years in Myanmar. In 1840 he gave Fr. P. Abbona to take a charge of Amarapura *Sasana* while King Tharawaddy made warlike preparations against British. He knew well that the strength of royal military did not compete against the British military which was one of the largest armies on the world. He believed that the political problems which King Tharawaddy faced could be settled by establishing diplomatic relations with the European Powers and the Papacy so that the king would receive their support. Therefore, during their presence in Myanmar, Fr. F. Cao and Fr. P. Abbona advised King Tharawaddy firstly to establish the diplomatic relation with Pope Gregory XVI.<sup>2</sup>

In 1839, Fr. Boccacio and Fr. Bartelli gave the Pope's letter to King Tharawaddy through Fr. P. Abbona. The Pope thanks King Tharawaddy for his benevolence towards the Burmese (Myanmar) Catholics. King Tharawaddy also received the token presents sent by Pope Gregory XVI.<sup>3</sup> During the reign of King Tharawaddy the Catholic missionary priests named Fr. G. Enrici, Msgr. G. Ceretti including Fr. Abbona was allowed to build churches and schools.<sup>4</sup> The diplomatic relation with Pope enabled Ava Kingdom to be familiar with the European powers especially France and Italy so that Ava king could challenge the British who was seizing Tenssarim (Taninthayi) and Arakan (Rakhine).

It can be said that Myanmar political situation persuaded Fr. P. Abbona to engage in the secular affairs. Why was Fr. P. Abbona appointed as a diplomat in spite of being an Italian Oblate priest? This answer was more suitable to Ava king, Tharawaddy's concept and current situation prevailing in Myanmar. The main factor was that King Tharawaddy confidently entrusted him in diplomatic affairs as Fr. P. Abbona was considered as a veteran priest who well versed in both secular and religious affairs. In the meanwhile, King Tharawaddy wanted to build his kingdom an industrialized state with help of the missionary priests like Fr. Cao, Fr. P. Abbona and Fr. Tarolli. It is seen that Fr. P. Abbona had to take an active part in building of the industrialization of Ava kingdom.

Though King Tharawaddy was a pro-military leader the war did not occur with the British during his reign. There are two reasons on why the war did not break out. The first reason was that his royal government led by King Tharawaddy understood the real situation in which not only the military strength but also the diplomatic relations was necessary. Fr. P. Abbona advised the king that he firstly built the country in all aspects such as military, diplomatic economic, social spheres so that he could fight against the British. The second was concerned with the world political condition in which the British were very busy with the Afghan wars, Persian wars. As a result, Fr. P. Abbona's advices halted not only the war but also led to the peace and the development of Ava country. Therefore, Ava king was acknowledged in world politics due to relation with Pope.

---

<sup>1</sup> Monica, Daw, "Myanmar Catholic Association in Myanmar Historical Sources," 500 Jubilee (1511-2011), Myanmar Dioceses' Association, 2014 (Hereafter cited as Monica, "Myanmar Catholic and American Baptist Mission") p.29

<sup>2</sup> Ba, Vivian, "Some Papal Correspondence With the Kings of Burma," Journal of Burmese Research Society, L.i, Yangon, June, 1967 (Hereafter cited as Ba, "Some Papal Correspondence") p.11

<sup>3</sup> Ba, Some Papal Correspondence, p.11

<sup>4</sup> Ba, Vivian, "The Beginnings of Western Education in Burma, The Catholic Effort," Journal of Burma Society, JBRS, XLVII, ii, 1964 (Hereafter cited as Ba, "The Beginnings of Western Education") p.312

Pope Gregory XVI (1831-1846) sent the Oblate missions of Turin, Italy to Myanmar from 1840 onwards.<sup>1</sup> Oblate means the religious devotion in English. Fr. P. Abbona was an Italian Oblate missionary priest. During the Konbaung period, the Oblate missionary priests took an active part in the role of the foreign relations and of the building of the country. Sometimes the political changes and the wars, occurring within the country or with the British encountered them to be in trouble. The Second Anglo-Myanmar War which broke out during the reign of King Pagan in 1852 caused Fr. P. Abbona and his colleagues to whom were accused as British spies by the Myanmar royal government. And so they were arrested in the war-time. However, they were released from the prison when King Mindon ascended the throne in 1853. It is seen that throughout his reign, King Mindon appointed Fr. P. Abbona as his advisor and a diplomat at the same time like his father, King Tharawaddy. This war had had an impact on the Catholic villages in Upper Myanmar. Fr. P. Abbona remarks as follows;

"In Upper Burma (Myanmar), the Christian villages were deserted due to the successive revolutions and wars. Nabek, Caunjo (Chaungyoe), Cianu (Chaung U) and Ciandoroa (Chanthaywa), once so prosperous, had only skeleton populations."<sup>2</sup>

It is seen that the Second Anglo-Myanmar War affected the *Bayingy* villages in Upper Myanmar. The Christian people moved to another places as they were afraid of disorder, occurred due to the war. This disorder caused the dacoities, thieving and robbery. Therefore, the political impact resulted in the *Bayingyi (Feringi)* society and the missionary priests who were ministering their Catholics.

In 1853, King Mindon gave a duty to Fr. P. Abbona and Fr. D. Tarolli to draw up a peace treaty.<sup>3</sup> Royal Consultant Council was consisted of Antonio Camaretta, J.S Manook, Fr. P. Abbona and Fr. Domingo Tarolli. On 19 January, 1853 King Mindon sent Fr. Domingo Tarolli (Don Da Mainku) and Fr. P. Abbona (Don Paulo) as interpreters including Myanmar ministers named Thihathu, Hla Thiri Min Htin the British for cessation of Second Anglo-Myanmar War to discuss with the British at Meede (Myayday).<sup>4</sup>

In 1857, he played a vital role in implementing the visit of Myanmar embassy to France, England, Italy and other European countries. His contributions resulted in concluding the treaty of friendship and trade with Italy and France. Therefore, it is seen that he became more important in Myanmar politics.

In short, there are two questions on why did he support Myanmar monarchs. Did he dislike the British imperialism? Did he support the Myanmar monarch due to the world political paradigm? It is assumed that the world political landscape probably led him to take part in Myanmar politics. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Italy at first joined an alliance led by Germany in Europe. The turning point in the Anglo-Italian diplomacy affected the Christian missionaries, ministering in Myanmar. Therefore, the historical evidences show that his activities in political, diplomatic, economic and social atmospheres were more concerned with the world political paradigm.

<sup>1</sup> Kaung, U, "1824-1853 Roman Catholic and American Baptist Mission," Burma Research Society, Fiftieth Anniversary Publications No.2, Journal of Burma Research Society, JBRS, Rangoon, 1960 (Hereafter cited as Kaung, "Roman Catholic and American Baptist Mission) p.136

<sup>2</sup> Ba, Some Papal Correspondence, p.13

<sup>3</sup> Peter Sein Hlaing Oo, Fr., "Oblates of the Virgin Mary in Burma (Myanmar) From 1842 to 1856, National Church History of Myanmar," Yangon, Alpha & Omega Color Printing, 2014 (Hereafter cited as Sein Hlaing Oo, "Oblates of the Virgin Mary in Burma) p.288

<sup>4</sup> Than Tun, Dr., "Ne-hle Yazawin (Peripatetic history)," Seikku Cho Cho Sarpay, Yangon, 2016 (Hereafter cited as Than Tun, "Ne-hle Yazawin) p.334

## 2. Diplomatic Atmosphere

Why did King Tharawaddy and King Mindon appoint Fr. P. Abbona as a diplomat and an advisor? This answer deals with his qualifications. Fr. P. Abbona possessed with the following qualifications such as;

1. He well-speaks in English and Myanmar,
2. He is very clever with regard to the diplomatic affairs,
3. He does appreciate the Myanmar culture,
4. He is well-erudite in the western thought and astronomy,
5. He possesses the progressive idea.

He was highly esteemed by King Tharawaddy and his son, King Mindon due to his qualifications. Especially, he was one of the most trusted persons during the reign of King Mindon. Why did King Mindon ask for his advice for diplomatic affairs? King Mindon considered Fr. P. Abbona who was well known in the world politics in spite of being a priest. Especially the missionary priests from Europe came to Myanmar were well versed in the religious and secular affairs. They were appointed as the royal advisors through ages by the Myanmar monarchs. Like their predecessors, King Tharawaddy and King Mindon thought that the country would develop if Don Paulo and Don Damingo (Fr. Donmingo Tarolly) were appointed as advisors.

Fr. P. Abbona wished to see the modernized country and so he gave advice to King Mindon that the king sent the royal pages to Europe and established the diplomatic relations with European Powers. There were two great opportunities to drive out the British in Lower Myanmar during his reign. The First chance was the sepoy mutiny broke out in 1857 and the next was the Anglo India-Chinese boundary dispute of 1871. In truth, these chances gave King Mindon to recover the lost territories in Lower Myanmar due to the lack of the British battalions except for the garrison troops there.

King Mindon wanted to seize these immediate opportunities to unite his country. However, Fr. P. Abbona viewed these chances contrary to King Mindon's vision that the Myanmar King inevitably faced the subsequent issues if he occupied the Lower Myanmar. And so he advised King Mindon not to seize the Lower Myanmar. It is found that his advices not only based on the peace and development of the country but also led to the progress of the Anglo-Myanmar relation. Sir Arthur Phyre, Commissioner of Pegu sent a letter of thanks to Fr. P. Abbona for his advice.

Reverend Sir,

I have been directed by the Supreme Government of India to convey to you the thanks of the Government for your good offices during the events which disturbed India in 1857. It affords me, Reverend Sir, much pleasure in being the medium for this communication, remembering as I do from past events that you have all along exerted yourself to promote peace and cordiality between the British and Burmese Government.

Dated: Rangoon, 11 August 1858<sup>1</sup>

Fr. P. Abbona's advices giving to King Mindon clearly showed that even the British who accused him pro-Mindon finally accepted his activities. This result turned the British to adopt the soft attitude towards the Myanmar government. At that time, King Mindon depended on the British who were seizing the Lower Myanmar in which the sea outlet existed for his foreign relation.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sein Hlaing Oo, *Oblates of the Virgin Mary in Burma* p.295

He edited and mended the royal letters to French Governor General. He and Min Hla Min Htin Yazar, tea-server translated the letters sent by the French Emperor, into Myanmar.<sup>1</sup> Fr. P. Abbona and Fr. D. Trolli translated royal credential letters sending to Captain Aurthur Phyre, first commissioner of Pegu. These letters were as follows;

“Prince Mindon warned King Pagan, his half-brother not to wage war against the British many times. But King Pagan, ministers and royal relatives did not emphasize his words. The people of both countries suffered the troubles. And so the people failed to support brother, his ministers and relatives. I wish, I continued to maintain the relation with the British if I seized the throne. The affairs of the country were very soft and deep and wide for the ruler. My brother did not send the high ranking officers to make peace with the British. Now, I sent high ranking officers and foreign advisors like Fr. P. Abbona for peace.”<sup>2</sup>

Captain Phyre’s letter to King Mindon was as follows;

“We are very pleased to know King Mindon to maintain peace hand in hand with us. However, we want to sign the peace treaty with the Myanmar plenipotentiaries. May we urge King Mindon to send the high ranking officials to conclude the peace?”<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, King Mindon easily sent the Myanmar embassies to European countries due to Fr. P. Abbona’s gratitude. As a result, King Mindon’s foreign relation and building of industrialized country was acknowledged by the British government. It can be said that Myanmar politics led to upstream after Fr. P. Abbona had been appointed as a diplomat. His advices led King Mindon’s image to be reflected in the world’s politics. The industrialization project implemented by Prince Kanaung, an heir apparent was contributed by establishing the political and economic relations with France, Germany and Italy. Thus, King Mindon not only sent the royal pages to Italy, France and England but also concluded the treaties of peace and treaty with these countries. The Myanmar youth who were studying abroad were made correspondence through Bishop Bigandet and Fr. P. Abbona.

### **\*Franco-Myanmar Relation**

After the Second Anglo-Myanmar War, King Mindon relied on France and Italy more than ever before. These foreign relations brought Fr. P. Abbona into the secular affairs. In this way, Bishop Bigandet, Fr. P. Abbona and French general d’ Orgoni became the reliable persons for King Mindon.<sup>4</sup> As the British power gained more and more ground in and around Burma, King Mindon was advised by Fr. P. Abbona to seek the help of other sovereign states of Europe to regain his lost territories.<sup>5</sup> Fr. P. Abbona advised King Mindon to get military support of foreign powers against the encroachments of the British. His advice was considered unsuccessful even if the military support would be received from any other European Powers. At that time, the British military strength was the most strongest of the world. However, his advices and thought made King Mindon’s mindset to be in progress.

In April, 1857 Napoleon III, the French emperor sent a letter to King Mindon. Fr. P. Abbona and Thirigunna Kyaw Thu who was in charge of Kular (Indian) translated this letter into

<sup>1</sup> Tun Yi, “Konbaung Khit Pyaypa Yeyar Paedetha Sarsu (Papers on External Affairs in Konbaung period),” Mibagon Sarpay, Yangon, 2015 (Hereafter cited as Tun Yi, “Konbaung Khit Pyaypa Yeyar), p.324

<sup>2</sup> Tin Maung Yin, U, “Khit Myanmar Tehan (The Making of Burma), Yarpay Book House, Yangon, 2018 (Hereafter cited as Tin Maung Yin, “Khit Myanmar Tehan) p.143

<sup>3</sup> Tin Maung Yin, Khit Myanmar Tehan, p.143

<sup>4</sup> Khin Mya Kyu, Dr., “History of Franco-Myanmar Relation During the Konbaung Period), Journalist Books Publishing, Yangon, 2019 (Hereafter cited as History of Franco Myanmar Relation) pp.88-90

<sup>5</sup> Ba, Vivian, “King Mindon and the World Fair of 1867 held in Paris,” Journal of Burmese Research Society, JBRS XLVIII, ii, Yangon, 1965 (Hereafter cited as King Mindon and World Fair held in Paris) p.17

Myanmar. In this letter, French emperor wanted to establish diplomatic relation with Myanmar.<sup>1</sup> During the reign of Napoleon III, the friendliest relations had been established between Myanmar and France. At the same time, King Mindon was afraid that he did not want to harm the Anglo-Myanmar if he relied on the French government for the building of his country. At that time, the colonial rivalry between the British and the French reached at the highest point with regard to India and Egypt.

In 1857, Fr. P. Abbona left for France with the first Burmese Embassy.<sup>2</sup> This was a symbol for the progress of Myanmar politics. On the other hand, the development of the Myanmar foreign relation caused a signal of great concern to the British. The British realized that the French continued to seize the Upper Myanmar after they had occupied the Indo China peninsular which was adjacent to Myanmar boundary. However, King Mindon tried to maintain relation with these two countries. He gave the presents to French general d'Organi in Mandalay.<sup>3</sup>

### **\*Italian–Myanmar relation**

In 1854, a following year which after King Mindon ascended the throne, Sardinian Foreign Office (Italy Foreign Office) sent the credential to Sig Casella, Council General in Calcutta. Its copy was also sent to Fr. P. Abbona. The aim of Italian government was to establish a diplomatic relation with Myanmar royal government. In addition, the Italian government instructed Sig Casella to make regular contact with Fr. P. Abbona ministering in Mandalay.

Italian government knew the political conditions, occurring in Myanmar from which Fr. P. Abbona messaged. In the meantime, King Mindon was aspiring to the foreign needs. King Mindon believed that Italy was more suitable for him for the building of the country because she did not compete against the British for colonial rivalry in Asia. Therefore, Fr. P. Abbona became the most trusted person of King Mindon. In 1868 Fr. P. Abbona Burmese state scholars went to Italy.<sup>4</sup>

In 1871, Italian-Myanmar diplomatic relation was formally established during the reign of King Victor Emmanuel. As a result, the countries step in signing the treaty of friendship and trade. Italy managed to send the Italian engineers for building of forts in Upper Myanmar. Christoforo Negri, a geographer gave an advice to Fr. P. Abbona that Irrawaddy river (Ayeyarwaddy river) was important for Myanmar commerce as Banmaw on the river was command to Unan province in China.<sup>5</sup>

With the consent of Count Cavour, C. Negri sent a treaty to Fr. P. Abbona in June 1854 through Giuseppe Casella, Counsel General of the Sardinian King in Calcutta. Fr. P. Abbona examined the articles, included in this treaty in the best form possible which would be acceptable by King Mindon. Then, he sent a copy of treaty he examined and mended to the Cardinal of the Propaganda. In September 1856, he had a chance to personally meet Count Cavour through C. Negri. In October 1856 he was given in charge of translating the project of treaty into Italian language which C. Cavour by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Italy.

Italian Embassy led by C.A Racchia, was sent to Mandalay in order to conclude the treaty. This embassy consisted of C.A Racchia, G. Coscia, Lieutenant Royal Italy Navy, acting Secretary to the Royal Italian Embassy, A. Bianchersi, Lieutenant Royal Italy Navy, attache' to the Royal

<sup>1</sup> Tun Yi, Konbaung Khit Pyaypa Yeyar, p.325

<sup>2</sup> Ba, Some correspondence with Pope, p.13

<sup>3</sup> Maung Maung Tin, U, "Konbaungset Mahayazawin, (the Great Chronicle of Konbaungset" Vol. III, Yangon, Yar Pyay Press, 2014 (Hereafter cited as Maung Maung Tin, "Konbaungset Mahayazawin) p.121

<sup>4</sup> Ba, Some Papal Correspondence, p.13

<sup>5</sup> Ba, Vivian, "Diplomatic Documents Relating to the Burmese-Italian Treaty in 1871," Journal of Burma Research Society (JBRS), LIII, ii. December, 1970 (Hereafter cited as Ba, Diplomatic Documents Relating to the Burmese-Italian Treaty in 1871) p.39

Italian Embassy, E. Cercone, Sub-Lieutenant Royal Italian Royal Italian Navy, attache' to the Royal Italian Embassy, L. Serra, Sub-Lieutenant Royal Italian Royal Italian Navy, attached to the Royal Italian Embassy and their assistant officers.<sup>1</sup>

The articles, concluded in the Italian Myanmar treaty showed that Italian government was interested in the Myanmar navigation and trade. Italian government agreed that the machineries, engineers, experts and workers were sent to Upper Myanmar. According to the agreement, the plenipotentiaries were appointed between the two countries.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, C.A Racchia, an Italian plenipotentiary to Myanmar and Mingyi Maha Sithu, a Myanmar plenipotentiary to Italy were respectively appointed.

Italian-Myanmar treaty was signed in Mandalay by Alberto Racchia on behalf of King Emanuel and Mingyi Maha Sithu on behalf of King Mindon. It is found that there was often interconnection between the two countries through Fr. P. Abbona. It is seen that the treaty consisting of nineteen articles based on the political, economic, religious and social affairs. This treaty showed that King Mindon gave permission to the Christians to pay worship freely and to build missionary schools such as colleges in hospitals. It also dealt with the bilateral trade. According to this treaty, Italian intelligentsias and navigators were sent to Mandalay for building of the industries and the development of navigation and the laws and the regulations prescribing for export and import were strictly abided by the countries.

As a result, the machines were imported from the European Powers for the industrialization project, implemented by Prince Kanaung. In addition, the royal pages were sent to France, Italy and England for further studies. Establishment of diplomatic relations with France and Italy resulted in not only conclusion of treaties of friendship and trade but also the military support. The French and the Italian military officers trained the Myanmar soldiers besides the support of arms and ammunitions. In addition, with the help of the French and the Italian engineers like Commotto and Molinari, Thapyetan fort, Gwe Chaung fort, Inwa fort and Min Hla fort along the Ayerawaddy River were built.<sup>3</sup> In short, the diplomatic relations, implemented during the reign of King Mindon considerably paid the way for the development of the country. In addition, the Anglo-Myanmar relation had not been harmed during his reign. On the other hand, the dynastic problems like Myingun rebellion halted the Myanmar political progress.

### **3. Socio-economic Atmosphere**

The friendly relations, established among the European Powers such as France and Italy resulted in the Scio-economic atmosphere. This atmosphere supported both the industrialization of country and royal military army.

In 1869, Myanmar exported such items as cotton, cutch, orpiment, buffalo and ox hides, hair of buffalo, palm sugar, lead, and other minerals; petrol, lac, yellow orpiment, precious stones, jade, teak, tea, tobacco, sesame, vegetable oil, wheat, etc. Such items to Myanmar which Italy imported were principally clothes in all kinds of material, cotton materials and yarn, etc.<sup>4</sup> It is assumed that King Mindon received the political outcome if viewing political aspect though Italy, an industrialized country got more commercial profits. The British kept watching Italian-Myanmar relation as they did not want Italy to give the military support such as arms and ammunitions to the Myanmar king. Italian-Myanmar diplomatic relation was more beneficial for both countries than

---

<sup>1</sup> Ba, *Diplomatic Documents Relating to the Burmese-Italian Treaty in 1871*, p.18

<sup>2</sup> Ba, *"Diplomatic Documents Relating to the Burmese-Italian Treaty in 1871"*, p.40

<sup>3</sup> Phone Kyaw, Natmauk, *"History of Anglo-Myanmar Wars,"* Yangon, Bagan Book House, 1966 (Hereafter cited as Phone Kyaw, *"History of Anglo-Myanmar Wars"* pp.285-288

<sup>4</sup> Ba, Vivian, *"The Burmese Embassy to Italy in 1872"* *Journal of Burma Research Society (JBRS)*, LIII, ii, December, 1970, Yangon (Hereafter cited as Ba, *"The Burmese Embassy to Italy in 1872,"*) p.67

did Franco-Myanmar relation which was established over past fifteen years. Therefore, bilateral relations on diplomatic and commercial affairs could firmly be established.

It is found that King Mindon relied on Fr. P. Abbona in establishing the Italian Myanmar diplomatic relation. The main cause of King Mindon's foreign relation was to support the industrialization project under the leader of Prince Kanaung and to reoccupy the lost territories. He understood that the machinery items were imported from European Powers for the industrialization. And so foreign crown servicemen and the missionary priests became Important in the foreign relation. It is found that Fr. P. Abbona took an active part in the Italian-Myanmar relation.

Myanmar youth were sent to Piedmont, Italy according to the agreement between the two countries. Italy government sent the weavers from Genoa to Mandalay at the request of King Mindon. Grape vine from Piedmont was cultivated in the royal garden. He hoped that King Mindon would allow him to explore the Upper Irrawaddy. He was interested in opening of a way for commerce between Burma and West China.<sup>1</sup> Transportation through the Irrawaddy River would shorten greatly the trade route of the Indo-Europeans with West China. In this way, he became acquainted with Kingdom of Ava during the reign of King Mindon.

Negri realized that there was a drastic loss for the Myanmar king due to the British occupation of the Lower Myanmar. The lack of sea outlet made the disturbances for the foreign relations of the Myanmar royal government. Italian government did not want the British to influence over the Myanmar royal government.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the Italian government planned to give the military support to King Mindon. It is found that Fr. P. Abbona served as a messenger besides an advisor for King Mindon.

Fr. P. Abbona did appreciate the Myanmar culture. In addition, His life style was intertwined with Myanmar customs. He endeared to King Mindon by chewing the betel with him. He translated the books into Myanmar, Latin, Italian language vice versa. He rejected the westerners' low impression upon the Myanmar. He also criticized the writings of Fr. Sangermano and Galo, the Oblate priests that assessed the Myanmar culture by European vision.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is clearly seen that Fr. P. Abbona was an Oblate priest who did appreciate the Myanmar culture.

He told the missionary priests not to hold the Christmas New Year Festivals while the Second Anglo-Myanmar War was occurring. He seriously criticized the priests who held these festivals. He regarded the celebration of these festivals as an enjoyable commemoration recognizing the British success. However, he was imprisoned by King Pagan on the ground that he was suspected as the British spy. However, he was released from imprison when King Mindon ascended the throne in 1853. King Mindon released Fr. P. Abbona knowing that he and Fr. D. Tarroli aided him in negotiation with the British. The reforms during his reign paid the way for Fr. P. Abbona to take part in Myanmar politics.

Fr. P. Abbona was given in charge of sending the royal pages to Italy for further studies. On the other hand, King Mindon supported him monthly for the propagation of his *Sasana*. Negri, geographer advised him that Po Zaw, a Myanmar youth, staying in Italy taught the art of healing wounds. Italy government sent the world map to Skradevi, the chief queen as present. Fr. P. Abbona advised King Mindon that the Italian and the German naturalists wanted to explore the Upper Irrawaddy River. However, King Mindon did not accept their Exploration of Upper

<sup>1</sup> Ba, "The Burmese Embassy to Italy in 1872 p.68

<sup>2</sup> Ba, "Diplomatic Documents Relating to the Burmese-Italian Treaty in 1871" p.16

<sup>3</sup> Sein Hlaing Oo, Oblates of the Virgin Mary in Burma, p.293



Irrawaddy River Project as to harm the Anglo-Myanmar relation. Not to contrary to the British, King Mindon permitted the exploration of Upper Irrawaddy by royal ships.

King Mindon also gave lands to Fr. P. Abbona to build the churches, schools in acknowledging his gratitude. So, Fr. P. Abbona had the right to do missionary works freely. He also gave a gold cup to him as gift. Pope Pious and Italian government thanked King Mindon who sympathized on the Catholics settling in Upper Myanmar in spite of being a devout Buddhist. Fr. P. Abbona offered his Holiness from King Mindon the following gifts; a heavy chalice of gold, a cross decorated with precious stones, a chain of gold and a ring with a magnificent sapphire.

The friendship between Pope and King Mindon posed a good sign for *Bayingies* and the country. This good relationship resulted in improving the relations with Italy, France and Germany. In 1857, Fr. P. Abbona left for France with the first Burmese Embassy.<sup>1</sup> In 1868 Fr. P. Abbona Burmese state scholars went to Italy.<sup>2</sup> During his reign, King Mindon gave permission to the Roman Catholic and Baptist missions to build the school, based on the western education.<sup>3</sup> In this way the schools in the Church campus taught the lay-boys and girls including the royal pages arts and science and the English literature.

Fr. P. Abbona was appointed the Pro-vicar apostolic in the Royal City of Mandalay.<sup>4</sup> He was the first Oblate who brought a female religious congregation to Myanmar. The Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Brothers of the Christian Schools (De La Salle) and the Jesuits came to Myanmar to help him. He gave different duties to these missions. The Sisters took charge of schools in Moulmein and Amarapura. An orphanage in Amarapura, a hospital in Rangoon (Yangon) was under the charge of the Brothers and a college in Amarapura was to be directed by the Jesuits.<sup>5</sup>

In 1848 the Sardinian (Italy) Government passed the Rattazzi Law (religious edicts) for destruction of some religious missions. According to this law, the Oblate mission was disfavored by the government. More than half a dozen Oblate missionaries remained in Myanmar and worked together with Foreign Missions of Paris (MEP).

#### Six Fathers and Coadjutor Brothers of Oblates who remained in Myanmar<sup>6</sup>

No.	Name	Places	Remarks
1	Fr. P. Abbona	Amarapura	Superior of the Oblates
2	Fr. F. Andreino	Chaung U, Nabek	----
3	Fr. V. Garbutti	Bassein	----
4	Fr. C. Pacchiotti	Prome (Pyay)	----
5	Fr. C. Paurzza	Rangoon (Yangon)	----
6	Fr. C. Pregno	Monhla	----
7	Br. G. Alasia	Rangoon (Yangon)	----
8	Br. P. Gardetti	Nabek	----
9	Br. G. Romanoin	Nabek	----
10	Br. D. Tesio	Nabek	----

<sup>1</sup> Ba, Some Papal Correspondence, p.13

<sup>2</sup> Ba, Some Papal Correspondence, p.13

<sup>3</sup> Catholic Directory of India 1925, 75<sup>th</sup> Annual Issue of the Madras Catholic Directory and Annual General Register, the Catholic Supply Society, Madras (Hereafter cited as "Catholic Directory of India") pp.327-329

<sup>4</sup> Ba, Some Papal Correspondence, p.16

<sup>5</sup> Sein Hlaing Oo, Oblates of the Virgin Mary in Burma, p.265

<sup>6</sup> Sein Hlaing Oo, "Oblates of the Virgin Mary in Burma" p.275

Catholic population in Myanmar according to annual statistics of 1856 reads as follows;

No		Place	
1	200 Catholics	Amarapura	Church, school, orphanage
2	600 Catholics	Ciandoroa (Chantharywa)	Church, dispensary
3	150 Catholics	Ciaunù (Chaung U)	Church, school
4	300 Catholics	Ciauujo (Chaungyoe)	Church, school
5	2000 Catholics	Moulmein	Church, school and press
6	150 Catholics	Nabek	Church, college
7	300 Catholics	Monhla	Church, college, school,
8	-----	Rangoon	Church

On 29 November 1856 he was conferred the title “Cavaliere” (Knight) of the Order of Sts. Maurice and Lazarus, signed by the Italian King. Due to Fr. P. Abbona’s efforts the Italian-Myanmar Treaty was concluded during the period of King Mindon. For his efforts he was again granted the title of “Commendatore (commentator)” of the Italian Crown in 1868.<sup>1</sup> The Roman Catholic missionaries and the Baptist missionaries reached Myanmar for the spread of their faith. On the other hand, the missionary priests tried to substitute the traditional monastic education which took root in Myanmar from the time of Bagan dynasty with the western education they brought. Some of Fathers were appointed as advisors of Myanmar monarchs. During the reign of King Mindon, Fr. P. Abbona played an important role in Myanmar politics as a King’s advisor. As a result, Roman Catholic and Baptist priests like Fr. P. Abbona, Bishop Bigandet and Dr. Mark served the Myanmar monarchs as advisors or diplomats.

## Results

The Roman Catholic missionaries and the Baptist missionaries reached Myanmar for the spread of their faith. On the other hand, the missionary priests tried to substitute the traditional monastic education which took root in Myanmar from the time of Bagan dynasty to the late Konbaung period with the western education they brought. Some of Fathers were appointed as advisors of Myanmar monarchs for the building of the country. During the reign of King Mindon, Fr. P. Abbona played an important role in Myanmar politics as a King’s advisor. As a result, Roman Catholic and Baptist priests like Fr. P. Abbona, Bishop Bigandet and Dr. Mark served the Myanmar monarchs as advisors or diplomats.

## Discussion

Theravada Buddhism profoundly took root in Myanmar from the time of Bagan period to present. Although Theravada Buddhism firmly established in the 12<sup>nd</sup> century A.D, alien regions such as Hinduism, Muslim and Christianity reached Myanmar according the historical sources and Myanmar chronicles. The Catholic priests who ministered the Portuguese adventurers and mercenaries served Myanmar kings in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. After the seizing of Syriam (Thanlyin) in 1613, King Anaukphet Lun took the Portuguese war captives to Ava though Philip de Brito and his principal leaders were executed. In this way, the Roman Catholics were spread far and wide in Myanmar. The native people in Myanmar call them *Bayingyi* which derives from the Persian word, “Feringi” meaning foreigner.

<sup>1</sup> Ba, Diplomatic Documents Relating to the Burmese-Italian Treaty in 1871, p.28

After the establishment of the *Bayingi* villages in Upper Myanmar, the Roman Catholic Missionaries such as Jesuit Society Mission, Barnabite Mission, Foreign Missions of Paris and Oblate Mission, etc. reached Myanmar to look after their decedents. Among those missionaries, some of Fathers and Bishops became advisors of the Myanmar monarchs. During the late Konbaung period, King Mindon relied on Fr. P. Abbona in the role of foreign relations and the building of the country. As Fr. P. Abbona appreciated the Myanmar culture he was loved by the king and subjects. After the second Anglo-Myanmar War, he served King Mindon as diplomat when the peace talks were carried out between the British and the Myanmar. Fr. P. Abbona played a vital role in concluding the Myanmar-Italian Treaty in 1871 and engaged in the building of the industrialization, carried out during the reign of King Mindon. He led the Myanmar scholars to Europe according to King Mindon's order. Thus Fr. P. Abbona was seen as a diplomat to Myanmar kingdom.

### Acknowledgement

I owe my special thanks to Rector and Pro-rectors for allowing and encouraging this research work. I would like to express my heart-felt thank to heads Dr. Yee Yee Win (Professor, Head), Dr. Ko KoNaing (Professor), Dr. Tin Maung Kyi (Cultural researcher), Fr. Joe Du and Fr. U Sein Hlaing Oo. Above all, to all who encouraged and helped me in doing this research I owe much gratitude.



Figure showing Oblate Missionary and Don Paulo called Fr. P. Abbona

Photo from Internet source



King Mindon

Photo From internet source



Photo by researcher

## References

### Myanmar

- Dr. Than Tun, "Ne-hleYazawin (Peripatetic history)," Seikku Cho ChoSarpay, Yangon, 2016
- Dr. Khin Mya Kyu, "History of Franco-Myanmar Relation during the Konbaung Period), Journalist Books Publishing, Yangon, 2019
- Daw Monica, "Myanmar Catholic Association in Myanmar Historical Sources," 500 Jubilee (1511-2011), Myanmar Dioceses' Association, 2014
- Natmauk Phone Kyaw, "History of Anglo-Myanmar Wars," Yangon, Bagan Book House, 1966
- Tun Yi, "Konbaungkhit PyaypaYeyarpadetha Sarsu(Papers on External Affairs in Konbaung period)," Mibagon Sarpay, Yangon, 2015
- U Aung Nyunt, "Mandalay Catholic *Sasana* and *Bayingyi* Villages," Mandalay, 2014
- U Maung Maung Tin, "Konbaungset Mahayazawin, (the Great Chronicle of Konbaungset" Vol. III, Yangon, Yar Pyay Press, 2014
- U Tin Maung Yin, "Khit Myanmar Tehan (The Making of Burma), Yarpay Book House, Yangon, 2018
- U Kung, "Kinwun Migyi's London Diary," Vol. I and II, Yarpay Press, Yangon, 2008

### English

- Catholic Directory of India 1925, 75<sup>th</sup> Annual Issue of the Madras Catholic Directory and Annual General Register, the Catholic Supply Society, Madras
- Fr. Peter Sein Hlaing Oo, "Oblates of the Virgin Mary in Burma (Myanmar) From 1842 to 1856," National Church History of Myanmar, Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar, Yangon, 2014
- Fr. Peter Sein Hlaing Oo, "Missionaries and Their Activities," National Church of History, Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar, Yangon, 2014
- Maung Tin, "Missionary Burmese," Myanmar Book Centre & Book Promotion & Service Ltd. copyright©, Yangon, 1998
- Vivian Ba, "Some Papal Correspondence with the Kings of Burma," Journal of Burma Research Society, L.i, Yangon, June, 1967
- Vivian Ba, "King Mindon and the World Fair of 1867 held in Paris," Journal of Burma Research Society, JBRS XLVIII, ii, Yangon, 1965
- Vivian Ba, "The Beginnings of Western Education in Burma, The Catholic Effort," Journal of Burma Society, JBRS, XLVII, ii, Rangoon, 1964
- Vivian Ba, "Diplomatic Documents Relating to the Burmese Italian Treaty of 1871," Journal of Burma Society, JBRS, LIII, ii, Yangon, 1970
- U Kaung, "1824-1853 Roman Catholic and American Baptist Mission," Burma Research Society, Fiftieth Anniversary Publications No.2, Journal of Burma Research Society, JBRS, Rangoon, 1960