

Digitization Project of the National Archives

Department of Myanmar



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ABSTRACT

The paper aims to explore the digitization project of the National Archive Department of the Union of the Republic of Myanmar and its manuscript digitization activities. The data are collected by interviewing the responsible persons and staff of this department who involve in digitization tasks. And other facts are collected by literature survey and field study. The digitization of manuscripts is ongoing activities in the NAD. It can be found that the staff should be given the training for digitization and information system management.

Keywords: digitization, manuscript digitization, electronic information system, digital history.

Introduction

Manuscripts perhaps are the oldest written or recorded pieces of information in the world. A manuscript encompasses the unique and variety of formats which includes scripts, textures, symbols, pictures and languages etc.

Manuscripts are regarded as intellectual and cultural heritage of any nation. The main objective of digitization initiatives of cultural heritage such as ancient manuscripts in digital repositories or digital libraries is to preserve the fragile but valuable items and to make them widely accessible to the public.

The challenges in today's world is not only to growth the rare manuscripts and publications with electronic versions, but to provide added value be enriching them with contextual and interpretative information. Many libraries, archives and historic societies would like to digitize very old and rare manuscripts and print materials for preservation purposes. Digital copies of their collection hold the promise of connecting many more readers with research, historical materials, and cultural ephemera.

Research Objectives

This study aims to explore the following:

1. To investigate the digitization project of the National Archives Department
2. To identify the activities of manuscripts digitization of NAD
2. To find out the issues related to the project

Literature Review

Smith (2003) pointed out the issues and challenges dealt with long-term digital preservation of manuscripts particularly that associated with "born digital materials." He said that digital information is easily created, quickly accesses, cheaply disseminated and provides significant benefits to users, but this versatility brings with it a new level of volatility and fragility.

Comment (2004) examined that the history of two digitization projects, one in Russia (Comintern Archives Project) and one in Albania (Albanian National Archives Project) and gave some comments of his own as an IT expert. He pointed the difficulties that are coming from the organization of the project are (multilateral versus bilateral) the too long time scale with the consequences on the technology used, the failure in estimation of the work to be done and not enough decision about how to access this cultural heritage by the public.

Saikia and Kalita (2011) present how to preserve the manuscript collections in digital environment. The study describes digitizing tools like scanner, digital camera, image processing software, file compression and OCR software along with digital library software like GSDL, DSpace and Eprints as well as the workflow of digitizing manuscripts.

Digitization of Heritage Knowledge

Myanmar has large collections of manuscripts in different places. These manuscripts are in different languages and in different scripts. They are written on different kinds of material

like birch bark, palm leaf, cloth and paper. They are in the custody of different institutions like libraries, archives, museums, monasteries, mutts and individuals.

In Myanmar, manuscripts are maintained usually by universities and research institutes such as the Universities' Central Library, the National Library(Yangon /Nay Pyi Taw) and the Department of Historical Research ,etc.

Background history of the National Archive Department

The National Archives Department (NAD)(As in Myanmar, it is called Mawgyun Taik) of Myanmar is situated at the Pyidaungzu Yeikthar Road. It was established in 1972 under the Ministry of National Planning and Finance with an initial staff of 32 members. In 1973, the Department became a third grade department manned by 114 person headed by a Director General. In 1982, to strengthen and improve the Department, a project document was signed by the UNESCO under the title "Strengthening of National Archives"¹

In 1990, the Department was upgraded as second grade department placed under the ministry of national Planning and Economic Development and its strength was doubled to 229. It is a member of the International Council on Archives (ICA) and has closed affiliation with South East Asia Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (SARBICA) since 1991. The 11th seminar and conference of SARBICA (from 15-12-1997 to 9-12-1997) was held successfully at the International Business Center, Yangon, by the National Archives of Myanmar and The Director General of Myanmar was elected as Chairman of that Organization from the year 1997 to 1999.



Fig.1 The National Archives Department (Yangon)

¹ “Report on electronic records management.” www.sarbica.org.my/download/philipinenote/Country-Report.../Myanmar.pdf. (accessed 14 October 2016).

The Electronic Information System and Electronic Archives Project (1999)

The National Archives Department keeps important archives and renders its services to researchers and students alike. In this case, keeping records of national heritage and archives in good condition for perpetuity and speedy retrieval when needed be, are utmost important. In this respect, archives and records essentially came to be reserved by digitalization.

The computerization project has been started since 1999. It being an immense task, computerization has been carried out phase by phase. In phase (1), pre independence period archives (1935-1945) which number over 10000, catalogues and index of printed archives (over 28000 copies) are put into the Database Server as clean data, and they are now readily retrievable. In phase (2), imaging process of palm leaf, manuscript, audio, video tapes, maps, film-reels and photos are started to be scanned and digitized and this task is still in progress.⁴ Moreover, the manuscripts which exist in different places in Myanmar are being made digitization by the National Archives Department. The staff of the department went to there and captured the manuscripts by the digital camera. They are in CD-Rom format and stored in non-paper section of the National Archives Department.

Local Area Network (LAN) is being used which is composed of (10) workstations for data entry, one digital library server.

Table 2. Equipment used for digitization

No.	Type	Name	Quantity
1	Computer	Not available in specific	10
2	Server	-	1
3	All-in-one printer/scanner/copier	Canon iR ADVANCE 6055	1
4	All-in-one printer/scanner/copier	Canon iR 3225	1
5	Copier	Sharp MX 623U	1
6	Multifunction printer	HP Designjet T1200 HD	1
7	All-in-one printer/scanner/copier	Oce PlotWave 300	1
8	Desktop microfilm scanner	Konica Minolta MS6000 MKII	1
9	Camera	Canon,Sony	3

⁴ Report on electronic records management. www.sarbica.org.my/download/philipine-note/Country-Report.../Myanmar.pdf. Accessed 14 October 2016.



Fig.2 Book Drive for scanning



Fig.3 HP Designjet T1200 HD MFP(all-in-one)scanner used for the scanning of map

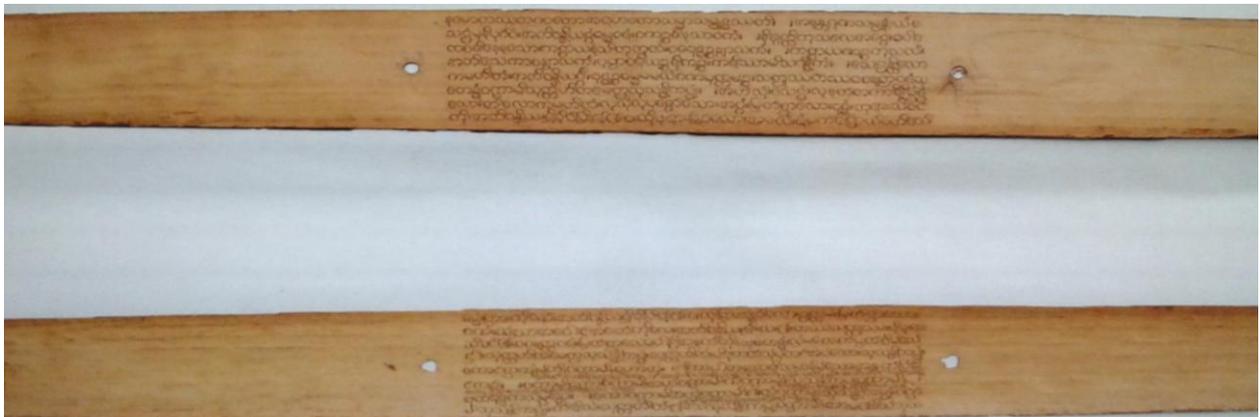


Fig.4 digitized palmleaf manuscript



Fig.5 A staff working in information technology section of NAD where the digitization functions have being done

National Archives Information System

The department has been upgrading National Archives Information System (NAIS) with objectives as follows.

- * To modernize standard of the basic principle of preservation to ensure usability and permanence of records in the future.
- * To retrieve the records in a timely manner.
- * To obtain the required information, accurately and rapidly.
- * To let the public know of the concept of National Archives Department.

This system is designed to connect with the already available Web Site. It composed of two integrated software which are namely the Document Management System (DMS) and the Content Management System (CMS). DMS is data storage process by which data can be computerized according to Archive series including accession list, quantity and security class. CMS is retrieval process that gives easier access to data. Now the Institution has already digitized over 400000 pages for records and archives.

The creation of electronic records rapidly spread all over the countries. Every National Archives needs an effective record keeping system to deal with electronic records. The International Archives which developed in Electronic Records management System use Database Management program in creation, disposition and storage of electronic records. National Archives Department of Myanmar is not fully developed yet in electronic records management system.

They are not able to collect e mail, voice mail and word processing records as other National Archives. The department has only records of electronic ones: they are the digital

format records that digitized existing paper records and imaging files of video and audio records.

Conclusion

Participating in digitization projects, allow for professional development as staff gain new skills, knowledge and expertise while completing the project. But the staff still need training for digitization and information system development.

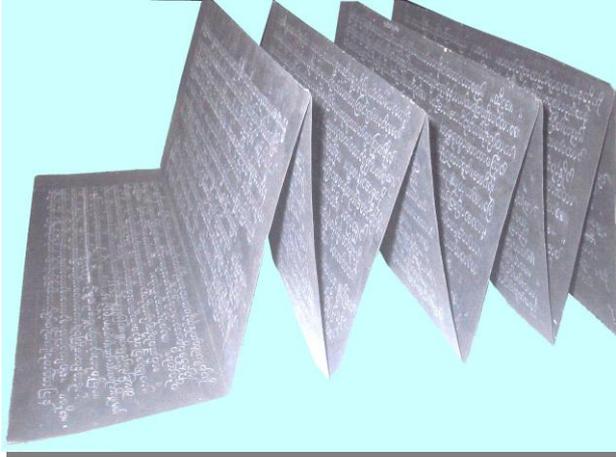
The project will enhance the use and access of digital information and create a system to communicate and preserve the valuable records and archives of the National Archives Department and old manuscripts which are exist in the various places in Myanmar.

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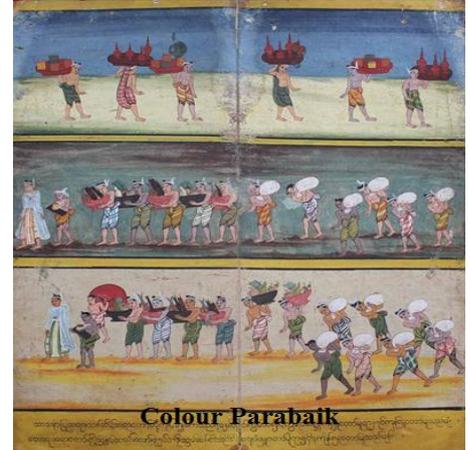
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Admitted letters of Konbaung period in

Parabaik Manuscripts



Donation of King Mindon



Presented by

Daw Ni Ni Naing

Librarian

Universities' Central Library



Admitted letters of Konbaung period in Parabaik Manuscripts

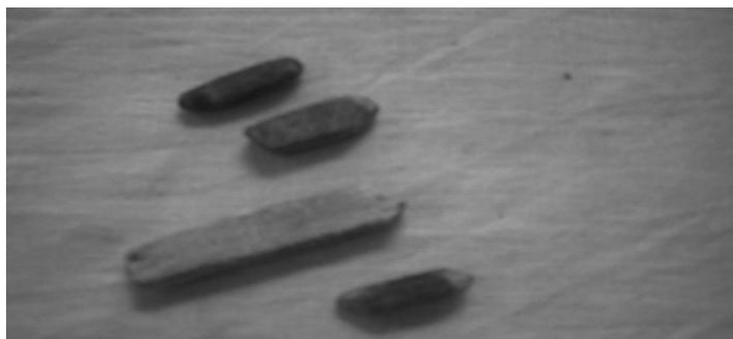
Universities' Central Library started to collect old manuscripts since the 1960s, sending groups of librarians to many monasteries all over Myanmar. There are over 4000 folds, collected from donations or by purchasing.

There are mainly two kinds of parabikes: white and black. The white parabikes are mostly to draw colorful painting or Yaung zon parabike. The black parabikes are made from hand-made paper. *Parabike* are made out of the Maing Kaing paper, a kind of coarse paper handmade from mulberry pulp in Maing Kaing town in Shan State. They were classified according to the number of folds ranging from a single fold to 64 folds.



Black Parabike

The black parabikes contain many subject matters and events. Black *parabikes* were records kept by individuals and families for financial transactions, agricultural records, day-to-day accounts, medicinal formulas, cooking recipes, short poems and diaries, administration, history, economy, astrology and mainly used as note-book for writing drafts. The Size of Parabike Manuscripts are usually within this range: length of 17 or 18 inches and width of 7 or 8 inches. Very small parabikes have the length of about 3 inches and the width of 1.5 inches. A soap stone or steatite is used as a writing stylus on black *parabike*.



Soap Stones for writing on Black *Parabike*

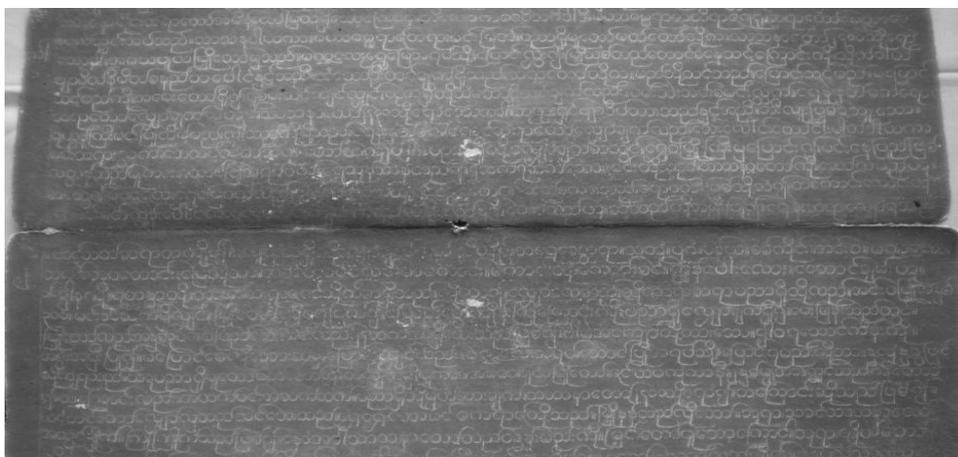
This paper expresses the letters writing forms and events happened in Konbaung era from (ME 1230-1330) (AD 1868- 1968). There are many kinds of correspondent letters such as: informed letter (ကြားစာ), admitted letter (သွင်းစာ), note (မှတ်စာ), memorandum (မှာစာ), summon (ဆင့်စာ) and love letter (မေတ္တာစာ) and so on, but admitted letters (သွင်းစာ) differ from royal order and found in many social life events. So, study of the collected data was to be regarded as a reliable reference for researchers and those interested in ancient Myanmar manuscripts.

Admitted letter is an order of authoritative group or person in a parliament, and it is considered a higher letter because Wun Min (ဝန်မင်း), Gaing Gyoke (ရိုက်ချုပ်) (Head of Monastic Association Belonging to a religious sect), Gaing Oak (ရိုက်ဆူပ်) (Head of an Association of a religious sect as well as Association to a religious sect), Gaing Htauk (ရိုက်ထောက်) (Association to head of an association of a religious sect) can directly admit the letters to the king.

There are (65) admitted letters out of (346) correspondent letters from the black parabikes, categorized mainly as administration, religious affairs, astrology, economics and taxation. In analyzing, out of the (65) admitted letters, there were (28) records for administration, (2) records for astrology, (5) records for economy, (18) records for religious affairs and (12) records for taxation. Among them, the most records were from the administration and the least records were from astrology.

Among (65) admitted letters, I would like to present some interesting admitted letters in this paper.

Admitted letters about administration are letters submitted by Tilawkadaza Sayadaw to the head of religious sect saying that “a new capital city should be moved from Amarapura to Mandalay”



Letter about the capital be moved to Mandalay (Pbk-0016)

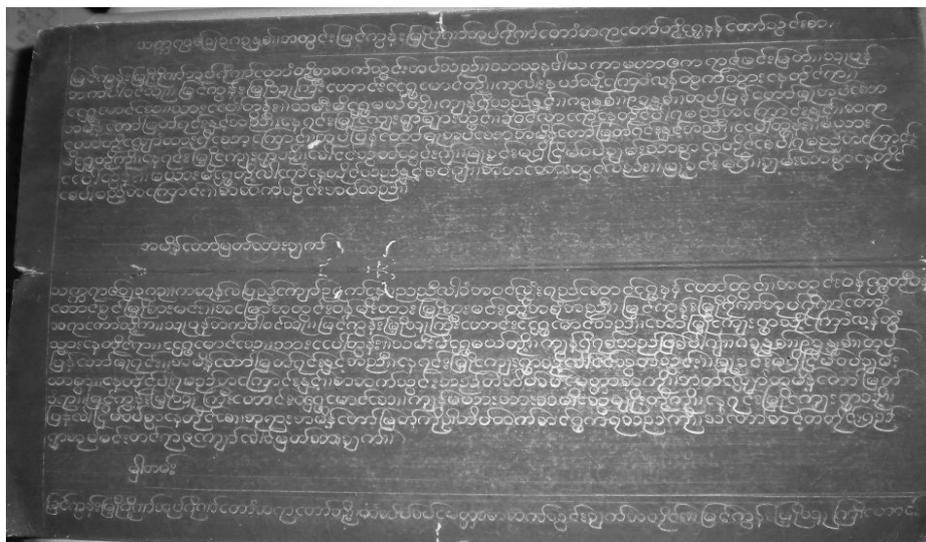
Another admitted letter is from the Brahmins to his kings, saying that the construction of Mandalay palace should be constructed in ME 1221.

In ME 1215, admitted letter, claiming that the capital of Amarapura had traditionally been a good place for propagation of Buddhism, was admitted by Sayadaw to Ruler of the State.



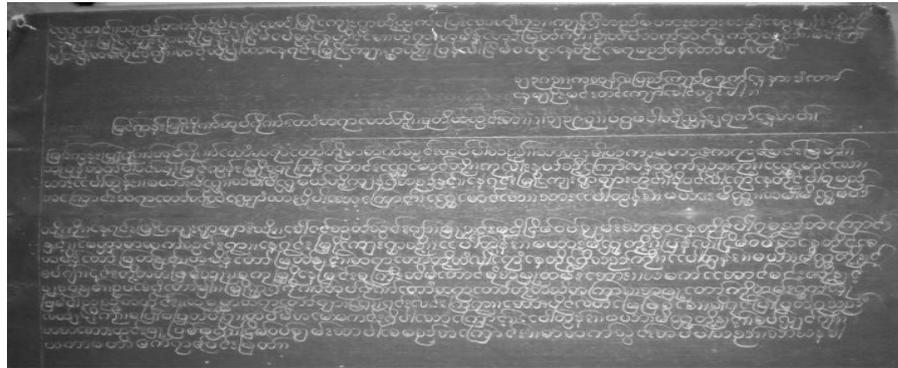
Letter about good place for propagation of Buddhism (pbk. 0452)

In ME 1238, the letter suggesting that “the rebellious acts of Nga Shwe Mg who was headman in Myinkun city got permission to live with his family in their village” was admitted by the Head of the religious sect to His Majesty.



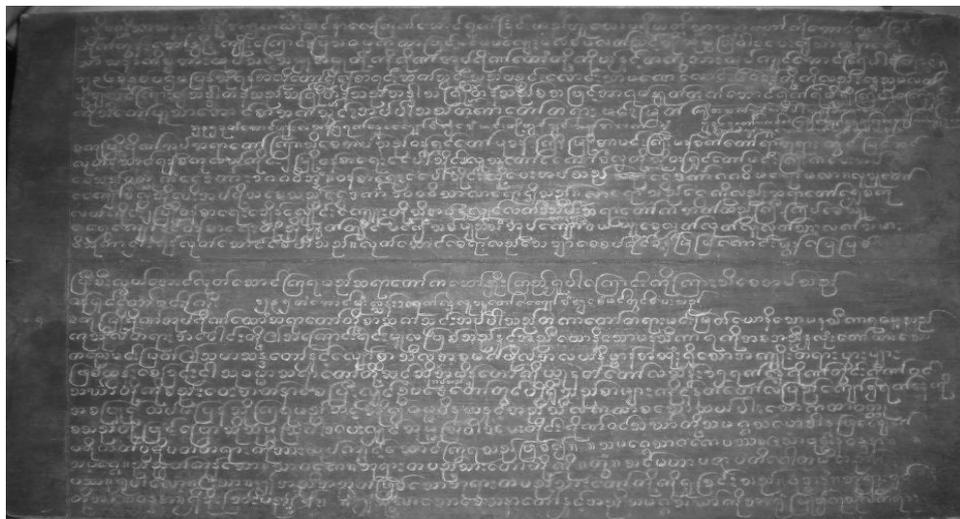
Letter about the Nga Shwe Mg (pbk- 0832)

And also another letter was admitted by the Head of the Religious Sect to His Majesty saying that “More investigation should be made on Nge Shwe Mg for his participation in the rebellion”



Letter about the Nga Shwe Mg (pbk.-0832)

In ME 1235, letter saying that “governors of the town and King’s servants were working lawfully for the peace and order of the town” was admitted by the Head of the Religious Sect to His Majesty.



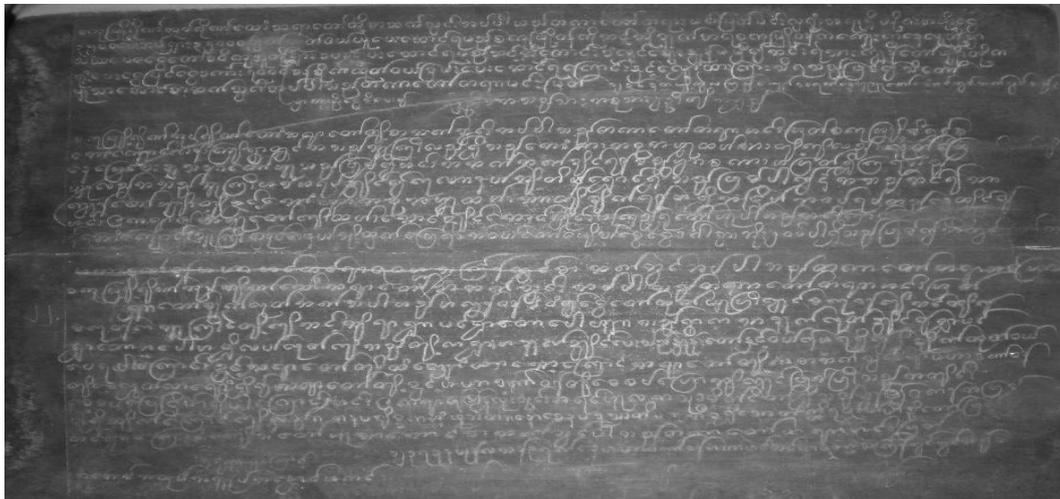
Letter about the peace and order of the town (pbk-0916)

An example of a letter about astrology is: in ME 1218, letter about “events in the past and what was likely to happen in the future according to the astrological calculations” was admitted by Sagaing Sayadaw to the King.



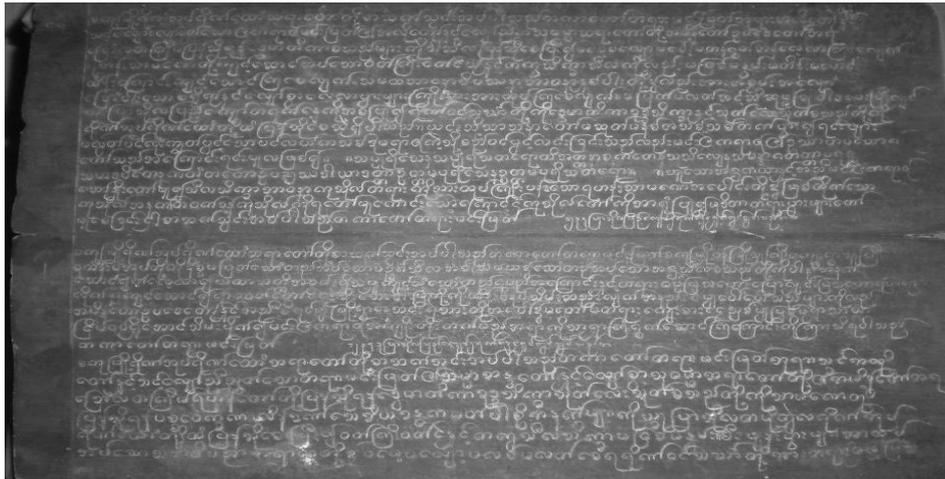
Letter about the astrological calculations (pbk- 1175)

And then, an example of a letter about economy is: in ME 1237, a letter asking to solve the problem “of neither being able to make Shar Say (could not boil cutch) nor buy them in the village” was admitted by the head of the Association of Religious Sect to His Majesty.

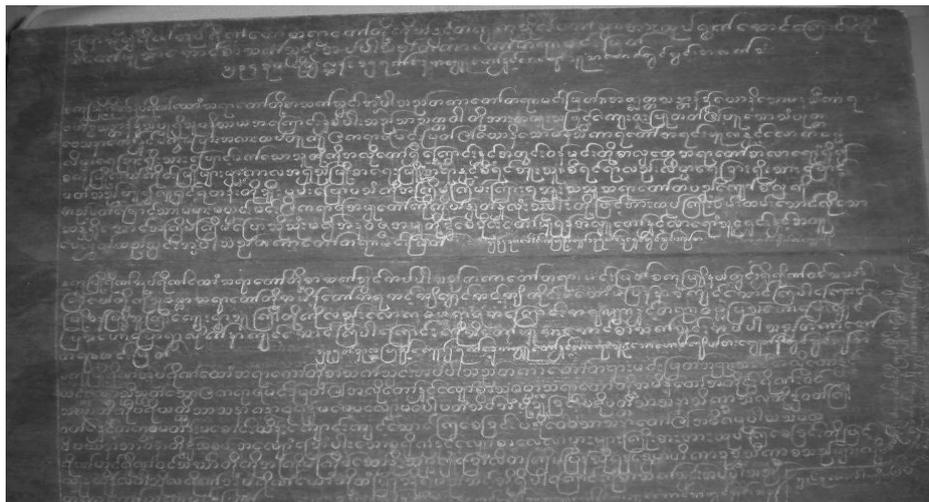


Letter about to make Shar Say (could not boil cutch) (pbk- 0916)

Another letter is about the religious affairs: in ME 1234, letter stating that “the monks were serving the Sasana in accordance with the virtues and discipline indicated by the rules and regulations of Sudhamma Sayadaw” was admitted by the Head of the Religious Sect to His Majesty.

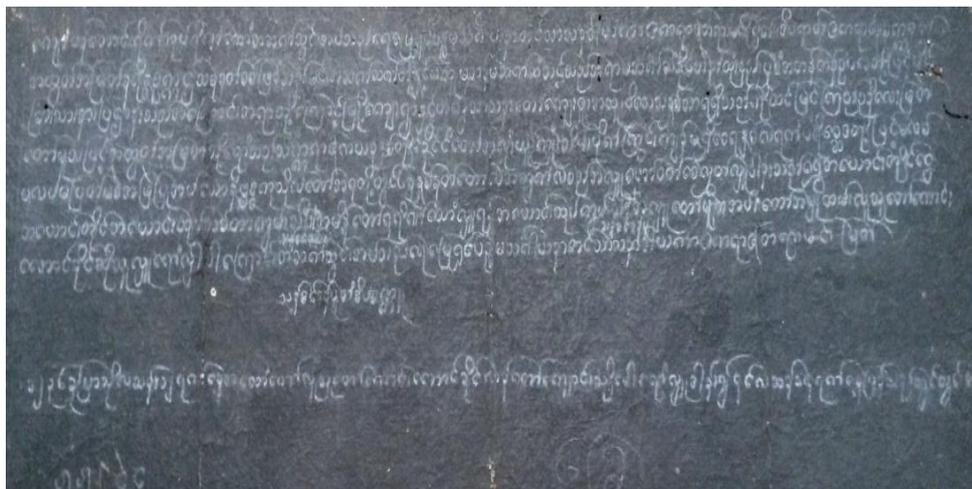


Letter about the rules and regulations (pbk-0916)



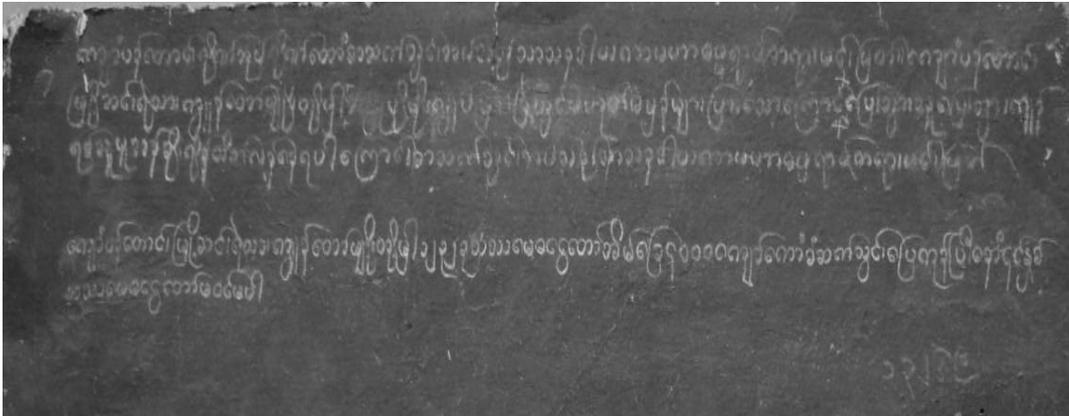
Letter about the rules and regulations (pbk-0916)

In addition, another letter about receiving the monthly donation materials such as gold, silver candle-sticks from His Majesty was admitted by the Head of the Religious Sect to His Majesty.



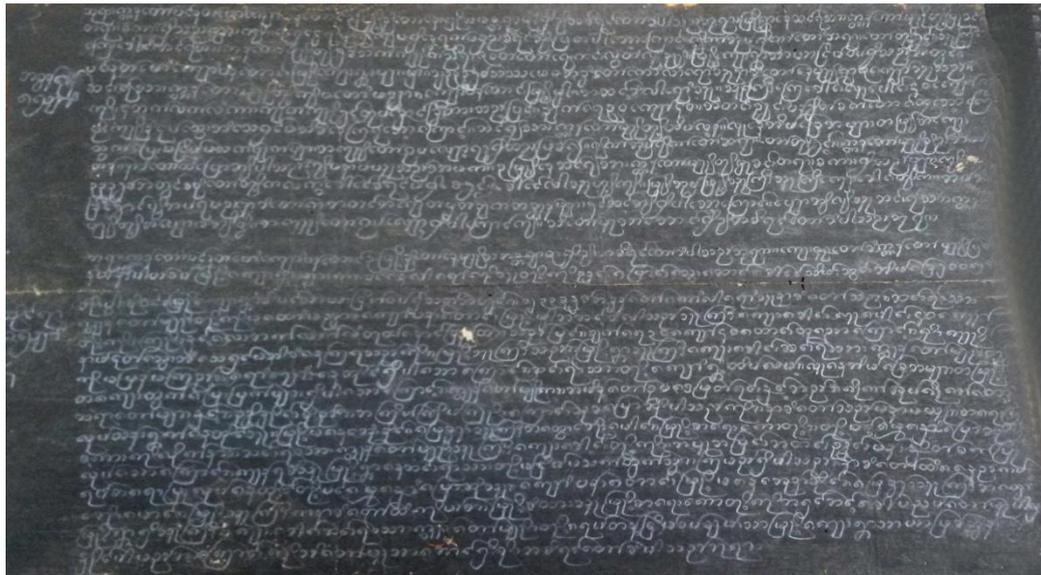
Letter about the donation materials (pbk-1128)

The last admitted letter is about Taxation (Tax for ten tithes given to King): In ME 1232, the letter about poor people running away from their villages because they were not able to pay their tax, keeping the rest of the family members worried, was admitted by the head of the Religious Sect to His Majesty.



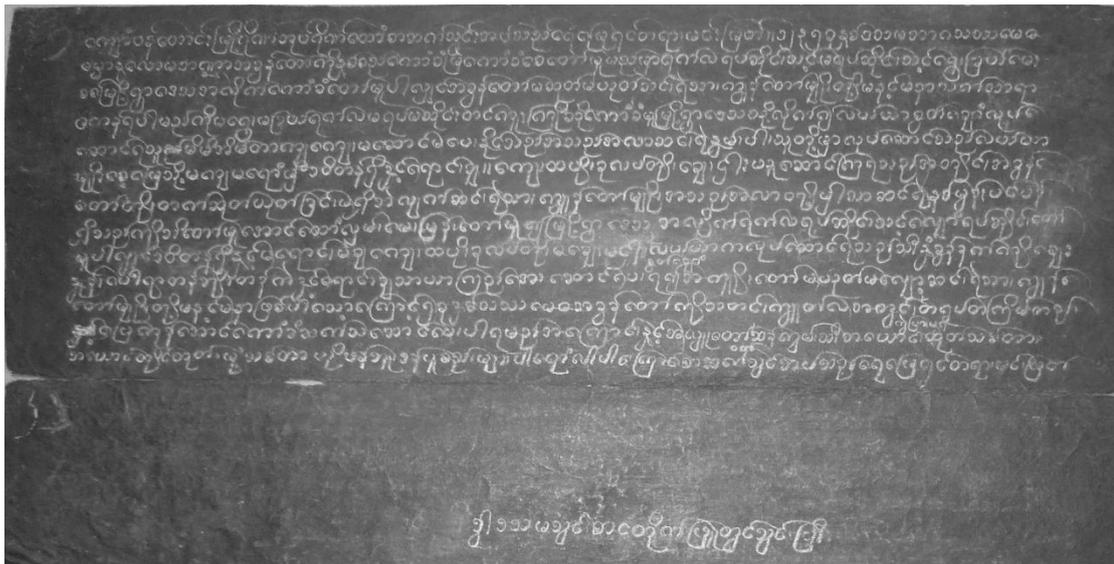
Letter about Taxation (pbk-1096)

In ME 1233, a letter was admitted by the Ruler of the state to the King saying that the tax collectors were capturing and torturing the poor people and headmen of village.



Letter about Capturing and Torturing the poor people (pbk-1456)

This letter was admitted in ME 1235 by the Head of the Religious Sect to his King saying that “the common people were too poor to pay the taxes so that the King would allow them to postpone paying taxes for several months”



Letter about Taxation (pbk-1456)

In conclusion, there are different kinds of letters and, among them, I have presented selected admitted letters in Konbaung period about Administration, astrology, economy, religious affairs and taxation. These admitted letters were to the King from the head of the Religious Sect. According to these studies, we know ancient Myanmar writings, and the situations of Konbaung period.

It can help the users to find events concerning with administration, religious affairs, economy and taxation of Konbaung period. It will be useful for historians and scholars who are interested in Myanmar history and administration of ancient Myanmar Kings.

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