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Social Life of *Kalabyo Ahmudans* (Muslim Gunners) in Pre-colonial Period

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Abstract

This paper mainly focuses on social life of *Kalabyo Ahmudans* under Myanmar Kings. *Kalabyo Ahmudans* were believers of Islamic faith in the service of Myanmar Kingdom. These groups of Gunners were first found in the service of King Thalun (1629-1648) and they continued to service in various successive Myanmar King. During the reign of King Alaungmintaya (1752-1760), *Kalabyo Ahmudans* were expand and given the important role as bodyguards in defending the life of the king. Some *Kalabyo Ahmudans* joined the royal army in military campaign against Siam and they also served as palace guards taking the role as night sentries for the security of the king during the reign of King Hsinbyushin (1763-1776). In recognizing the loyalty of *Kalabyo Ahmudans*, the Myanmar Kings awarded titles and ranks viz. *Kalawun*, *Thanatwun*, *Thanatbo* and *Thway-thauk-gyi* to them respectively. Moreover, they were granted deed of lands in compatible with their rank and status. This paper examine how much extents *Kalabyo Ahmudans* involved in the service of Myanmar King and what are the titles and insignias of *Kalabyo Ahmudans*.

Keyword: Gunners, ranks and titles

The Arrival of Islamic Religion

Islamic religion was originated in early 7th A.D. A hundred years after the death of Muhammad, the messenger of God or the prophet of Islam, in 732 A.D., the Arabs who had faith in Islamic religion migrated to the coasts of Mediterranean Sea, the coasts of Atlantic Ocean, the central Asia, and to the border of India.² They settled down in the ports of China in 8th A.D., and Islamic traders started to have their bases in the ports of South-east Asia.³

A record written in 871 A.D. mentioned the arrival of two Arab travelers in Adman Islands (Kappali Islands).⁴ In 788 A.D., during the reign of Rakhine King Maha Taing Chamdra (A.D. 788-810), a group of ships wrecked near Yanbye Island, and the king let the Muslims on board settle down in his country.⁵ It was the first arrival of Muslims in Rakhine.

During the Yuan Dynasty in China (1280-1368), Myanmar began to have the relationship with Islamic religion through Yunan Region. Bengal region, in the west of

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² Zeya Kyaw Htin Bohmu Ba Shin, *Myanmar-naing-ngan-tha Islam-ba-tha-win-do-ar Shay Myanmar-min-do-ka Chie-myint-kai-pon-mya* (The ranks and titles conferred upon the Muslim during the reign of Myanmar King), Yangon, Burma Historical Commission Library, 1962, p.1 (Henceforth: Ba Shin, 1962)

³ B.R. Pearn, *An Introduction to the History of South East Asia*, Kaulalumpur, Longmans of Malaya, Ltd Printed in Hong Kong, 1963, p.29 (Henceforth: Pearn, 1962)

⁴ Ba Shin, 1962, 2

⁵ Win Myint, "*Konbaung-khit Tine-yin-tha Islam-ba-tha-win-min-hmudan-mya-ei A-khan-kan-na*" (Islamist Ahmudans in the service of Myanmar Kings), M.A Thesis, Department of History, University of Yangon, 1986, p.2 (Henceforth: Win Myint, 1986)

Myanmar, was introduced to Islamic religion as early as the time of Muhammad in 1202. While the power of the Sultan Dynasty in Delhi was weak, the Sultan Dynasty in East Bengal was established in 1336. The Sultan Country (Islamic Country)⁶, occupying all the Bengal regions, was established in 1345.

Min Ye Kyaw Swa, the son of King Minkhaung of Innwa (1401-1422) attacked Laungkyat, the royal city of Rakhine, in 1404, and King Nara Mate Hla (Min Saw Mon) fled to Bengal. He had to remain in Bengal for 26 years, and regain his throne of Rakhine, with the help of King Sultan, in 1430.⁷ He established Myauk-u, a new royal city, in 1431, and let Muslims to settle down in the regions near the city in return for their help.⁸

In 16 A.D., Muslims served the Rakhine king as his gunners in the Navy and also as his body-guards called Kaman Archers.⁹ Muslims gunners were seen together with Myanmar horsemen when Rakhine King Sirisudhamma (1622-1638) at the ceremony of Rajabhiseka (consecration by pouring lustral waters on the head of a king being consecrated) where troops were deployed of the royal entourage.¹⁰ Thus, in early 17 A.D., Muslims were in the service of the Rakhine kings, and consequently Islamic religions spread around the area.

The Origin of the Name "Kalabyo"

During the reign of Myanmar kings, Muslims were called Kalar, (It is said that the term "Kalar" was derived from the term "Ku-lar" which literally means immigrants) Mohammedan, (This is Arabic word which means the disciples of Prophet Muhammad) Zerbadee, (This is Persian word which means below the wind) and Pathi (Parsee).¹¹ However, Chinese Muslims were called Pan-thay.

The name Pathi (Parsee) was formerly used to describe Muslims in Myanmar. It was the name given to Indian Muslims, the decedents of Persia (Iran).¹² Parsees armed gunners were called Kalabyo.¹³ Therefore, Kalabyo servants were the Muslims who handled guns in the royal army of Myanmar kings.

The Settlements of Kalabyo

When King Min Raja of Rakhine attacked Bago, he had Portuguese and Kalabyo mercenaries in his army. When Bago fell under the attack, in 1600, Thanlyin was given to Nga Zinga (De Brito), a Portuguese, to rule. King Anaukphetlun (1605-1628) occupied Thanlyin in 1612. Over two thousand Parsees (Kalabyo) who were sent on four ships to help Nga Zinga were captured by the Myanmar royal army, and taken to Upper Myanmar.¹⁴

⁶ Ba Shin, 1962, 4, 5

⁷ Ba Shin, 1962, 6

⁸ G.E. Harvey, *Outline History of Burma*, Calcutta India, 1929, p.24 (Henceforth: Harvey, 1929)

⁹ U Thein Hlaing, *Myanmar-English Dictionary of Ancient Myanmar Historical terms*, Yangon, Zabu-ta-lu Press, 2016, p.2 (Henceforth: Thein Hlaing, 2016)

¹⁰ Ba Shin, 1962, 30, 31

¹¹ Tin Oo, "*Myanmar Muslim Tha-maing*" (History of Myanmar-Muslim), M.A Thesis, Department of History, Mandalay University, 1995, p.1 (Henceforth: Tin Oo, 1995)

¹² Thein Hlaing, 2016, 101

¹³ Dr Than Tun, "*Thalunmin Let-htet Ok-chock-ye*" (Administration Under King Thalun), JBRS, Vol.XLIX, part.i, June 1966, p.54 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 1966)

¹⁴ Ba Shin, 1962, 21

Again in 1707, King Sanay (1698-1714) occupied Thandwe, and captured Muslim Kalabyo. They were given places to live in Taungngu, Yamethin, Nyaunyan, Yindaw, Meikhtila, Pintale, Tabetswe, Bodhi, Sitha, Siputtara, Myedu, and Dipeiyin.¹⁵ Therefore, it can be seen that Kalabyo had their settlements in Myanmar during the reign of King Anaukphetlun, and again they had twelve more settlements during the reign of King Sanay.

The forming of Kalabyo Gunner Groups

Kalabyo had been in the royal service for the kings of Rakhine by 16 A.D., but they were in the service of the Myanmar kings during the reign of King Thalun (1629-1648). King Thalun formed eleven gunner groups¹⁶ including Kalabyo troop. Thus, Kalabyos were first seen in the royal service during the reign of King Thalun.

King Sanay (1698-1714) gave 280 Kalabyos some land to live and work, and they were formed as Kalabyo gunner group again. A hundred guns were given to them and they also served as the king's night sentries.¹⁷

King Alaungmintaya (1752-1760) formed Kalabyo gunner groups again. After conquering Thanlyin on 29 July 1756, King Alaungmintaya again formed a gunner group with 550 men, including Kalabyos who had been already in the royal service, Kalas from Yangon and Thanlyin, Parsees, and Ferenghi, as his body-guards. Eight men of those body-guards were chosen as *Thwe-thauk-gyi* (a *Thwe-thauk-gyi* is a commander of a troop of fifty-man).¹⁸ Since Kalabyos were trusted by King Alaungmintaya, they were formed as the king's body-guards.

During the reign of King Badon (1782-1819), gunner groups were reformed and extended. King Badon, when he gained the power, chose trusted able young men from Badon (now Alon), a town that he was given to rule before he became the king, and formed gunner groups called *Sugyi-chauk-kyauung* or *Atwin-chauk-su* (Interior Six Guards who took in turn the night duty too were North Daway, South Daway, North 150, South 150, North Marabin and Shwe Pyi Hman Kin).¹⁹ He also formed twenty-eight gunner groups excluding his body-guards, *Atwin-chauk-su*. One of those troops was Kalabyo gunner group that was formed with 336 men.²⁰ Therefore, there were 34 gunner groups during his reign.

King Mindon (1853-1878) included separate quarters for people of different origins in his new royal city, Mandalay, and the names to those quarters were given accordingly: Kalabyo Yat, Shan Pwe Yat, Ferenghi Win, Kathae Win, Tayoke Tan, Punna Su, Rakhine Su, etc.²¹ The name itself suggested that Kalabyo gunner group were placed in a separate quarter

¹⁵ Ba Shin, 1962, 23

¹⁶ Than Tun, 1966, 66

¹⁷ Maung Tint, "*Badonmin Let-htet Sit-hmu-dan*" (Military Servicemen in King Badon), *Researches in Burmese History*, No.2, 1978, p.72 (Henceforth: Maung Tint, 1978)

¹⁸ Maung Maung Tin, KSM, ATM, *Kon-baung-zet Maha Ya-za-win-daw-gyi* (Great Chronicle of Konbaung Dynasty), Vol.I, Yangon, Yarppei Press, 2004, p.157 (Henceforth: Maung Maung Tin I, 2004)

¹⁹ Maung Maung Tin, K.S.M, ATM, *Shwe-nan-thone Wo-ha-ra Abidan* (Dictionary of words and used at the Court), Yangon, University of Historical Research Centre, 2005, pp.279, 280 (Henceforth: Maung Maung Tin, 2005)

²⁰ Maung Tint, 1978, 72

²¹ Maung Maung Tin, "*Mandalay Yat-kwet-tha-maing*" (History of Mandalay Quarters), *Researches in Burmese History*, No.2, 1978, p.100 (Henceforth: Maung Maung Tin, 1978)

during the reign of King Mindon. Kalabyo still live in the streets between 33rd and 34th, and 70th and 71st in Chan Aye Thar Zan Township, Mandalay.

Kalabyo in the royal service were also called Kinta Kalabyo. The name was first used during the reign of King Bagan (1846-1853). King Thibaw had thirty-two gunner groups and there were 12202 gunners served in those troops. One of those troops was Kinta Kalabyo Gunner group that was formed with 335 Kinta Kalabyos. The detail information is given below.

Table (1) The list of gunners served in gunner groups during the reign of King Thibaw (1878-1885)

No.	The name of the gunner group	Numbers of gunners	Payment (per month) (Kyats)	Average monthly pay for each soldier	Remark
1.	Thuyei	1110	11775	11	
2.	Natshinywe	562	6520	12	
3.	Shwe Hlan	504	5820	12	
4.	Bhonetawtoe	461	5475	12	
5.	Thaungmarabin	356	4180	12	
6.	Kinta Kalabyo	335	4005	12	
7.	Linzin	330	4005	12	
8.	Bhonetawphit	294	3615	12	
9.	Takharni	177	2215	13	
10.	Naukwin Kyin	176	2027	12	
11.	Shwepyi	168	2080	12	
12.	Natshin Yan Naing	114	3440	30	
13.	Palaing-let-swei (or) Bikyat let-swei	71	1640	23	
14.	Ngaphone Taik let-swei	45	1130	25	
15.	Mingala let-swei	41	830	20	
16.	Let-swei-lay	34	700	21	
17.	Let-swei-gyi	21	1110	53	
18.	Myauksamouk let-swei	19	400	21	
19.	Taungsamouk let-swei	19	400	21	
20.	Anauksamouk let-swei	11	270	25	
Total		4848	61637		

Source: Maung Maung Tin, 2005, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288

According to the information mentioned in the list, the average monthly payment for a soldier in Kinta Kalabyo Gunner group is 12 kyats. It is quite reasonable compare to the payment that the gunners in other gunner groups received. Gunners in different gunner groups were tattooed differently, and those tattoos were the symbols of their respective troop. The gunners in the gunner groups had their tattoos on the back of their right hands, on the napes, on

the backs, between two shoulder blades, on the right side of the body and on the left side. The gunners in Kalabyo Gunner group had their lion-tattoos on the right side of their bodies.²²

Myanmar kings had Kalabyo gunner groups among the royal servants, and they held some positions, received honourable titles, and specific duties. Some of the known positions of Kalabyo gunner groups include Kala *wun* (Consul),²³ Kalabyo Thanatwun (Central Leader gunners),²⁴ Kalabo (Provincial Leader Gunners),²⁵ Kinta Kalabyo Thanatbo (Provincial Leader/Gunners), Kalabyo Thwe-thauk-gyi (Leader of Blood-bond Brother hood),²⁶ Kalabyo Thanatbo (Provincial Leader/Gunners),²⁷ Pathi Thanat Saye (Adjutant/Gunners),²⁸ Kalabyo Thanat Saye (Adjutant/Gunners),²⁹ and Kinta Kalabyo Thanat Saye (Adjutant/Gunners),³⁰ etc.

Kalawun (Consul)

The Consul had the duty to keep the immigrant Indians in Myanmar and foreign traders separated. He had to keep a detail list of foreign traders including their nationalities, addresses, the numbers of them in each group, the goods they sold and bought, the date of their departure, etc. He was also responsible for keeping Kalabyo royal servants abide by the law and also have proper livelihood. He also acted as a judge when there is a law-case among Kalabyo royal servants.³¹ Therefore, it is noted here that the Consul had important duties. The Consul who served Myanmar kings were:

Table (2)The Consuls who served Myanmar kings

No	the Consuls' Names	The names of the kings	Remark
1	Mani Thura	King Sanay (1698-1714)	
2	Mingyi Maha Minhla Kyaw Htin	King Badon (1782-1819)	
3	Thiri Nawratha (T.M.Mackertich)	King Badon (1782-1819)	17 March 1806
4	Thiri Gonnarat	King Badon (1782-1819)	17 November 1816
5	Maha Thiha Min Htin	King Bagyidaw (1819-1837)	18 January 1841
6	Maha Thiha Min Htin	King Thayawady (1837-1846)	

²² Maung Maung Tin, 2005, 287

²³ Maung Maung Tin, 2005, 191

²⁴ Ba Shin, 1962, 67

²⁵ Maung Maung Tin, I, 2004, 381, 388

²⁶ Ba Shin, 1962, gha

²⁷ Ba Shin, 1962, 56

²⁸ Parabaik, Dr Toe Hla Collection

²⁹ Ba Shin, 1962, ga

³⁰ Maung Maung Tin, 2005, 287

³¹ *The Royal Orders of Burma* (AD 1598-1885), Compiled, edited, translated and annotated with long preface by Dr Than Tun, Part Seven, (AD 1811-1819), Kyoto, The Center of Southeast Asia Studies, Kyoto University, 1988, p.359 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 1988)

7	Maha Min Htin Thihathu	King Bagan (1846-1853)	
8	Maha Min Khaung Thihathu	King Bagan (1846-1853)	5 January 1853
9	Maha Minkhaung Thihathu	King Mindon (1853-1878)	
10	Minhla Min Htin Razar (U Don)	King Thibaw (1878-1885)	

Sources: Ba Shin, 1962, 32, 65, 67, 69; Than Tun, 1988, 359; Than Tun, 1990, 122; Win Myint, 1986, 122; Maung Maung Tin, II, 2004, 410

According to the information given in the table, the Consuls were first appointed in the royal service during the reign of King Sanay. However, there was no records on the Consuls during early Konbaung Period, but most the Consuls were appointed during late Konbaung Period. Among the Kalabyo royal servants, the Consuls held the highest positions, and immediately under him were Kalabyo *Thanatwun* whose names are unknown. Under them, Kalabo, who were also called Kalabyo *Thanatbo* (Provincial Leaders/Gunners), served. The title Kalabyo *Thanatbo* (Provincial Leaders Gunners) was changed to Kinta Kalabyo Provincial Leaders (Gunners) during the reign of King Bagan. A detail list of their names is mentioned below.

Table (3) Kalabyo *Thanatbo* (Provincial Leaders/Gunners) who served Myanmar kings

No	Kalabyo <i>Thanatbo</i>	The names of the kings	Remark
1	Arkar Kyaw Htin	King Alaungmintaya (1752-1760)	
2	Thiri Sanda Kyaw Thu	King Naungdawgyi (1760-1763)	
3	Arkar Kyaw Htin	King Hsinbhyushin (1763-1776)	
4	Zawtala	King Badon (1782-1819)	
5	Minthiha Kyaw Htin Nawrahta	King Badon (1782-1819)	
6	Naymyo Gonnarat	King Bagydaw (1819-1846)	
7	Maha Minhla Min Htin Razar	King Bagan (1846-1853)	5 February 1852
8	Min Htin Kyawthu	King Mindon (1853-1878)	
9	Minhla Min Htin Kyawthu	King Thibaw (1878-1885)	
10	Min Kyaw Ye Khaung	King Thibaw (1878-1885)	

Sources: Maung Maung Tin, I, 2004, 125, 260, 389; Maung Maung Tin, II, 2004, 261; Maung Maung Tin, III, 2004, 222, 429; Ba Shin, 1962, 56; Win Myint, 1986, 121

King Hsinbhyushin marched to Siam (Then: known to Myanmar as Yodaya) on 30 November 1764, and there was one Kalabyo gunner groups among his army. Nay Myo Gonnarat, a Kalabyo, was appointed as a deputy commander of the troop of 20,000 men.³² During the first British-Myanmar War (1824-1826), at Gotawpalin bettle, Nay Myo Gonnarat

³² Maung Maung Tin, I, 2004, 276

led a troop and fought against the British, and the British lost that battle.³³ Again, during the reign of King Bagan, when the British invaded Myanmar second time (the Second British-Myanmar War) in 1852, Kalabyo Provincial Leader (Gunner) Maha Minhla Min Htin Razar and over 240 Kalabyo gunners fought in Dannyawady Column,³⁴ and during the Third British-Myanmar War (1885), Kinta Kalabyo provincial Leader Minhla Min Htin Kyawthu led 335 and fought against the British in Taungdwingyi Column.³⁵ Kalabyo royal servants did not only serve Myanmar kings fighting against British invasion, but also fought Chinese army that invaded Bamaw on 17 July 1884, during the reign of King Thibaw. Min Kyaw Ye Khaung,³⁶ a Kalabyo Provincial Leader, led 400 men and fought in the battle.³⁷ Kalabyo royal servants did not only fight against foreign invasions, but also served the kings to settle down rebellions in the country. Thus, Kalabyo royal servants played an important role in defending the country and creating peace in the country.

Kalabyo *Thwethaukgyis* (Leaders of Blood-bond Brotherhood)

Under Kalabyo provincial leaders, leaders of blood-bond brotherhood served. Some of them were Pyachi Nandarar who served King Alaungmintaya³⁸ and Ye Khaung Kyaw Thu who served King Badon.³⁹ Leaders of blood-bond brotherhood had the same level of rank as village headmen. They were responsible for maintaining law and order and collecting taxes in the regions they rule. They had to report to the officials whose offices are in the royal city every six month.⁴⁰

Under the leaders of blood-bond brotherhood, adjutants (gunners) served. They served in their own gunner groups. Kalabyo adjutants⁴¹ were also called Pathi adjutants,⁴² and Kinta Kalabyo adjutants.⁴³ King Sin Phyu Shin gave the adjutant Thiri Gonnarat a title named Thara Sakka Thu.⁴⁴

Kalabyo gunners did not only served in Kalabyo gunner groups, but also served in suburban gunner groups. King Hsinbhyushin gave the titles "Set Htut Pannarat" to Kalabyo Nga Moe Myin, "Set Htut Nandarar" to Nga Tun Nyo, and "Set Htut Mantarat" to Nga Thar Nyo.⁴⁵ Thus, Myanmar kings did not only gave honourable titles to the officers of Kalabyo gunner groups, but also gave them to privates.

³³ Maung Maung Tin, KSM, ATM, *Kon-baung-zet Maha-ya-za-win-daw-gyi* (Great chronicle of the Konbaung Dynasty), Vol.II, Yangon, Yarpay Press, 2004, p.261 (Henceforth: Maung Maung Tin, II, 2004)

³⁴ Maung Maung Tin, KSM, ATM, *Konbaung-zet Maha-ya-za-win-daw-gyi* (Great Chronicle of the Konbaung Dynasty), Vol.III, Yangon, Yarpay Press, 2004, p.82 (Henceforth: Maung Maung Tin, III, 2004)

³⁵ Maung Maung Tin, III, 2004, 465, 466

³⁶ Ba Shin, 1962, 56

³⁷ Maung Maung Tin, III, 2004, 429

³⁸ Maung Maung Tin, I, 2004, 210

³⁹ Parabaik, Dr Khin Saw Oo Collection

⁴⁰ Ba Shin, 1962, nga

⁴¹ Parabaik, Dr Khin Saw Oo Collection

⁴² Parabaik, Dr Toe Hla Collection

⁴³ Maung Maung Tin, 2005, 287

⁴⁴ Pe (Palm-leaf), No.492, National Library, Yangon (Henceforth: Pe: NL, no.492)

⁴⁵ Palm-leaf no.492, NL

Conclusion

By 16th century, Muslims had already served Rakhine kings. Myanmar King Anauk-phet-lun, when he won Thanlyin in 1612, captured 2000 Kalabyo, and brought them to upper Myanmar. King Thalun formed gunner groups, and there were Kalabyo gunner groups among them. Kalabyo royal servants were trustworthy and loyal, and consequently they were also appointed among the king's body-guard troops. They fought, serving in the Myanmar royal army, against rebellions, Chinese invasions, and British-Myanmar Wars. They play important roles in rebuilding the country and creating peace in the country. Therefore, Myanmar kings gave proper titles and awards to them. The consul, other officials, and the privates who served among the Kalabyo royal servants received honourable titles and awards from Myanmar kings.

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