CUŁA SAKARĀJA AND THE SIXTY CYCLICAL YEAR NAMES

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Those familiar with the chronicles of Northern Thailand will readily recognize the following names of kings responsible for terminations and inaugurations of successive eras since the parinibbāna of the Exalted One: Ajātasattu, Bandhumati, Trīcakkhu and Anuruddha. The first was a historical king and a late disciple of the Buddha, who, together with Mahāthera Kassapa, started the Buddha Sakarāja (BS), according to the Theravāda tradition. No one disputes this and BS begins with the year after the parinibbāna. Of the remaining three kings one is less certain where they came from. Bandhumati is mentioned as a king of Śrī Lanka, but is not in the list of kings of that country. Trīcakkhu is mentioned as a king of Pagan but sometimes no country is attached to his name. Anuruddha is also mentioned as a king of Pagan.

The following changes of eras are mentioned in the Northern Thai chronicles:

1. With the parinibbāna of the Bhagavā, an “old sakarāja” was terminated at 148 by Mahāthera Kassapa and King Ajātasattu who then instituted Buddha Sakarāja.
2. When BS had attained the year 621/622 it was abolished by Trīcakkhu who then inaugurated Mahā Sakarāja (MS), better known in India and the West as Saka Era which coincides with the year 78 AD.
3. Anuruddha abolished the MS after it had reached the year 559/560 and inaugurated Cula Sakarāja (CS) in the year 638 AD.

The above four eras seem plain enough and in the main agree with the Burmese changes, but who are Trīcakkhu and Anuruddha? Before attempting to solve the mystery, let me present the reader with traditional Burmese account of how the various eras and CS came about, as described in the Burmese chronicles.

One of the early British administrators of Burma, Sir Arthur Phayre, had a high regard for Burmese chronicles from which he compiled his History of Burma (Trubner, London 1883) in the introduction to which he said that Burma had a long and clear history. A Burmese chronicle that must have been brought to attention of Phayre

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1. Phryā Prjākicckaraacakr (Jaem Bunnag): Yonaka Chronicle (Sobhoñbibadhanākara, Bangkok BS 2478) p. 223.
2. Manīt Vallibhotama: Tammān Sihanavatikumāra p. 64 (Commission for the Publication of Historical Documents, Office of the Prime Minister, Bangkok BS 2516)
would be U Kalā’s *Mahārājavingyi* (Mahārājavamsa or the Great Genealogy of Kings) which was written and submitted to King Taninganwe (1714–33) at Ava. The writer came of a wealthy father, Devasețha, and an equally rich mother, Mați Ogha, and he himself was a great scholar. U Kalā must have collected all the then available chronicles and read many of the ancient inscriptions which two and a half centuries ago must have been more legible than now, before he wrote his *magnum opus*. The *Mahārājavingyi* formed the backbone of the *Hmannan Maharajawindawgyi*, better known to Western scholars as the *Glass Palace Chronicle*, compiled under royal order of King Bagyidaw or Sagaing Min (1819–37) grandson and successor of King Bodawpayā (1782–1819) who was the fourth son of Alaungpayā (1752–60), founder of the Konbaung Dynasty.

According to the *Mahārājavyingyi* Burma recognizes the following eras:

1. When an ancient era had reached the year 8645 it was terminated by King Añjana, maternal grandfather of the Buddha, and a new era was established by him called, for convenience, Añjana Saka6ija (AS).5

2. Lord Buddha attained parinibbana when AS reached 148. Mahāthera Kassapa and King Ajītasattu abolished the AS at this point and inaugurated BS with the year BS 1 as the year after the parinibbana, which is 544 BC by Śrī Lankan and Burmese reckoning6.

3. When King Sumundari (73–80 AD) of Tharekhittārā (Śrī Kṣetra or old Prome) died in BS 624, the chronicle states, “the time had come to abolish the sakkarāja (Burmese spelling), the place called Lokananda of Pagan was then known as Kyauksaga. Here Sakka, in the guise of the brahman Mahallaka abolished (BS) 622 and inscribed on a rock ‘Short Sakkariija 2’. ” Thus a new era was born at 78 AD (622–544 = 78). This is the MS of Thailand (and ? Cambodia), or Śaka Era of India set up to commemorate the accession of King Kaniśka of the Kuśāna Empire8.

4. While at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA, 1974–78, I read several Northern Thai chronicles, including those in the series of *Prajum Tamān Bradhātu*. I remember reading *Prajum Bohśavadar Part 61* and trying to decipher or get some sense out of the various eras, and the result was unmitigated headache. I have none of these chronicles with me here in Burma, except the above mentioned (1) and (2).

5. U Kalā: *Mahārājavingyi* p. 28 (Burma Research Society, Ed. Pe Maung Tin, Hanthāvatī Press, Rangoon—no date)

6. Ibid. p. 32

7. Ibid. pp. 130–1

4. When MS reached the year 560 Poppa Sawrahan, king of Pagan (613–40 AD), abolished it and established a new era which is the CS of the present, in use in Burma and Thailand, and it began in the year 638 AD (78+560 = 638)\(^9\).

In the above changes of eras there is a supernatural element in (3). MS was not exactly established by King Sumundari; it was adopted because Sakka, the king of devas, had ordained it by his inscription on the rock. This points to the possibility of the era having come from India with which Burma had overland connection as early as the 2nd century BC, if not earlier\(^10\). Note also that the adoption was done two years after the Śaka Era had appeared in India. It is more than possible that the brāhmaṇ astrologers of the court at Tharekhittarā must have heard of the change in India nearly two years later and invented the Sakka’s writing on the rock; in those days it must have taken that long for important news from Northwest India to reach Burma. Those astrologers must doubtless know or hear about the Śaka people of India and, true to the tradition of living by their wits, turned the word “Śaka” into “Sakka” and added the writing on the rock. The very word “Śakarāja” and “Mahā Sakarāja” could have originated at the time as the era was to celebrate the accession of a famous Śakarāja, king of the Śakas. The word Sakarāja itself has been spelled in Burmese and kiin as “Sakkarāja” through, according to Professor Luce, mis-spelling in the early inscriptions of Kyaukse,\(^11\) a few miles south of Mandalay.

Poppa Sawrahan means Co or Cau (lord) Arahan (here—monk or bhikkhu) of Poppa, the extinct volcano in Central Burma close to and southeast of Pagan. During the reign of his predecessor, King Htunchit, Sawrahan was the saṅgharāja and tutor to the queen who after her husband’s death made him king in reverence and gratitude. It is not related if the new king took his pupil to be his queen in order to maintain the purity of the royal line, as was the custom in Burmese history.

The three eras, namely BS, MS and CS are used in the Burmese chronicles for dating important events and reigns of kings and apart from discrepancies due to successive copying there is little confusion. Some Western scholars before the second World War II did not set great store by these datings, especially before the 5th century AD, because they did not believe the chronicles and did not share the Burmese belief in the early culture, tradition and civilisation of Burma. Professor Luce for one was

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9. U Kala: op. cit. p. 151
of the opinion that the CS was “invented” by the Pyu of Tharekhittara, to commemorate the founding of the city, i.e. in 638. But the disbelief of those scholars in the antiquity of Tharekhittara and Pagan has been upset by the post-World War II discovery by radio carbon testing that Tharekhittara was already in existence by the 1st century AD. So it is entirely within reason and realms of possibility that the MS was adopted in 78 AD at Tharekhittara and that the CS was inaugurated in 638 AD at Pagan.

To return to the mysterious Trîcakkhu and Anuruddha. By tradition, King Dwattabaung who ruled Tharekhittara from BS 101 to 171 (443–373 BC) was reputed to have a divine third eye in the middle of his forehead in the form of a live mole. No change of eras was attributed to this “Trîcakkhu” in in the Burmese chronicles, but King Sumundari during whose reign MS was adopted was also king of Tharekhittara, a descendant of Dwattabaung.

King Anuruddha or Aniruddha (or Anawrahta in Burmese) was one of the early historical kings of Pagan; European historians often call him the first historical king of Burma with his capital at Pagan, and he ruled from 1044 to 1077 AD, but no abolition or establishment of any era is connected with his name in Burmese history. There was no other Anuruddha in the chronicles or history of Burma, and the Aniruddha mentioned was one of the best known of Burmese kings.

It is possible that as far as changes of eras are concerned Northern Thai chronicles had their sources from Burma but that in the process the name Trîcakkhu got the better of Sumundari as Dwattabaung was the best known of Tharekhittara kings and to Burma’s neighbours there was little difference between old Prome (Tharekhittara) and old Pagan (Arimaddana). In the same way Aniruddha, being the best known of Pagan kings, eclipsed the name of Sawrahan of the same kingdom of Pagan. Is it not possible that Northern Thai chronicles before being committed to writing must have been passed by words of mouth from chroniclers to chroniclers and hence the confusion of names?

Although scholars have not come up with exciting pronouncements the possibility cannot be ruled out that communication existed between Central and Lower Burma on the one hand, and Northern Thailand on the other, even during the early centuries of the Christian era. Within historical times we are told of the cholera

12. Ibid.
epidemic in Haripuṇḍāya which sent the populace fleeing to Thaton and Pegu around the middle of the 11th century when King Aniruddha was already on the throne of Pagan. It was this self-same Aniruddha who spread Pagan influence as far as the Menam Valley of Central Thailand putting an end to the Khmer empire and thereby encouraging the rise of Dai kingdoms and principalities. During the prominence of these kingdoms and principalities from the 13th to 15th centuries the land routes between Lower Burma and Thailand were well worn with footprints of monks and men. Then came the Burmese domination over much of Northern Thailand from the middle of the 16th century to the latter part of the 18th century. Even in modern times, right up to the present, overland routes between Burma and Thailand have been well traversed by traders, pilgrims and smugglers. It will thus be seen that contact during historical times between Burma and Northern Thailand has been unbroken. It follows therefore that there must have been a greater exchange of cultures and ideas, particularly the spread of the Sāṣāṇā, than apparent in history books. Of the two regions Burma was the senior partner, and Burmese influence on the architectural style and dialect of the Northern Thais can still be seen today. It is not surprising that the names of Trīcakkhu (Dwattabaung) and Anuruddha found their way however confusedly into Northern Thai chronicles. And there seems to be little doubt that it was the Burmese who introduced both MS and CS into both Northern and Central Thailand.

Burmese people, including many scholars, believe firmly that MS and CS originated as stated in the Burmese chronicles. The beginning of CS, 638 AD, is two hundred and eleven years before the present walls of Pagan (that tourists see) were constructed by King Pinbyā in 849 AD. There were thirteen kings between Poppa Sawrahan (613–40 AD) and Pinbyā each reign averaging only 16.23 years which is not extraordinary. Early Burmese chronicles deal only with Tharekhittarā and Pagan, one after the other, while those of Northern Thailand have several states to contend with, and the dates are bound to overlap or get distorted, while carelessness of scribes in copying cannot be overlooked as a cause for mistakes and distortions.

Having presented my view on how CS originated, I will now deal with the sixty cyclical year names as used in the Shan States of Burma, with special reference to those used in the Khūn State of Kengtung (Chiengtung). The following are the complete sixty names in Khiṃ spelling:

15. W.A.R. Wood: *A History of Siam* pp. 50–51 (The Siam Barnakich Press, Bangkok 1933)
The table contains all the sixty cyclical year names of the accompanying chart, and the latter covers 1405 years of CS beginning with CS 1 in year Kadgai and ending with CS 1405 in year Kāgai. There are 23 CSs in the first thirty five, and 24 CSs in the second twenty five, of the year names, as indicated in the "box" under each name. There is a difference of sixty years between one CS and the next in the same box. Each year name has two syllables (Kāpsaṇā is often read as Kāpsāṇā); the first syllable, written in capitals for easy identification, is called "mother of the year" (Māepī), and the second syllable is called "child of the year" (Lūkipī). There are ten mothers and twelve children.

The ten mothers are:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
KĀP ĐAP RĀY MŪN PŪK KAD KOĎ RŌN TAU KĀ

The twelve children, together with animals they represent, are

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
cai pau yi hmau si sai sañā med san rau seď gai
caií paud rayi hmau sī sañāi med san rau seď gai

cat ox tiger hare nāga snake horse goat monkey cock dog pig

de āśu, āśu, amū, amū, amū, amū, amū, amū, amū, amū, amū, amū,
cat ox tiger hare nāga snake horse goat monkey cock dog pig

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The numbering denotes only the sequence of names which must be in this order, and in no other, and it has nothing to do with the ending numerals of CS. Note also the odd and even numbers for both mothers and children.

The table shows how mothers and children of the years are combined, and there can be no other combinations, each mother having six children as clearly seen in the table. It will be noticed that mothers under odd numbers have only children under odd numbers, and those of even numbers have children of even numbers. Thus KĀP (odd numbers) yields KĀPcāi, KĀPṣēd, KĀPṣan, KĀPṣaṇā, KĀPṣī, KĀPṣy; ĐAP (even number) has ĐAPcāi, ĐAPṣēd, ĐAPṣan, ĐAPṣaṇā, ĐAPṣai, ĐAPṣy, etc. Ten mothers, each with six children, make a total of sixty in the cycle, and there can never be a mother under an odd number with a child under an even number. It will also be seen that each child (representing an animal) appears five times in the cycle with
difference mothers. Thus cai (rat) has KĀPcai, RĀYcai, PŪKcai, KOḌcai, TAŬcai; pau (ox) has DAPpau, MŪNpau, KADpau, RŌNpau, KĀpau and so on. Twelve children, each with five combinations, make a total of sixty cyclical names; and the same rule applies about inadmissibility of combining an odd number with an even one.

To the question "What year?", a Westerner's answer is likely to be "1980" or "1342" if he wants to refer to CS. A Khūn, however, will answer "Koṣan", and to him "1342" will be "Sakkarāja" (always understood to be CS) or "Sakkhāj" as is often spoken. One day after the full moon of October 24th 1980 will be written as "Year Koṣan CS 1342, Month Twelve Waning 1st night." (Month Twelve in Kengtung is Month Eleven in Western Shan States and Central Thailand, but Month One in Chiengmai). The day preceding the nightfall in the foregoing statement comes under that night because waxing and waning refer only to moon phases, and the moon can be seen only at night. Thus a person can be born at midday on Month Twelve Waning 1st night. The incongruity in English of the midday on Month Twelve Waning 1st night can be obviated by omitting the word "night", as is usually the practice.

To convert CS into BS, add 1182 to CS and the result will be BS as calculated in Burma and Sri Lanka, whilst that in Thailand is one year less.

To convert CS into Christian era (AD) add 638 to CS. But in working out the detail of the months, it must be be remembered that the new AD year which falls on the 1st of January is NOT the beginning of a CS year which starts from the middle of April of each year. For instance, March 31st 1980 was still in CS1341, whereas after April 15th the CS became 1342 and would remain so until about April 15th 1981. AD year always begins three and a half months before CS year.

It is not known when the sixty cyclical year names were introduced to various Dai regions, from Āhom Shan area in the Upper Brahmaputra valley, through the Shan States of Burma and Southwest Yunnan, Northern Thailand and Vietnam. This should be an interesting research subject for diligent scholars. But there seems to be little doubt as to where they came from. It is well known that the Chinese have the sixty-year cyclical system, and it is said that they have been using it since the 27th century BC. The only question is how and when the system came from China to the regions just mentioned from the Upper Brahmaputra river to South China Sea.

The ten "mothers" and twelve "children" of the Khūn system are called "stems" and "branches" respectively in Chinese, and they are combined in exactly the same way as in the table above except that the words are Chinese. The ten Chinese stems with their Khūn and Shan counterparts below them are:
CUṬA SAKARĀJA AND THE SIXTY CYCLICAL YEAR NAMES

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JEATYII BIING DING WUH JII GENG SHIN REN GOEI
KĀP ḌAP RĀY MŪN PŪK KAḌ KOḌ RŌN TAU KĀ
KĀP LAP HĀI MŪN PŪK KAT KHUT HOṆ TAU KĀ

Similarly the twelve Chinese branches with Khūn, Shan and Thai equivalents are:

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tzyy choou yn mao chern syh wuu wey shen yeou shiu hay
cai pau yi hmau si sai sanā meḍ san rau seḍ gai
cali pau yi mau si sau sūn mot san hau met kaṭi
jut chalū khāl thō marōn masēn mamia mamae vōk rakā cō kun

I hesitate to include Northern Thai equivalents as I am sure of their spelling.

The animals represented by the children or branches are almost the same for all except for the following: the Shans have “buffalo” while the rest have “ox” (choou—Chinese or cai—Khūn or chalu—Thai); the Chinese have “dragon”, Shans “alligator” instead of “nāga” of Khūns and Thais (chern, si or marōn); the Chinese have “sheep” in place of “goat” for the rest (wey, meḍ or mamae).

As stated, the combination of the Chinese stems and branches is done in exactly the same way as that of the Khūn as set out in the table on page 6. Some samples are: JEAtzyy (CS 1286, 1924 AD—rat); YIIchoou (CS 1287, 1925 AD—ox); BIINGyn (CS 1288, 1926 AD—tiger) . . . . . . . SHINyeou (CS 1343, 1981 AD—cock); RENshiu (CS 1344, 1982 AD—dog); GOEIhay (CS 1345, 1983—pig).

So, barring Central and Lower Burma, Central Thailand and Cambodia, there is a belt of regions that stretch from Eastern Assam right across mainland Southeast Asia which follow the Chinese system of sixty-year cyclical names, and the animal assigned to each of the names is almost identical. Central Thais and Cambodians use the twelve-animal cycle which also coincides with the animals in the sixty-cycle.

Thus far the similarity is uniform throughout. But when it comes to assigning a year name to a particular CS there is a marked difference between the practice in the Shan areas from west of the Salween to the Upper Brahmaputra (Āhom Shans) on the one hand, and that in all areas east of the Salween up to Vietnam and China on the other. For the latter there is complete agreement that CS 1342 (1980) is in Koḍsan of the monkey (Vōk of Thais and Cambodians), Gengshen of the Chinese, in the sixty-year cycle; but for the former, CS 1342 is in Kāpsinā of their sixty-year cycle.
Now there is a difference of twenty-six years between Kāpsañā and Koḍsan if we count Kāpsañā before Koḍsan; or thirty-four years if Kāpsañā is to come after Koḍsan. If we look at the twelve-year animal cycle, however, the difference is only two or ten years as the case may be. In short, the two regions agree on the animals and name combinations but differ in assigning CS to them.

I have raised this point because in working out the dates in Āhom-Buranji (Chronicle of the Āhom Kingdom), Mōngmau Chronicle, Hsenwi State Chronicle, and Cāṭisaraṇān (a Shan manual on horoscope), I discovered that the sixty cyclical year names (called laknl) assigned to CS in these books are such that CS 1 started in Kārau; whereas the vast trans-Salween sub-continent, including Mōnglaem and Sipsôngbanna, starts CS 1 in Kādgai as computed in my chart. I have checked the chart (Khūn) with the Chinese and Chiengmai systems and have found the three correspond in every respect except the language. The cis-Salween Shan system is the “odd man out” and one is tempted to discard it out of hand, but I think the difference is worth looking into, even though no one in the Western Shan States of Burma has been able to tell me about this difference from what may be called the majority. Will this affect astrology and horoscopy in the two regions? If the cause of the difference can be found will that solve the discrepancies in the dates of the Shan chronicles when compared with Burmese and other chronicles?

The chart I have compiled will make this article easier to read, and it will be useful for future reference in any case. There is nothing so frustrating as to read an article in the JSS or a chronicle in which the cyclical year names and CSs are discussed or mentioned by scholars, without understanding how a CS fits into what year name. I hope the chart, which covers 1405 CSs, will put an end to this problem.

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Āhom-Buranji translated and edited by G.C. Barua, published under the authority of the Assam Administration, printed at the Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta 1930.


Hsenwi States Chronicle, 139 pp. of Ms on concertina-pleated type of folding book of Shan paper, size 18”x7”, copied after World War II.

Cāṭisaraṇān by Giṅgsö of Mōngsū, edited by Sobhana Thera of Mōngnawng, published by Paññaśami of Hsenwi, Rangoon 1972. (The title is from Pali “Jātissaraṇāṇa”-knowledge of births, and the author was a well-known Shan poet of the late 19th century.)

Chart showing the Sixty-year Cyclical Names in Khün together with Cula Sakar<j>įja years for each name for 1405 years

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Compiled by the Author