Two Recently Discovered Mon Inscriptions of Aniruddha

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In 1971 a votive tablet of Aniruddha bearing an inscription in the Mon language was discovered at Momeit in Northern Shan State. Again on March 8, 1983, we discovered another terra cotta votive tablet signed by Aniruddha himself, written in the Mon language, at Kalaymyo, a small town on the Chindwin River some 300 miles northwest of Pagan.

Aniruddha (also known as Anawrahta) was king of the Burmese kingdom of Pagan (Arimaddanapūra) from 1044 to 1077 A.D. He conquered the Mon kingdom of Thaton (Sudhammavatī), and had many other military campaigns both eastward and westward, even assisting in a campaign in Srilanka in 1069. He left terra cotta votive tablets with Sanskrit and Pali inscriptions, but strangely no stone inscriptions by him have yet been found.

Professor G.H.Luce wrote as recently as 1969, "Aniruddha had written in Sanskrit and Pali -- in Sanskrit, perhaps, for dignity, in Pali for ease. ...Aniruddha himself, so far as we know at present, never wrote in Mon" (1969:96,101). So these new discoveries add important linguistic evidence to our knowledge of Aniruddha's relationship with the Mons.
We are told by tradition that Aniruddha was a devout Buddhist whose main motivation was to obtain, by persuasion or force, copies of the Tripiṭaka and relics of the Buddha from Ramaññadesa (Western Mon), Dvāravatī (Eastern Mon), Ceylon, Cambodia, and China. The most learned Mon monk Shin Arahān of Thaton became the advisor to Aniruddha in both religious and political affairs. So when Aniruddha's campaigns in Vesali (Arakan) and East Bengal failed to get the Buddhist texts there, Shin Arahān advised him that the Mon kingdom of Thaton had numerous Buddha relics and 30 sets of the Tripiṭaka and that king Manuha (Sūriyakumāra) of Thaton was politically weak. Meanwhile the Khmer king Sūriyavarman I (1002-1050 A.D.) had overrun the eastern Mon (Buddhist) kingdom of Dvāravatī (old Siam); he was also making raids into Thaton, so that this second Theravada Buddhist kingdom was in danger of falling under Brahmanist Khmer rule too.

So Aniruddha heeded Shin Arahān's advice and turned southward. He overran the Pyu kingdom of Prome (Srī Ksetra)¹; then in 1057 marched on Thaton, capturing it and carrying back to Pagan not only the Buddhist manuscripts but also all the relics, all the Mon architects, artists, and learned monks, and King Manuha and his royal family². I am of the opinion that Aniruddha's main motive in capturing Thaton was to protect or save its Theravada Buddhism from the Shaivite court of Angkor. There is no sign of quarrelling between Mon and Burmese³. And in Pagan the Mon royal family was treated with respect, not as captives, even being allowed to build a large Mon-style temple in Pagan.
In consequence of this the Mon language was even used at the Burmese court, and its use in religious matters in Pagan is well attested in numerous stone inscriptions, terra cotta plaques, votive tablets, bricks, and ink inscriptions describing the mural paintings on the inner walls of all the early temples of the Pagan dynasty. But until our recent discoveries, evidence was lacking that Aniruddha himself used the Mon language. This gap has now been securely filled.

Following are the texts and translations of the Mon inscriptions on the two votive tablets signed by Aniruddha.

(A) Votive tablet found at Moneit in 1971:

Mon text

1. wo' kyāk a
2. niruddhadeva gna smiŋ ju
3. m nok ma lāt
4. (na) tey kum

Translation

1. This Buddha (image)
2. Aniruddha, the divine
3. the great king who made
4. even (with) his own hands.
(B) Votive tablet found at Kalaymyo in 1983:

Mon text

1. wo' kyāk mun
2. aniruddhadeva gna smiṅ
3. jum nok lāt
4. na tey kum

Translation

1. This Buddha (image) which
2. Aniruddha, the divine
3. the great king made
4. even with his own hands.

These two texts are only slightly different. In A the attributive particle ma is used before the verb lāt 'make', but B has its equivalent the attributive particle mun before the name aniruddhadeva. Palaeographically and orthographically the two texts are identical. It is clear in both inscriptions that kum is written in the Thaton Mon fashion with the vowel u hanging under the middle of the consonant k. (၀၂၅)

Glossary

aniruddhadeva = proper name; title of the king.
(also anuruddha) Skt, a - niruddha - deva 'unobstructed god'
(divine or superhuman)
kum (also kuṃ, kumm) = also, even, again.

Mod. Mon kuim /kʊm/. 