

Arakan during the Mrauk U Period: The Political Success of a Buddhist Border States

posted Dec 29, 2008 6:19 PM by Kogyi Kyaw [updated Jun 25, 2009 10:59 AM]

Dr. Jacques P. Leider

Historical Conference On Seventeenth Century Southeast Asia in the Context of Autonomous History 14 May 1999 Royal Garden Resort, Hua Hun, Thailand "Arakan during the Mrauk U Period: The Political Success of a Buddhist Border States" Dr. Jacques P. Leider Organized by The Institute of Asian Students, Chulalongkorn University. Sponsor by The Southeast Asian Studies Regional Exchange Program (SEASREP)

Introduction

Though Arakan ¹ has remained up to a very recent date a very poorly studied area of Southeast Asia, historians agree that the coastal Kingdom of Arakan developed during the 17th century into a thriving commercial entrepot that had its place in the trade network of the Bay of Bengal (Lieberman 1980:204 Subrahmanyam 1997:208) ². But little interest has been paid to the political and military background of Arakan's rise during the 16th and early 17th century ³. While the reasons for this lack of interest can only be hinted at, a look at an Arakan-related bibliography shows indeed the paucity of scientific or academic materials on the country. The only overview of Arakanese history can be found in Arthur P. Phayer's History of Burma published in 1983, a book in which, meritoriously, Arakanese history still gets a fair share in the general history of Burma ⁴. Mainly based on a single Arakanese chronicle that was written around 1842 at the initiative of Phayre himself, the Na Man rajawan ⁵, Phayer's text reflects the Western reading of a traditional Burmese literacy form, an oriental chronicle seen through the eyes of an educated and interested mid-19th century British colonial officer. Phayer singled out what he deemed fit to pass as straight facts and put it into the mould of a Western-style dynastic history. In the end, much interpretation of the author is passed over to the reader as a matter of fact. Little attention was paid to the geographical and historical context and much of the textual richness of the original document was sacrificed. All this should be born in mind as Phayre has remained a major reference tool for most people who are unfamiliar with the original sources. If we examine what has been written on, or in connection with Arakanese history, it looks more like an incongruous collage than a mosaic of elements completing each other. A various range of books and articles have brought about a certain number of simplifications or clichés that can only be accounted for in the reduced perspectives of their authors. There is thus an obvious interest in dealing briefly with the historiographical literature on Arakan to approach the history in its geographical context and some of the problems of research. Some conclusions from this review can lead us to a better understanding of the field of studies concerned with Arakan's past and the challenges awaiting the researcher.

In a second part, the political and military history of Arakan from the 15th to the end of the 17th century will be presented diachronically. This synopsis, based on Burmese, Arakanese, Portuguese and Persian sources, is a critical attempt to pull together in coherent picture the episodic appearances of Arakan in the older literature; it also pays due attention to its local and wider socio-economic context as construed in contemporary studies on the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia. The second part will show that the kingdom of Arakan had its own autonomous history, that should be understood in its proper geo-political and cultural context. Arakan in

the 16th and 17th centuries does not fit into the conceptual framework of dynastic cycles that has been outlined for neighboring Burma. This paper challenges Harvey's statement that "Arakan has a separate history" that is "the same in kind" [than Burma's]

(Harvey 1967:137). A consistent approach of Arakan's history must moreover transgress the all too well established and rigorously defined cultural areas of study and research, such as South Asia and Southeast Asia and contemporary political borders. Northeast India, East Bangladesh and Western Myanmar form a last geographical zone of mountains, valleys and alluvial plains characterized by a great ethnic diversity. They share the experience of a past (and maybe a present) peripheral situation when related to the development of the greater political centres on their eastern and western sides (mainly in our context, the eastward expansion of the Irrawaddy kingdoms and the eastward expansion of the Mogul empire). This experience can also be recontextualised in a longue durée perspective with the expansion of Islam and Islamic culture moving towards the east and the consolidation and increasing impact of a centralizing kingdom in the upper Irrawaddy valley. The whole area was repeatedly a destination port for refugees from India's North and West Buddhists who lost the support of predominantly Hindu ruling elites and came under the pressure of Muslim progress, Afghan Muslims fleeing the Mogul conquerors) and a barrier for ethnic expansion from the east (the farthest expansion of the Tai (Tai-Ahom settling in Assam) and the Tibeto-Burmans (e.g. Arakanese settling in Eastern Bengal). In political terms (keeping the major political centre-oriented perspective), the area had only a limited importance; but conquest by great powers (i.e. the Moguls from India or the kings of Burma) was discouraged and for a long time kept at bay, as the hope of controlling effectively the land faded away with the rising heights, the dense jungle or the intricate waterways. One can illustrate this point with the dragging Mogul wars against the Ahom or the approximately 90 years that it took to extend Mogul control over the whole of Bengal [from the 1576 victories in Western and central Bengal to the conquest of Chittagong (in southeastern Bengal) in 1666].

With the first and second part outlining the sources and the history of Arakan's kingship in the early modern period, one may wonder if this is an attempt to put another, lesser known centre on the map of continental Southeast Asia. It actually is. But this does not only mean switching the headlight to a minor political and economic center worth to be recognized as such. It leads inevitably to a whole lot of yet little explored questions linked to the relations between Arakan and Bengal or Myanmar. How did Arakan resist attempts at conquest in the 16th 17th centuries? Why did it fail in defending Chittagong in 1666 a year which marks the onset of its decline and why did it fall like a rotten fruit into Burmese hands in 1785? I consider that Arakan's development was sensibly different from the political development in the Irrawaddy valley during the early modern period. This paper supports the view that a study of Arakanese political institutions and the country's integration into the socio-economic network of the Bay of Bengal provide answers to the above questions. Where the historian makes himself at home on the periphery, he faces both an inward and an outward perspective. On one hand there is the all pervasive question of how does the periphery respond to the challenge of higher' centres in terms of defending itself (military resources, alliances, diplomacy). On the other hand, there is the question of the periphery's own structural balance which is based

on creating and maintaining resources. Logically the third part will thus proceed with an analysis of various aspects of the administration, the trade connections in relation to the socio-political background and the nature of the political development that characterized Arakan's rise during the Mrauk U period. Those who consider that the varying degree of centralization is the crucial question of Southeast Asia's historical development, might feel that the insistence on peripheral developments is blurring their main point of interest. The study of the periphery compels indeed a more complex view as it calls for an examination of the diversity of local conditions. Shifting our attention from the centre to the periphery, the analytical framework of political and economic centralization needs to be complemented by a better understanding of related and interacting networks based on a study of local and regional history.

Historians of Southeast Asia have maneuvered themselves into a blind alley while sticking too much to the 20th century concept of Southeast Asia and its nation states that emerged from the colonial period. The challenge of studying especially early modern history calls for a more flexible answer in terms of geographical and ethnic boundaries and the concept of autonomous history comes as a natural companion to the discovery of regional and local history. This does not just mean a shifting of perspectives and this is not just giving more credit to some minor centres on a map of hierarchically structured political and economic centres. It literally enriches our perception and deepens our meaning of the historical map of Southeast Asia.

1. Arakan's Past in Historical Writing

The deplorable state of historical research on Arakan is best illustrated by the fact that there is neither any manuscript or printed collection of epigraphic sources of the Mrauk U period nor any catalogue or detailed description of religious monuments, temples, pagodas or mosques. In this paper, I will deal mainly with manuscript or printed literary and historiographical sources. The main source for the study of Arakan's history are Arakanese historiographical compilations which contain texts belonging to different literary genres (poetry, annals, narratives, eulogies) ⁶; the only chronicle presenting a coherent narrative like U Kala's Maharajawan is the above mentioned Na Man rajawan, of which only a few manuscript copies are still existing. Burmese, Persian and Tripura chronicles as well as Bengali literary sources vastly contribute to our information on Arakan's history as they report how the Mon or Burmese kings of the Irrawaddy valley, the political rivals in southeastern Bengal (sultans of Bengal or kings of Tripura), and the Mogul government (through its subadars of Bengal) interfered with Arakan's master. Some slightly better known printed French, Portuguese and Dutch sources have in fact been little exploited. Recently scholars have unraveled new source material in England, Portugal and the Netherlands which is directly or indirectly relevant for the study of Arakan.

The major grief with the modern historiography on Arakan has been the selective choice of source materials by historians dealing with the country. Actually the work of historians reflects not only their own eclectic use of sources, it mirrors the chronicles in their selectivity. Progress of research and academic interest have evolved mainly along traditional borderlines of culture and nation. What we can read in English or Burmese on Arakan's history is generally based on the Arakanese and Burmese palm leaf sources and historians have not shown much interest in

Arakan's involvement in southeastern Bengal's past. Bengali historians, on the other hand, have based their articles mainly on Bengali and Persian sources; Phayre's or Harvey's standard histories of Burma would do as their reference tools in English to keep track of the chronology of kings and political events, but nothing is generally said about what was Arakan's place in the Burmese context. As a result, the general picture (or just the impression) of the Arakanese kingdom and its political and its political and socio-economic development was biased following the selective choice of materials consulted and as a consequence of the linguistic abilities or just the limited knowledge of historian. But more than that, Arakan's history has suffered from the centre-oriented perspectives of modern-day historian. With the exception of Arthur Phayre, the majority of Burma specialists had little or no special interest in Arakan's history as such ⁷. As we have already mentioned, Phayre's history was based on a chronicle written by an Arakanese familiar with the country's past and the traditional, historiographical literature. Phayre presents Arakan's history in distinct chapters beside the Burmese history and differences between what the respective chronicles say on the same events or people are occasionally outlined. GE. Harvey readily subsumed Arakan's history under Burma's general history and in consequence disregarded Arakan's own political development, focusing mainly on a few episodes relating to Arakan's involvement with Burma or occasionally Bengal. In Maung Htin Aung's History of Burma, Arakan gets recognition as one among other Burmese kingdoms competing for power, but the author does not allow for a separate history and Arakan gets only attention as a military player momentarily involved with events in Burma. Harvey's and Maung Htin Aung's histories exclusively focus on the history of important Burmese political centres, such as Pagan, Ava or Pegu. Though his chapter on Arakan is less detailed than Phayre's, Harvey consulted Arakanese manuscript sources (and seemingly had a broader access to them than Phayre); Maung Htin Aung does not refer to any Arakanese sources at all. After the second world war, the tendency among historians dealing with the history of Burma was mostly to disregard Arakanese history. With one exception though: D.G.E Hall was not proficient in Burmese, but he had some interest in Arakanese history as his article on Arakanese Dutch relations shows. The little regard for Arakanese history may be stated without too many critical overtones. Not too much can be glanced from the sole reading of the Burmese chroniclers. After all, one does not necessarily need to share the view that a history of Burma has to cover the history of Arakan as well. It is actually quite a different story, , though we are evidently inside the sphere of Tibeto-Burmese ethnicity and culture and on the safe ground of a Theravadin Buddhist kingship. But while Maung Htin Aung strongly claims the Burmese identity of 16th century Arakanese ("the Arakanese remained nationalistic and proud of their Burmese origin"), it is surprising that he, as a self-proclaimed nationalist historian, pays about no attention to the historical developments in Arakan. Readers of the Journal of the Burma Research Society are familiar with the more than a dozen articles that Maurice Collis and two Arakanese authors, San Baw U and San Shwe Bu, published on diverse topics and periods of Arakanese history between 1913 and 1933. We find here some valuable contributions to what the authors called "legendary history" and what are actually oral traditions that have sometimes a counterpart in the written historiographical tradition. Though Maurice Collis was not a historian, he had a

tremendous influence inside and outside of Burma on what people currently think on Arakan and its kings; his popular romance on friar Sebastian Manrique's stay in Mrauk U during Sirisudharamaraja's reign, was published as *The land of the Great Image* in 1943. In his article "Arakan's Place in the Civilisation of the Bay". Collis asserted, without any scientific rationale that Mrauk U's civilization in the 16th-17th century was mainly the result of turning away from a backward East and exposing itself to a civilizing Muslim world (1925: 39-40). Not much more convincingly Maung Htin Aung explained that Arakan became a "worthy rival of Pegu" because it had copied "Bayinnaung's enlightened policies with regard to commerce, religion and culture". Interestingly, Harvey strikes the balance and is so much less condescending as regards the "real aptitudes" of the Arakanese who he says, "were usually quite able to look after themselves" and "in several respects less backward than the Burmese". Beside the fact of the cultural influences and the complex relationships that Arakan entertained with neighbouring countries. Harvey notes their competence on the sea, their use of coins and the business-like attitude of their 17th century kings (1967: 138, 140, 146) And this is indeed one of the rare positive judgements on the Arakanese kingship.

In the writings of Bengali historians, three major themes are prominent: (1) The raids of Arakanese fleets and the aggressions against southern and eastern Bengal; (2) the Bengali Muslim influence on the court of Arakan; (3) Arakan's control over Chittagong. Most articles are void of any contextual approach and generally try to give a kind of synthesis based on Bengali and Persian sources. So the main criticism one can formulate concerns the neglect of any Arakanese socio-cultural, economic or political background that would have provided a more sensitive approach to the (indeed horrifying) slave-raids (but the Arakanese incursions were not only slave-raids!) and to the impact of the Muslim presence at the court which varied considerably over the decades! ⁸

Arakanese kings led war raids against Tripura and south-eastern Bengal and they even attacked the Mogul fleet in Dhaka. On the other hand, they tolerated slave-raids which were for many decades masterminded and organized by the Luso-Asian communities in the Chittagong area with the help of Arakanese manpower. Both phenomena cannot be chronologically separated and particular events are sometimes difficult to assess. The available evidence suggests that warfare played a greater part during the period between approximately 1575 and 1624, while systematic slave-raiding became more prominent after the final elimination of the political endeavours of the local Portuguese community in 1615. The deportation of Bengali country folk to Arakan considerably slowed down only some time after the establishment of the British administration in Chittagong (1761). While the subject of slaveraiding and Bengal wars did not interest historians focusing on Burmese history, there is generally no clear distinction in the Bengali historiography between these two related but dissimilar aspects of Arakan's aggressive policy versus Bengal. Exclusive attention is paid to slave-raids highlighted in western travelogues like Francois Bernier's or Wouter Schouten's and remembered in Bengali folk songs. Moreover the Arakanese are usually identified as pirates, a biased (and value-added) term, which makes it difficult to understand the political strategy of the Arakanese kings while reading one's way through the confusing *Histoire événementielle* of Arakan-Bengal relations. In his *History of the Mughal Navy and Naval Warfare*, Atul Chandra Roy writes for instance that "at the

beginning of Jahangir's reign, most of the strategic naval forts in Bengal were in the possession of the Bhulyas and the Magh-Feringhi pirates".

These naval forts were -"strongly built and raised on the confluence of important river routes". While the aggressions of the "Maghs" (an insulting Bengali term for the Arakanese [9](#)) are labeled as "depredations of the pirates", Mogul expeditions are called "conquests" (Chandra Roy 1972:72-73). At second glance, the construction of such naval forts is hardly consistent with piracy. In Mirza Nathan's Baharistan-i-Ghaybi, a Mogul general's detailed account of events between 1608 and 1624, Mags are unsurprisingly referred to as "rebellious" and "accursed", but never as pirates. He usually notes the numerical strength of the Arakanese (numbers appear as much inflated) and clearly speaks of "the Raja of the Mags" who e.g. in 1617, after "repeatedly raiding Bhalwa" and suffering "defeat after defeat", "busied himself in repairing his fleet and in organizing his army" (Nathan 1936, vol. 1:404). Some decades later, things look indeed differently, as in Shiabuddin Talish's Fathya-i-Ibriyya which reports on the Mogul conquest of Chittagong in 1665:1666. At that time, the Arakanese kings had abandoned hopes of expanding their territory towards Boakhali while slave-raids had become endemic. Little attention was unfortunately paid by historians to that tremendous change of Arakanese policy well expressed in Talish's opening paragraph: "The Rajah appointed the Feringhi pirates to plunder Bengal and hence he did not send the Arracan fleet for this purpose." Following a general impression (which, maybe, largely emanated from Talish's account), later historians have left us with their one-sided perception of the Arakanese/ Mags as pirates. Jamini M. Ghosh's Magh Raiders in Bengal is a curious patchwork of quotations from primary and secondary sources, starting from the dubious statement that "all Arakanese are not Maghs nor all Maghs Arakanese", the reader gets only a vague sense of the difference between the piracy of the Mags on one hand and the expansion of the kings of Arakan. The latter fact is though most clearly expressed in Maulvi Hamidullah Khan's Tarikh-i-chatgaon (1873) where the author refers to the "aggressive move for territorial acquisition of the Kings of Arakan" who "took advantage of the internal troubles and political complications following Akar's nominal conquest Bengal to extend their authority over a large portion of southeastern Bengal" (Ghosh 1960-58).

A lack of appreciation of the political background and the cultural identity of the Arakanese is also reflected in characterizations of the Arakanese and various epithets applied to them. S.N. Bhattacharya thus spoke of the "quaint features, manners and customs of these half civilized Mongoloid hordes" in the authoritative History of Bengal (Dacca University) while Alamgir Serrajuddin thinks that the "superior culture" of Bengal was a cultural challenge for the "primitive society" of the "turbulent", tribal and backward" Arakanese people. In an otherwise remarkable paper, the Bengali historian rejected precisely the earlier claim that the adoption of Muslim titles betrayed a manifestation of Muslim influence on the Arakanese court (Ghosh 1960: 58; Serrajuddin 1986: 17-18).

Two years after Collis had postulated that at the beginning of the Mrauk U period, the country had opened itself to the civilizing influence of Muslim India, B. Bhattacharya strung together the well established proofs of Muslim presence at the court and the more speculative arguments relating to the so called Muslim titles of the kings and the

minting of Bengali-type coins and concluded that the tolerant Buddhist dynasty of Arakan had "been essentially a Bengali dynasty" (Bhattacharya 1927:144). Most historians did not question Phayre's conclusion that king *Man: co mwan* "agreed to be tributary to the king of Bengal" after the Bengal sultan's presumed military support around 1426-1428. This is in fact a very debatable claim based on a single sentence in Na Man's chronicle which says that the king adopted an Indian name and minted coins [10](#) . Neither an Indian name nor any coin of this king are known and A.B.M. Habibuillah could not find any "proofs of Arakan's continued vassalage", noting that Bengal after 1433 was not "in a position to demand its fulfillment" (Phayer1883:78; Habibullah 1945:35). Moreover it should be said that not a single Bengal source is claiming that a sultan of gaur happened to become the overlord of Arakan. So the point at discussion is not political domination but the cultural impact of Bengal and the place of our area in the Muslim-dominated trading world of the Bay. The fact that standard text books on Bengal history or literature generally contain some paragraphs on Bengali literature at the court of Arakan is a fact hardly acknowledged by scholars in Burma. Two famous Bengali poets, Dawlat Qazi and AI Awwal lived at the Arakanese court, under the reigns of Sirisudhammaraja (1622-1638) and Satui: dhammaraja (1645-1652), and praised in their poetry their local patrons.

Unfortunately the Arakanese have as yet played a negligible part in making their own Arakanese historiography known to outsiders. Contemporary, Post-independence historical writing on Arakan (mostly written in Burmese has been largely limited to monks, students and amateur writers. Historical subjects are frequently deal with in popular Arakanese magazines and contents are somewhat repetitive and predominantly of a non academic nature. Original research in Burmese has as yet been sparse and is sometimes difficult to trace [11](#) while works which have been written or translated into English are not necessarily authoritative [12](#) . The strength and the interest of academic and non academic research work lies for the moment in the area of publishing rare and little known documents and collecting oral traditions [13](#) .

As has already been shortly mentioned, progress in research in related fields yields promising perspectives for Arakanese studies. Sanjay Subrahmanyam's remarkable work on the Portuguese communities on the Coromandel coast and his overlapping interest for the eastern coast of the Bay, reflected in a number of his articles, contributes to our understanding of the Luso-Asiatic communities in southeastern Bengal. Ana Guides has been digging out new material in the Portuguese archives that throw further light on Portuguese activities, but enrich as well our perception of the power structures. In the context of the decidedly eventful period between 1580 and 1630, she interprets the Portuguese presence in the eastern Bay of Bengal as a link between two rival polities, Arakan and Lower Burma. But she somewhat disregards the divisiveness of the Luso-Asiatic society which was definitely one of its major characteristics, but not always apparent in contemporary sources. Research on the Portuguese involvement in Arakan has reached a tidal turn with Michael Charney's attempt at a change of perspective. How did the Arakanese king profit from the Portuguese presence? How did they use foreign mercenaries to fit in their own political agenda? (Subrahmanyam 1990, 1993; Guedes 1994; Charney 1993, 1994, 1997) Stephan van Galen's work in the Dutch VOC archives promises new insights into the life at the Mrauk U court and a better understanding of the

slave trade (Van Galen 1998). In my own research work, I have been mainly involved with the early and middle Mrauk U period (1404-1692) (Leider 1998 D). The study of Arakanese history is still in its infancy as little discussed and yet unsolved questions chronology show. Since Phayre, the length of period during which the Arakanese controlled Chittagong has been one of the most confusing issues in Arakanese historical writing. The question is relevant for the historian as it involves Arakan's relations with its northern neighbour and as Chittagong became an economic and military pillar of the kingdom. Phayre presumed that the Arakanese had already controlled Chittagong for a "half-century" following Baco Phru's attack (somewhere between 1459 and 1474) and this led to the occasional assertion that the city was under

Arakanese control from 1459 to 1666. S. Murtaza Ali, in his summary account of the "Arakan rule in Chittagong" wrote that "Arakan had firmly established its authority over Chittagong by the middle of the 16th century" which is a view also found in Majumdar's History of Medieval Bengal where it is said that "the king of Arakan conquered Chittagong and it remained under the king of Arakan till 1666". S. B. Qanungo showed that there are proofs which deny any permanent occupation of Chittagong by the Arakanese before the reign of King Man: Phalon: (1571-1593). He was also the first history trying to give an approximate date to the final conquest of Chittagong (Phayre 1883: 78-79, Ali 1967: 333; Majumdar 1973: 69; Qanungo 1988: 234). Confronting Qanungo's arguments with the Arakanese sources, I came to the conclusion (which need not go unchallenged) that Chittagong came probably under Arakanese control around 1578. In any regard, the need for a more coherent approach on the level of source exploitation becomes evident when particular cases are singled out like the turbulent reign of King Sirisudhammaraja (1622-1638). Its image seems badly distorted by the better known sources, e.g. Friar Manrique who first presents him as a king person and later, referring to his second stay in Arakan, vilifies him. In Arakanese sources, he appears as a rather weak and undecisive king while both Burmese and Persian sources leave us with the impression of an aggressive leader, Persian chronicler Mirza Nathan's chronicle ignores. Taking into account enhances our perception of the quick rapprochement between Arakanese and Goa around 1620 that was undertaken by a king whose father had to fight off a Goan armada which threatened Mrauk U just five years earlier in 1615.

My own approach to the Mrauk U period derives from the preceding analysis. Making use of all available sources. I try to give due consideration to Mrauk U as a political and economic centre and to Arakan's integration in the trading network of the Bay of Bengal. Shifting perspectives appear to me as a sensible answer to post-structuralist criticism of 'positioned' historical writing. It cannot be overseen that in the state of our actual knowledge of sources, there is a greater exposure on royal policy and the political centre than on other fields of historical enquiry such as e.g. art and religion that need much further study. The organization of historical materials in what follows should thus not be understood as a thematic choice along the lines of a political dominant-marginal spectrum. Major facets of Arakan's autonomous development can only be sketched in this paper. While Arakan's policy is mostly emphasized as a matter of its own political dynamics and opportunities, due consideration will be given to the important relationships with Bengal, Upper and Lower Burma, with the Portuguese and the Dutch.

2. Arakan's Rise as a Regional Power

What we might call the great period of the kingdom of Mrauk U in terms of political ascendancy, territorial expansion and economic development covers roughly 150 years, stretching from the reign of Man: Pa (1531-1553) to the reign of Candasudhammaraja (1652-1684) ¹⁴. In a first step, I will outline Arakan's situation up to the middle of the 16th century stressing the importance of the reign of king Man: Pa. The second part will cover the more than a half century of Arakanese expansion which was a period of incessant warfare. The reigns of the warrior kings Man: (1612-1622) will be described in the political context of Arakan's relations with its neighbours. In the third part, our attention will focus on the decades up to the early 1680s when Arakan's kings profited from their local power status in a relatively stable geopolitical environment. These were the years when the prosperity of the Arakanese court depended on a thriving trade and court life further developed its own distinctive features.

a. Laying the Foundations: Arakan in the Early 16th Century

Historians have underestimated the fact that when Man: Pa became king in 1531, he inherited a kingdom that had already given proofs of its military abilities, its will to expand and its openness to trade. All those factors that played a crucial role fifty years later were already there: the presence of foreigners in Arakan's armed forces, the integration into a trading network and a defensive strategy against invaders. The hundred years that precede king Man: Pa's access to power are still poorly known, but they need to be outlined to understand in which way Man: Pa's reign (1531-1553) meant a tremendous step ahead in Arakan's political ascent. At the beginning of the 15th century, Arakan became the victim of Mon and Burmese expansionism, as both Pegu and Ava rivaled for the control of the country. For the Mons invading the country from the south, the southern area around Sadoway could easily be reached by sea and land forces, while the Avan armies had to cross the hill passes (mainly the Am and Talak roads) to step into Arakan's heartland, the rice plains of the Kaladon and Lemro river basins. According to the Burmese chronicler U Kala, the king of Ava, Man: kri: Cwa coke (Mingyiswasokay 1368-1401) had installed an uncle on Arakan's throne in 1373 who reigned for seven years. The different Arakanese lists of kings do not mention this Burmese appointee, but leave us with a confusing succession of local kings, a fact that betrays somewhat the unstable political situation in the country at the end of the 14th century. In 1406, after just two years on the throne, a young king called Nara mit Hha, fled a Burmese invasion and left the country supposedly for Bengal. He came back around 1428, adopting a new name (Man: Co mwan), and founded a new capital, Mrauk U, in 1430. The mid 19th century Na Man rajawan seemingly reports oral traditions of a legendary character relating to the refugee king's stay in Bengal; it is said e.g. that he taught the sultan how to catch elephants and tricks to impede the progress of an invading army; ultimately, by his wit, he would have contributed to the conquest of Delhi¹⁵. Other sources are silent on the question of this exile. Hardly anything is known on the situation in Arakan during these years. The Arakanese sources do not even mention who were the troops or foreign governors the returning king had to confront when he gained back power in Ion: Krak (Launggret), allegedly with the help of Muslim soldiers provided by the sultan of Bengal. We may assume that at the time he founded a new capital (around 1430), he did only control the Kaladan and Lemro valley and possibly the island of Ramree. The

country was unified under the reign of his brother Man: Knari, best known by his adopted name Ali Khan (1434-1458). Sandoway which might have been for some decades under Mon control, was coerced into the kingdom while the king also extended his power along the northeastern coastline up to Ranu. Under Baco Phru (1458-1481) and Do Iya (1481-1491), the Arakanese kingship was further strengthened. In 1454, king Ali Khan had met king Narapati of Ava (1443-1469) and the watershed of the Arakan Yoma was defined as the border line of the two kingdoms. In 1480, another meeting between their successors Baco Phru and Sihasura confirmed the stable relationship between kings who considered themselves on a par. Poetical creation at the Arakanese court may have inspired Burmese poetry. The famous Rakhin man: sami: ekhyan: was written by the Arakanese minister Adu man: nui and the Burmese monk-poets Shin Maharathasara and Shin Tejosara stayed for some years at the court of Mrauk U (Pe Maung Tin 1987: 53-54).

Just like the courts of Ava and Pegu, Mrauk U turned to Ceylon to reform its sangha. To the supposed debt that king Man: Co mwan would have incurred in his relation to the sultan of Bengal (for the military help in 1428), some historians have linked the idea of a political ascendancy of Bengal over Arakan during the 15th century [16](#). But this is subject to overt criticism, first due to a lack of sources and second, with reference to the political situation in Bengal, especially in the second half of the 15th century (as earlier mentioned). The control of the central power was weakened and such a situation would be consistent with a Bengali hegemony. On the other hand, it is likely that the cultural impact of the dependent Bengal sultanate was not negligible: the Arakanese kings adopted so called Muslim titles and of the identity of some rare undated coins in Persian script could be confirmed the kings had their coins gilded since the late 15th century according to the Bengal model. There is little doubt that Muslim traders from India came regularly to Mrauk U. Arakan was not a secluded, isolated polity. It is exact that information on the ruby trade from Ava over the Arakan Yoma to the Bay of Bengal and of Arakanese ice exports dates only from a later period, but hints of Arakan's integration into the trading network of the Bay of Bengal are available since the beginning of the 16th century (Corteseo 1978: 227-229). The uninterrupted rivalry for the control of the port-city of Chittagong opposing the sultanate, the Hindu kingdom of Tripura and Arakan illustrates prevailing economic interests.

The date of Arakan's first attack on Chittagong during the Mrauk U period cannot be fully ascertained. Phayre's conjecture that the Arakanese controlled the city of fifty years after 1459 cannot be upheld, as Ruknuddin Barbak Shah (1495-1474) held the city around 1473 (Phayre 1883:78). But the short narrative of the attack in the Arakanese sources does not suggest a lasting occupation of the city (Habibullah 1945:35:CL 33). The political history of Arakan at the end of the 15th c. and the three first decades of the 16th c. is confusing; the dynastic succession between 1513 and 1531 and is still a mystery; in the historiographic tradition, these decades are neglected and overshadowed by the acclaimed splendour of Man: Pa's reign. On the other hand again, the kings' openness to trade and their commitment to further expansion in the north-east towards Chittagong get confirmation. Chittagong was one of the three most important ports of Bengal at the beginning of the 16th century, at the time when the first Portuguese arrived in Bengal. The anonymous chronicler of the 1521 (official) Portuguese mission to gaur describes Chittagong as

a cosmopolitan city with a strong fortress where rivaling groups of merchants were competing for influence (Bouchon/ Thomaz 1988). Chittagong's position at the periphery of the sultanate, deprived of any real hinterland, made it a tempting object for both the Arakanese and Tripura. In 1513, the Tripura king dhanyamanikya conquered the city, but about two years later, Arakanese troops (sent, as I assume, by king Gajapati) took the city and hold it until Nusrat Khan, the son of the great Husayn Shah (1493-1519), put it once more under the sultanate's sway in 1517, according to the Portuguese chronicler Barros, the Arakanese king made a warm appeal to the first Portuguese who arrived around 1516/1517) in Chittagong to come to his kingdom for trade. This invitation is confirmed by an undated from ca. 1519 to the Portuguese authorities (Bouchon/ Thomaz 1988).

No other reign has been as magnified by the Arakanese tradition as Man: Pa's and his actions have been extolled in a way unfamiliar to accounts on his successors. We may assume that it was under his government that for the first time annals were written at the court 17 . A reform of the Arakanese legal code the Shwe Myint dhammathat) was undertaken and the brahmanical ritual "making" the king through an act of ablution was revived (Tha Thwan Aung 1927: 45; 93:110). What we know about his reign is still present to our eyes in some of Mrauk U's most remarkable stone constructions .e.g. the Shittaung Pagoda or the remains of the inner palace walls (whose exquisite shape was unraveled by the 1997/ 1998 excavations on the palace site). The written tradition relating to Man: Pa (whose origins could be tentatively drawn back to the early 17th century) provides us with a eulogy best described as a mix of enhanced facts and political visions. The tradition of the *Dhanawati are: to pum* : asserts that the king conquered large parts of Bengal (up to Murshedabad) and married a daughter of the sultan of Delhi 18 . The reason of this conquest, as given by this source, throws some light on the contemporary ideas of the kings as to the stretch of land they claimed as their own. The king asserted that his ancestor Man: Co mwan had given these large Bengal territories to the sultan's predecessors as a token of gratitude for helping him to regain his throne, but that gratitude had to come to an end and these lands had to be returned. This point of political legitimacy as found in Arakanese historiography would need further discussion that has to be reported to a later study. Until very recently, it was assumed that at least one Arakanese coin could be attributed to our king, proving in addition that Man: Pa conquered Chittagong. The reading of that coin is now seriously challenged (Chowdhury 1997). But we still have good reason to believe that Arakanese did in fact conquer Chittagong, Probably around 1539/ 1540, and possibly hold the city until the end of Man. Pa's rule. It is revealing that the Portuguese chronicler de Barros is mute on events at Chittagong after 1539. An Arakanese inscription on a silver plate dated 1542 proves the Arakanese presence in the city at that time (shore 1790). The turbulent political situation in Bengal and India under the reign of Sher Khan (1539-1545) offered an undeniable opportunity for the Arakanese to intervene in southeastern Bengal and oust their Tripura rivals. While parts of the chronicles' description of the Arakanese attack against Bengal could be dismissed as exaggerations or gross embellishments, basically the account makes sense. What made Man: Pa's reign great was not only this new successful invasion of Chittagong where the Arakanese inevitably faced the tremendous problem of controlling a cosmopolitan port with a b

ustling populations of traders and soldiers of fortune. It was also the victorious defence of the kingdom against Portuguese invaders in 1534 and against the Burmese

invaders in 1545/1546. And it was the fortunate expansion of trade that generated those resources that lay the foundation for the wealth and the strength of Arakan's rulers. The first pillar of this new strength was the ricegrowing population which could provide the troops who manned the fast Arakanese war boats. The second pillar was the expending trade that brought to Mrauk U both Muslim and Portuguese traders who introduced new weaponry and provided the court with luxury items. One source mentions the increasing number of ships arriving from abroad. Rubies from Upper Burma and cotton textiles from India were a major article of the trans Arakanese trade which connected Ava with the Bay of Bengal and Arakanese rice was probably already a staple product for export (Guises 1994: 201, leider 1994: Blackmore 1985:30). A thno pillar, inferred from a later socio-political situation, is somewhat hypothetical: the mounting presence of foreigners (mercenaries, artists, traders) of diverse origins in Arakan and their military and cultural impact. As far as the technological transfer in weaponry is concerned, we are left with the general theories relating to the expansion of military technology in Asia first of all thanks to the Muslims and later through the Portuguese as well (Parker 1988; Subrahmanyam 1993). It has been surmised that the defence works of Mrauk U and temples like the Shitaung were built with the help of Hindu or Portuguese "architects" or "engineers!". The political context of the 1534 attack on Mrauk U is mainly known through a paragraph in the Na Man rajawan. A Portuguese fleet went up the Kaladan and succeeded in pushing back the Arakanese resistance up to Mrauk U; the king reorganized his troops and finally the attackers were rejected to the sea. We do not know who were these Portuguese aggressors - as it was not an official fleet and what was their aim, but the attack clearly illustrates the importance of the Portuguese settlers in the area. As the Portuguese archives have not provided us up to now with much information on the Portuguese presence and particularly events in the northeastern Bay of Bengal between 1540 and 1590, we can only speculate on the early relations between the Arakanese kingdom and the growing Portuguese community in the Chittagong area. If we might judge from the later situation, there must have been Portuguese both among the allies and the foes of the Arakanese 19 . If this was not yet a sufficient reason for the king to surround his capital with defence works, the threat of a massive Burmese invasion surely was. In 1545, after a preliminary Burmese invasion of Sandoway, the southern province of Arakan, both land and sea forces converged on the Kaladan/Lemro heartland and threatened Mrauk U.

The Burmese siege led by Bayinnaung, the excellent commander and future emperor, failed because of the astute defence system of the Arakanese. Water canals were used to flood the southeastern and western areas near the capital. The town itself, lying amidst low-level hills covered by dense vegetation, was shielded in the south by two lakes and partly surrounded by walls that connected the hillsides at their base (CL 1921, vol. 2:46-48). The Arakanese were probably not strong enough to push back the invaders, but the stalking Burmese ran out of provisions, so that with the stalemate, a no winner no loser situation ensued that brought about the retreat of the Burmese. After a short term, the Burmese troops also lost their control over Sandoway where a Burmese governor had been installed. The

question of the Burmese actually supported an alternative candidate to the throne, as U Kala's chronicle has it, cannot be answered satisfactorily because the Arakanese sources do not provide any evidence on the matter of a rival pretender to the throne. In this context, it should be noted that the later, but far lesser known Burmese attack of 1580/1581 was also linked to an Arakanese rebel prince, who would have taken refuge in Lower Burma.

The reigns of Man: Pa's successors may be included as forming part of the same epoch of flourishing artistic expression and burgeoning political expansion. The way that Man: Tikkha (1553-1555) acceded to the throne indicates that he came out as the strongest contestant in a power struggle. He built the remarkable Kothaung Pagoda, whose impressive ruins distantly remember Borobudur and are the most impressive proof of Arakan's original 16th century architecture. For the next thirty years, Arakan's kings waged continual wars against the kingdom of Tripura (who succeeded in controlling Chittagong during the early 1560s) and the Muslim governors of Chittagong whose autonomy further grew as the sultans had to confront their political foes in the west. In 1567, the Mogul troops conquered large parts of Bengal. This put an end to the independent sultanate of Bengal and opened an entirely new period in the history of the whole area. But in the four next decades, the Mogul governors confronted not only a tight resistance from the Hindu and Afghan (Muslim) landlords (traditionally called the 12 bhara bhuiyas) who hold most of East and South Bengal, the lack of any impeding central power opened also the gates for more warfare and political competition in southeastern Bengal. The end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th centuries became the heyday of Arakan's expansion to the northeast.

b. Arakan's Expansion under the Warrior King (1578-1629)

The conquest of Chittagong by Man: Phalon: (1571-1593) ca. 1578 and the formidable attack of the fleet on Dhaka in 1634, at the beginning of the reign of king Sirisudhammaraja (1622-1638) mark the glorious epoch of Arakan's struggles to expand its territory and defend itself against rival powers. While the military successes and the architectural splendour under Man: Pa signal the outcome of a century of the slow growth and maturity, Man: Phalon: might duly be considered as the founder of as Arakanese power. His reign ushered in a new period of the country's history. He finally crushed the power of tribal lords on the northeastern border and eliminated Tripura as a competitor for Chittagong. At the end of the century, at least southern Tripura had to recognize Arakan's king as its overlord (Chowdhury 1997:151). Chittagong came finally under the total control of the Arakanese kingdom and it remained for 80 years a military and economic cornerstone of the kingdom. Curiously enough, this event is not specially celebrated in the Arakanese chronicles: the reason could be twofold: on one hand southeastern Bengal was looked upon as an area which came legitimately under Arakan's sway, on the other hand, it is possible that there was not one single dramatic conquest, but rather the progressive outcome of a military and political constellation in which the Arakanese took finally over the control of the city [20](#) . Parallel to the Arakanese political and military ascent, the Luso-Asiatic community in Chittagong and its neighbourhood (their major basis was Dianga) gained unprecedented strength [21](#) . Many Portuguese and their descendants entered the service of the Arakanese and they were richly paid for their efforts. But at the end

of the century, the political ambitions of some enterprising Portuguese captains-traders out to become a direct threat to Arakan's outstanding position in the northeastern Bay of Bengal. The Arakanese chronicler celebrates the reign of Man: Phalon: as a time when religious life prospered, trade flourished and foreign rulers sent presents to the court. [22](#)

The integration of Arakan into the Burmese could have been the crown of Bayinnaung's conquests at the end of a long reign. But the Burmese invaders failed once more in their attempt in 1581. Both U Kala and an anonymous Portuguese source of ca. 1607 contend that the Burmese were close to attack Mrauk U, but retreated when they learned of the death of the emperor, and returned home. According to the Arakanese sources the Burmese were fought off south of Mrauk U, near to former capital Launggrak.

Man: Phalonn's reign been overshadowed by the better known and possibly even more active reign of his son, king Man Raja kri: (1593-1612), who pushed Arakan's expansion to new limits. In 1597/1598, Arakan followed an offer made by the king of Taungngu to join him in his attack on Pegu, the capital of the weakened Burmese empire. The Arakanese sent a fleet that took part in the siege of the city. After the emperor Nandabayin surrendered without a fight, the Arakanese king took home the famous white elephant, a daughter of the emperor, possibly some other members of the royal household and hundreds of war-prisoners. When the Siamese under king Naresuan invaded the ruined empire, the king of Taungngu felt directly threatened, abandoned Pegu and fortified himself in Taungngu. The intervention of a fleet under the Arakanese crown prince (the future king Man: Khamon:) saved Taungngu as the Arakanese cut off the lines of supply of the Siamese troops who finally returned home empty handed. Unsurprisingly the Arakanese asked for their share in a booty that the prince of Taungngu had earlier taken to his home city. This was no mean issue of we believe contemporary western descriptions who portray the events as the pillaging of an amazing treasure (Guedes 1994: 221-222; 232). Jesuit sources also say that the Arakanese king was furious when he heard that the king of Taungngu had assassinated the old emperor Nandabayin and he immediately ordered an expedition against Taungngu, mainly to save what he could from the riches of Pegu.

One of the most intriguing political issues of Lower Burma's history during over a decade was indeed the relationship between the Arakanese and the king of Taungngu. Probably the ambitions of both blocked each other while their forces were somewhat on the par. The context for both was unfavourable as the country had been desolated and depopulated by a decade of warfare. The trade through the Lower Burma ports had been seriously disrupted; in 1598, Goa had told the Portuguese traders of the Bay to keep away from Peguan ports and the rubies of Ava reached now the Bay of Bengal over the transarakanese road. The Arakanese made a clever move by occupying Syriam, the key to Upper Burma's trade. At the Arakanese court, two factions had been battling to gain control over the trade of the port: a Muslim faction arguing the interests of the Masulipatam traders a Portuguese faction who had to its credit the military help it had given the king since many years. It seems that the king saw greater opportunities trusting the latter. Around 1600, there was an Arakanese garrison in Syriam which was not very strong, but supposedly had to check the actions of Filipe do Brito and his entourage to whom the king had given authority over the Arakanese possession. It can be

admitted that for some time at least, Brito's intention to pursue his own interests were not fully known to the king. He went to Goa in 1601 to seek official support for establishing a Portuguese outpost under Goan protection. While Portuguese traders came indeed back to Syroa, (Guedes 1994:128, fn. 37), a certain Salvador Ribeiro who was in charge of the port, was enmeshed in conflicts with a local Mon lord (the Binnya Dala) whom he ultimately subdued. When de Brito was back in Syriam in June 1603, he strenuously pursued his goal of transforming the city into the centre of his own principality. A stone walled fort took the place of the old wooden stockade. Simultaneously he decried the pro-Masulipatam faction and tried to convince the Arakanese king that the support of the Portuguese king was vital for the defence against the Mogul threat on the northeastern border, he sweetened his rhetoric with rich donations to the Mrauk U court and ingratiated himself also in Martaban and Taungngu (Guedes 1994:133; 223).

Looking at de Brito's barely disguised treachery and his shooting career, one gets the feeling that the Arakanese were pretty slow to react to what was happening in Syriam. When the king renewed his alliance with Taungngu and sent at last an expedition force in 1605, the Arakanese crown prince was captured on his way to Prome by de Brito's

ships and the mission failed. De Brito either went himself to Mrauk U (as an Arakanese source says) or sent an embassy to negotiate peace; the crown prince was freed, but we do not exactly know if de Brito got all that he had been asking for, e.g. one third of the customs revenues at Chittagong and an important sum of money! It is possible that in the short term de Brito got hardly more than what U Kala's report of the events suggests: a grudging recognition of his sovereignty over Syriam. Only two years later, in 1607, the Arakanese tried once more to regain control of Syriam, but they failed again [23](#). The Arakanese had allied themselves to Taungngu while de Brito found an ally in the lord of Prome. When the Arakanese had to ask for peace terms, the Pegu adventure of the Arakanese king was over. One might argue that 1599 was "the most important year in Arakanese imperial history" as it brought Arakan "a decisive victory over its ancient enemy (i.e. Pegu)" (Charney), but eight years later, the result of the enormous investment in military efforts was nil. In Lower Burma, the Arakanese failed to establish what succeeded so well in Chittagong : a fort, a garrison, control over trade and the integration of the local Portuguese and Muslim trading communities in the existing hierarchical structure. The reasons for this failure are not difficult to find. First of all, it is unlikely that the Arakanese had any sound concept anonymous Portuguese writer of 1607 was correct in asserting that the Arakanese king called himself emperor of Pegu and actually wanted to govern Lower Burma (Guedes 1994:216-217). But seemingly the Arakanese depended on the help of others to further their interests: the alliance of the Taungngu king, unspecified relations with the local Mon lords, the trade connections of the Portuguese and the promise of their military support, the Muslim traders who (at that time) were less prominent though, and ultimately, as we will see, the Dutch. Unlike what the king did in Chittagong, the port was not given to

a close member of the royal family. Prince Man: Khamon; the heir apparent, was commander in chief of the fleet, but not entrusted with the government of Syriam. The administration was handled in a very traditional way, depending on a royally sanctioned lord submitting to the king of Arakan and sending tribute. The second

major reason was the socio-economic situation of Lower Burma. Treasures were pillaged and numbers of the already sparse Mon population of Lower Burma were deported to Arakan. These deportations come in a somewhat striking contrast to a contemporary Portuguese contention that the Arakanese had enough people to populate the devastated Lower Burma. The Arakanese felt seemingly unable to revive themselves the trade and were not keen on rebuilding a vast country much more extended than their own. They net on their dubious relationship and occasional alliance with the king of Taungngu and trusted de Brito's promises. A third reason relates to the political situation in eastern Bengal which was then in turmoil. While the Afghan rebels and local landlords were resisting the progression of Mogul control, there were enterprising men among the Luso-Asiatic community with a similar inspiration to de Brito's, who colluded with the zamindars of Sripur and Bhulua (in Noakhali) and put themselves from the Chitagong area, was unable to gain influence over the Luso-Asiatic community in the northeastern Bay and Sebastiao Tibau, the ruler of Sandwip between 1609 and 1613, pursued his own ambitions. Superiority of arms was just one element of politics: de Brito and Tibau had ties with local rulers through marriage alliances and sent emissaries with presents to neighbouring lords. In 1610, the Arakanese governor of Chittagong rebelled and fled to Sandwip; the king replaced him with one of his sons, Cakrawate:. Just two years later, Man: Khamon: became king and turned against his rival brother. While the local Portuguese community supported Cakrawate:, the king could not rally the help of Tibau the defeat his brother who finally succumbed after a siege. Reportedly Tibau had betrayed all his allies. His own resources did not allow him in the short run to survive, but meanwhile he found some support in Goa. As the Estado da India had lost the opportunity to safe do Brito's Syriam, Tiban's suggestion to conquer Mrauk U and lay the foundations of a territorial establishment on the northeast coast of the Bay of Bengal came as a welcome invitation. But the attempt in 1615 utterly failed. When the fleet under de Menezes went up the Kaladan, the ships were repulsed at their first encounter with the well armed Arakanese who had moreover secured the help of two Dutch VOC ships. De Menezes was shot and his successor was not ready to give any further support to de Brito (Guedes 1994: 166-167). In 1616, Sandwip became Arakanese; it was probably at the same time that a first Mogul attempt at invading Arakan failed (Nathan 1936, vol. 1: 404-405).

At the end of Man: Khamon:'s rule (1612-1622), the Arakanese kingdom had reached a new height of its military and diplomatic power. From 1616 on, the Luso-Asian community was economically and military integrated into the political system of Arakan. Over the years Arakan's warfare had earned it a reputation as a strong contestant in the regional power struggle. The court had now sufficient recognition to sent embassies dealing with political affairs to Bengal, Goa, Burma and Siam. Peace nonetheless did not prevail, as the geopolitical situation had dramatically changed. In 1600, There was no unquestioned authority or central control either in Burma or Bengal. The empire of the Taungngu dynasty had been torn apart by centripetal forces such as the political ambitions of provincial lords. Bengal was divided among those who rallied and those who resisted the Moguls. The two countries thus offered opportunities for military intervention from outsiders. Two decades later, Mogul power was strongly entrenched in Bengal and a

renewed Burmese kingdom with its capital relocated at Ava, was on the rise. This barred not only any new opportunity for Arakanese expansion, but created a constant threat for Arakan itself. In 1618, Ibrahim Khan Fath-Jang attacked Tripura whose king (Yashodhara Manikya) vainly tried to flee to Arakan (Majumdar 1973:165). Its capital was taken and attributed as a jagir to one of the Mogul generals. As this campaign was nothing less than a preliminary step to an invasion of Arakanese territory that the emperor Jahangir had been calling for, the king reacted without delay by mobilizing an important fleet (Nathan's figures "700 gurabs (two-mast sailing ships) and 4000 jaliya boats (moved by oar)" seem rather exaggerated). While Fath-Jang prepared himself for a naval encounter ("within a short time 4000 to 5000 war-boats were found ready"), Man: Khamon's troops turned back "leaving 2000 jaliya boats in the frontier of his kingdom" (Nathan 1936, vol. II: 630). It is said that the governor of Bengal undertook an expedition some two years later (the date, somewhere between 1621 and 1623, is difficult to ascertain) which was a complete failure: Arakanese territory was not even reached, as the troops were starved, desperately trying to cut their way through the jungle (Nathan 1936, vol. II: 632-633; Qanungo 1988: Arakan's pride and the court's self-court's self-consciousness. Ongoing Muslim failures of hitting at Arakan's position in the Bay fostered a belief among Bengalis of Arakan's supposed invincibility, a surprising, attitude reflected in contemporary Muslim historiography. c. Rice Trade, Slave Raids and Royal Splendour in the 17th Century

While the reigns of the Warrior kings were characterized by the stress of constant warfare and challenged the diplomatic and military abilities of the kings bent on conquest and expansion, rulers in the following decades were directing their efforts at maintaining Arakan's acquired position. A description of Arakan during its years of splendour (1620-1690) has to deal with four main issues: in the area of foreign policy, the calculated aggressiveness towards neighbouring countries which strengthened the fleet's reputation of being unbeatable, in the inner political sphere, tensions and conflicts rising in the wake of succession struggles for the throne, on the economic side, the further development of the rice and slave trade (the last one being directly linked to the ongoing raids against Bengal) and, finally, the structural imbalance that upset the political order after the loss of Chittagong in 1666. All these issues are related in one way or the other to the main instrument of royal power: the heterogeneous group of armed forces that were at the king's permanent disposal.

We know through different sources that the military forces of the Arakanese king were constituted for large, if not a dominant part of non Arakanese. Numerically the Mon troops probably figured as the most important group. Earlier they may have come as refugees from Lower Burma, but most of them were probably deportees from the 1598/

1599 campaign. They were still recognized as a distinct group at the end of the 18th century (Leider 1998A: 76, 86). We may also mention troops from the hill areas in the north of Arakan. In lesser numbers, but of disproportionate importance figured the Portuguese and Muslim mercenaries. Portuguese sources boast the military importance of the sea-faring Luso-Asian community, so that we are not in doubt that since at least the two last decades of the 16th century, Portuguese and their descendants were at the king's service, though not all their brethren would, as we have seen, be reliable followers. After the ultimate failure of a Portuguese

establishment in 1615, the Luso-Asians in Mrauk U and in the Arakanese heartland were under tight control while those of Dianga and of other communities in the Chittagong area enjoyed some kind of autonomy within a well-defined frame of defending the northeastern border of the kingdom against the Moguls. For the next fifty years, it was the LusoAsians who were largely in charge of the aggressive defence policy which combined economic and political aims. Up to 1629, there were several massive Arakanese invasions crossing the Feni river into the territory of Bhulua (Noakhali). Parallel to these, minor raids brought terror to southeastern Bengal: trade was disrupted, villages along the rivers were destroyed and their population was deported and sold as slaves all over the Bay of Bengal.

Bengali authors have, as earlier mentioned, stressed the presence of Muslim officers at the court of Arakan. We may safely assume that even before the unfortunate sojourn of Shuja in Arakan (1660/1661) which stranded several hundred Persian archers in Arakan, Muslim mercenaries of Afghan descent had arrived in Arakan decades earlier, fleeing the progress of the Mogul troops.

The Arakanese sources occasionally provide grandiose figures for Arakan's land forces, but the western and Muslim sources underscore the performance of the Arakanese fleet which could number up a several hundred boats of diverse size. This is due to the fact that it was thanks to their fast war boats at the Arakanese became the terror of Lower Bengal. The most notable type of the Arakanese was canoe (-wilk- the) was a heavy sea going boat used on the rivers as well as along the coast. It could be moved by -or- and sail.

While his three successors were in their mid-thirties when they became kings, Srisudhammaraja (1622-1638) was only around 20 when he ascended the throne. The first years of the reign of this young king still form an integral part of what I call the period of the Warrior kings (1571-1629). Father Marique, an Augustine monk, well known for his account of two prolonged stays in Arakan, mentions at when he arrived for the first time in Arakan in 1629, missionaries had not been able to cross the Bay from Bengal to Arakan due to seven years of ongoing raids of the Arakanese. But military activities during this period cannot or can only be approximately dated. A major source is , as we have seen, Mirza ----Baharistan-iGhaybi, but his descriptions of the so called Mag raids on Bengal in the time of the ----ubahdar's Qasim Khan (1613-1617) and Ibrabim Khin Fath-jang (1617-1624), leave much space for perpetration as the to the exact aims of Man: Khamon:'s and Sirisudhammaraja's invasions of southeastern Bengal. When we look at the military measures that had to be taken by the Mogul governors to fight off the Arakanese attacks, events spell out a greater threat than the simultaneous and more frequent slave raids of the Feringhis (Portuguese). "In no other part of the Mughal empire has any neighbouring infidel king the power to oppress and domineer over Muslims: But rather do infidel kings show all kinds of submission and humility in order to save their homes and lands, and the Mughal officers of those places engage in making new acquisitions by conquest", writes the impassioned Talish (Sarkar 1933-423).

Whatever one might say about Arakanese aggressiveness, it is a fact that Arakan was directly threatened by both the Moguls and the Burmese. The Arakanese raids have in part to be seen as a policy of self defence, basically as pre-emptive strikes against incumbent Mogul invasions.

According to the Na Man chronicle, Sirisudhammaraja led an attack against Bengal in October 1622 which I identify provisionally with Nathan's raid against Dakhin

Shabazpur. Fath-Jang immediately dispatched an important fleet, but, as note Nathan, "towards the close of the day, information was received that the Raja of the Mags had returned to his own country in order to fight against an enemy of his named Barhama who had attacked his country from the other side" (Nathan 1936, vol. II: 639-641). As neither Arakanese nor Burmese sources provide any information on this Burmese attack, we can only speculate on the actual circumstances.

Nothing shows better the high degree of military preparedness than the events of the next two years. If we follow the Arakanese sources, in December 1625, Sirisudhammaraja sent a fleet of 1600 boats against Dhaka and plundered the city with impunity. In December 1626, another fleet attacked and pillaged Syriam and Pegu while king Anok bhak lawn (Anaukpetlun) was waging a war in the Shan states. Two years later, prince Man: re dibba (Minyedeipa), after killing his father, the king, appealed to Arakan for help to secure the throne of Ava, but he was arrested by his own guard. The continuity in warring activities and the persistence of hostility between Arakan and its neighbours did not at all exclude ways of foreseeing diplomatic and Sirisudhammaraja's rule must count as one the most active reigns on terms of diplomatic activity. During the dynastic intermezzo of Shah Jahan in Bengal (April- October 1624), i.e. when the prince revolted against his father, Sirisudhammaraja sent him precious gifts and the Mogul nobleman responded favorable by sending "a valuable dress of honour along with many presents and a peremptory farman was issued confirming the sovereignty of his territory" (Nathan 1936, vol. II: 710-711). This diplomatic initiative was far from useless. Though eventually more complex regional circumstances need to be sorted out by historians, it appears that during emperor Shahjahan's long reign (1628-1658), there were no more serious attempts of invading Arkan, despite the slave raids by the Luso-Asian community which never stopped.

Beside the tremendously important rice trade, the export of slaves had a major share in the thriving Arakanese trade of the next fifty years. Dutch sources do not only illustrate the mutual interest of the VOC and the Arakanese court to further the export of rice and slaves, they also underscore the growth of Arakan's economy during several decades as shown by the trade relations with Aceh, Coromandel and Tenasserim. Dutch relations with the court became stable after 1623 and the Dutch tried to establish a permanent factory. The Arakanese court sent trade related embassies to Batavia in 1627 and 1634 (Van Galen 1998: 10) In different ways the informative Dagregister helps us to counterbalance a somewhat negative picture of Arkan during these years. On the level of factual history, our attention is drawn on one hand to the indefinite preying on Bengal's civil population encouraged by the court; on the other hand, most of the information relating to king Sirisudhammaraja that is contained in the Arakanese sources, concerns the simmering conflict between the king and the powerful lord of Launggrak. According to historical traditions, an adviser of the king (Na lak rum:) tried to persuade his master that

Kusala, the lord of Launggrak, strove to weaken his power and evict him from the throne though magical means. It is also reported that the lord of Launggrak enjoyed the company and support of queen Nat rhan may (Narshinmay). Manrique's contradictory comments and reports on king Sirisudhammaraja (as found passim in his Itinerario) bear an obscure testimony to this political conflict that threatened the

courts stability after 1630. The situation was simmering until 1639 when the king died. Shortly afterwards, the heir apparent passed away, allegedly with the helping hand of queen Nat rhan may. While the members of the royal council, intimidated by the queen, were wavering in their resolution to whom they should hand over the power, the personal guard of the lord of Launggrak took possession of the palace and indulged in a blood bath that saw most members of the court ruthlessly slain. The usurper Kusala took the name of Narapati and apparently spent much effort to strengthen his power and build up his own network of power in the following years. Notably, he convened an assembly of the 12 major abbots of Mrauk U, supposedly for guidance and legitimation of his kingship and appealed to Na lak rum: (who had prudently sought refuge in the southern Chittagong area) to take once more his established place as a court advisor. Narapati remained on the throne for seven years, but his active reign covered only five years. After 1643, the king grew sick and his son, the future king Satui: dhammaraja (1645-1652), held the reins of power. Traditional historiography has looked at the 1638 date as an important date (its ominously the years 1000 of the sakkaraj era!), dividing Mrauk U's dynastic history into a first and a second Mrauk U dynasty. But as this date marks just a change in power and did not bring forth any sensible change of Arakan's political structures, economic relations or relations or regional status, the events of 1638 do not strike the same chord with the modern day historian. Moreover it seems obvious that the massacres of 1638 effectively eliminated potential contenders whose revolts could have destabilized the country. We do not know very much about Satui: dhammaraja's reign. The Dutch factor Arent van der Helm, siding with a rival party at the court, alienated the young king during a power struggle. In 1647, this brought about the end of the Dutch factory which was reopened only six years later, in 1653. A few laconic lines in Na Man's chronicle suggest that there was a military expedition against southern Tripura or the Chittagong hinterland and possibly also a new invasion into the Bhalwa area (Noakhali) from where, it is said, seven kings' came to acknowledge the authority of the king (CL, 220). While the political life thus shows signs of discontinuity against a background of economic prosperity, more impressive changes can be found in the sphere of culture, art and mentality. Starting from Sirisudhammaraja's official coronation in 1635, the kings did not use Muslim titles any more, it was under their Pali names alone that kings were known. Startingly this change that is mirrored in the transition from trilingual (Persian, Bengali, Arakanese [24](#)) to purely Arakanese coins (1635), came at a time when the Muslim presence at the court was quite prominent. Two famous Bengali poets writing in Persian, Dawhat Qazi and AI Awwal, resided in Arakan and were witnesses of the sophisticated court life. During the 17th century, the titles "Lord of the White Elephant", Lord of the Red Elephant' and a little bit later "Lord of the Golden Palace" were standardized through coinage. A more obvious change is found in the religious architecture stretching from Sirisudhammaraja's to the prevalent inner passage and gu (cave) type temples and hails the advent of those bell-shaped pagodas that match the religious architecture of the Irrawaddy valley. If Arakan's 15th and 16th century art was influenced by India, its 17th century architecture found its parallels in Burma. The variety of design and ornamentation that extends from Sirisudhammaraja's richly decorated Sakya man-aung pagoda (built after 1652) bears witness to the splendour and prosperity of the court during these flourishing decades. We do not

know in what degree the development of religious works (foundation of monasteries, restoration of pagodas and new constructions) reflects some kind of religious reform or growth during these times. As no inscriptions have as yet been edited, religious donations in Mrauk U are still very poorly known. The five major pagodas of this period bear the name 'man-aung's victory. What could better and more obviously reflect the gleaming pride of kings who deemed themselves virtuous Buddhist kings (Dhammaraja) while confidently overlooking the affluence at Mrauk U's markets and reckoning the undisputed sway of their fleets?

The most enchanting description of Arakan's prosperity and the boisterous self-confidence of its king in the early second half of the century can be found in the travelogue of a Dutch doctor of repute, Wouter Schouten (Schouten 1727). He stayed four months (1660/1661) in Mrauk U, extensively visited the capital's surroundings and left vivid descriptions of the people and the nature that are occasionally permeated with a surprisingly romantic atmosphere.

After its return in 1653, the Dutch East India Company profited from even more favourable trading conditions than earlier, importing textiles from Coromandal and focusing on the export of rice to Batavia. That Candasudhammaraja had a long and prosperous reign is as much as we can say when we take into account the inner political stability and the importance of religious buildings erected from 1652 to 1684. But it can be safely assumed the Arakan's decline at the end of the century is intimately linked to the dramatic loss of Chittagong in 1666. So at the same time this reign forebodes the fast decay of Arakan some years after the king's death and especially the chaotic years from 1692 to 1706.

It has already been said that for the Mogul government of India, the conquest of Chittagong had been on the military agenda since the time of Islam Khan (1608-1612) who had crushed the long resistance of the Bengal zamindars. Despite several early failures, the threat of a new determined Mogul attempt to take not only Chittagong but also to invade Arakan itself, never completely vanished. But no initiative from the Mogul side upset the status quo up to the early sixties and for 80 years, the Feni river remained the de facto border between the two countries. Shah Shuja, the third son of Shah Jahan (1628-1658) who governed Bengal from 1639 to 1659, urged the Dutch to support an attack against Arakan, but the company categorically rejected the proposal. Undoubtedly the officially approved slave raiding supplying the markets of the Bay must have been more than just a thaw in the Bengal flesh. Preparations for a new attack against Chittagong started in 1664; they were related to a change of people in power in Mogul Bengal, a further deterioration in the mutual relations between Bengal and Arakan and a shift in the balance of military power that entailed a serious disadvantage for the Arakanese.

When Shah Shuja lost his final battle against his brother Aurangzeb in the struggle for the Mogul throne, he had no choice but to leave Bengal as fast as possible. In May 1660, Dhaka was abandoned. As there was no way to flee to Mekka or Persia at this time of the year, messengers were sent to this secular opponent of the Moguls, the king of Arakan, to seek asylum. Candasudhammaraja granted his hospitality to the former governor of Bengal and his retinue of 500, comprising family members and guards who, in August 1660, arrived in Mrauk U on Arakanese boats. Shah Shuja was received politely, but his presence prompted in a short while

a political crisis that deepened the rift between Arakan's court and the Mogul government in Dhaka. At the beginning of September, Mir Jumla requested the Dutch trading in Bengal to request the return of the prince to Bengal. The court in Mrauk U saw at once the opportunity to use the prince as a boon to recover some territories on the border and sent an embassy to Dhaka. Mir Jumla gave them presents, but made no concessions. In Arakan, relations between Shah Shuja's followers and the court were soon irritated by the court's request of a daughter, for the royal harem and the considerable treasures of Shah Shuja raised some jealousy on behalf of the court. Though it is difficult to disentangle the events of the following months, as notes the contemporary writer Francois Bernier, it appears the followers of Shuja raised a revolt and Shah Shuja tried to flee the country in the aftermath. He is said to have been killed with members of his guard during that attempt, but for years rumours spread that he was still alive. His treasures were pillaged and what were left of his guards were arrested and later integrated into the Arakanese army as royal archers (Schouten 1727:229-236, Bernier 1830: 150-156; Qanungo 1986: 645; Harvey 1922; Hall 1936: 88-89). During three years (1661-1663), Mir Jumla, the Mogul governor of Bengal sent embassies to Mrauk U and tried to corrupt members of the court to obtain the surrender of the children of Shah Shuja, but his envoys were humbled and one of them was even put into prison. But he could not press his demands because he used up his military resources (among them a newly built fleet) in suppressing the resurgent power of the Ahoms. In March 1663, Mir Jumla died and for a year, Bengal was waiting for its new governor. It is not difficult to understand that with Aurangzeb's policy of asserting his power over the empire, the traditional policy of indulgent *laissez faire* came to an end in southeastern Bengal. Shaysta Khan who came to govern Bengal with an iron fist, immediately started to build a fleet to attack Arakan. The Arakanese were not unaware of the impending threat; true to their policy of defending themselves

through early strikes, they had taken no risks and at the end of the rainy season of 1664, had destroyed the Mogul fleet lying near Dhaka. But with the determination of Shaysta Khan not to repeat the errors of his predecessors, this sources gave the Arakanese just a respite. A new fleet was built, extensive preparations were taken to dispose of sufficient provisions and war material. A naval base was established in Sa ngramgarh, below Dhaka. In November 1665, Sandwip island was occupied. One month later land and sea forces moved simultaneously towards Chittagong. After a first naval success on the 23rd of January against an Arakanese squadron, the Mogul fleet triumphed on the next day when its ships succeeded in pushing back the Arakanese ships towards Chittagong. When both land and sea forces converged on Chittagong, the Arakanese fleet was locked up on the Karmaphuli and the garrison was overwhelmed by the progress of the enemy. The Mogul troops were unable to march on against Arakan, - and the heart of the kingdom was thus not threatened-, but Chittagong, its economic and military pillar, was definitely lost (Sarkar 1936: 182-209; Hall 1936: 95-97; CL 222). What were the major reasons of this disaster? It is difficult to make statements on the degree of military preparation and tactical failures of the Arakanese. The description of the naval battles by the Mogul chroniclers reads as if the Arakanese underestimated the strength of the enemy's forces and exceedingly built on their force of dissuasion. Things that can be said with more assurance relate to the military and diplomatic

preparations of Shayata Khan. The governor of Bengal had succeeded in pulling to his side the LusoAsiatic community of Chittagong (Habibullah 1945:38). As they had been for decades the core troops of Arakan's northwest defence, they were not only experienced guides for the Mogul troops, but admittedly became the vanguard of the Mogul fleet. To add insult to injure, the VOC had decided to leave Arakan and its men secretly left the country in November 1665. Political pressures had been considerable and the Bengal trade was ultimately more important than Arakan (Hall 1936: 92-93).

To our knowledge, the loss of Chittagong had no immediate consequences on the political stability of the kingdom until the end of the reign. It seems that a half-hearted attempt at reconquering the city failed. Up to the beginnings of the English colonization, the defence of the city and the outlying districts put a heavy burden on the Mogul authorities (Qanungo 1988:448). Slave raiding went on for another century and raiders still could reach Hugly, but this had no incidence on the result on the battle field. Psychologically, the country was undoubtedly shaken by a defeat that tore down its reputation of naval superiority.

Economically, the military disaster meant a heavy blow to the trade, severing an well. Looking at the available evidence, it seems impossible not to see a link between the catastrophe of 1666 and the political deterioration in Arakan two decades later, when the royal authority was mined by rival groups of palace guards and rebel units in the countryside who set up and dethroned the sons of king son and successor Uggabala had earlier entered Monkhood, a veiled indication that he sought protection from political infighting at the court. From this time on, the chronicles abound in laconic statements that indicate not always very clearly that things went from bad to worse. Uggabala built a new palace at Khrip at some distance from his capital where three days after his death (in early April 1685), the inhabitants of the palace were massacred by palace guards; groups of people had to take an oath to show their allegiance; talking about Waradhammaraja's reign (1685-1692), the chronicler notes payments to important and ordinary people as well as a certain salary of the guards, strongly suggesting that the royal treasury was relentlessly emptied to secure some loyalty (CL 225). Arakan had entered by then a twenty year long phase of its political development that can be adeptly called government of the palace guard's. The decline of trade was not the only reason of decline. The fall of revenue directly affected the kings' possibilities to maintain the military establishment that they earlier had. It is possible that after the fall of Chittagong, the number of troops was just too large, so that a potential of discontent built among redundant troops and could easily be exploited by contenders for power. The erosion of political authority was further hastened by the heterogeneous character of the Arakanese forces. Thus the decrease of commercial revenue and the hypertrophy of military resources were related and appear both as major causes of the kingdom's decline.

The royal authority was temporarily restored in the first half of the 18th century, but the kingdom never recovered from the loss of its connections to the trading network of the Bay of Bengal. Arakan's fame lingered on for some years and faded away in the tepid decades of the 18th century.

3. Arakan's Regional Integration

In the third part of this paper, I would like to formulate some hypotheses concerning structural aspects of Arakan's historical development which should be

useful for a comparison of the country with other Buddhist kingdoms of Southeast Asia. Administrative structures, commercial integration and the exercise of royal power are core elements of the political life centred on kingship that will be examined. It is obvious that we can only deal imperfectly with these matters as research on Arakanese institutions has

just begun. However at this point, our major stance, namely that Arakan claims an autonomous history that cannot just be summed up with the dynamics of its more powerful neighbours, should be sufficiently clear.

But in a study of the periphery that unravels major aspects of political, cultural and economic autonomy cannot only be meant as a useful supplement to a better perception of varying degrees of political centralization. Nor is it just a criticism of the concept of progressive centralization which appears to some as a simplistic model that asserts itself as explanatory while it is merely interpretative. At the periphery, we tend to look more than once in Southeast Asia not only at one but also at two (or even more) higher' centres that challenge the outlying centres. We are inevitably led to a more complex view of the past which perceives the model of centralization as rather unsatisfactory.

Centralization as occurring in the development of monarchic politics, denotes the fact sub-centers fade or disappear as entities per se while coming under the control of larger centers into which they are absorbed/ integrated in a way that precludes any further autonomous (economic or political) development. The weakening of the periphery is corollary to centralization which means a concentration of control in a center eager to dominate human and material resources. Reviewing the past in the light of centralization as an ongoing process of political development is a model that fits perfectly well national history writing. The concept of centralization is thus ideologically tainted because it gives a priority to major ethnic groups and predominant cultural practices. It discards somewhat the relevance of the periphery and its particularities as these would tend to be absorbed or standardized anyway in the course of time. Autonomous history means that the periphery is interesting, relevant and subject to further study as its is a challenge to centres. The periphery occasionally becomes a 'centre' itself once historians unfold its links in networks of cultural and economic relationships. The most profitable aspect of autonomous history, as I understand it, lies in the diversity of these networks that reflect successive layers of historical experience that transgress all too well established political and ethnic borders and allow a more subtle and richer discourse on the past.

Fertile rice-fields and a numerous population alone did not assure Arakan's political rise; rising mountain ridges, an intricate river system and deep jungle from the early Dhanyawati and Vesali periods to the Lemro dynasties, Arakan had offered these favourable natural setting to small principalities whose influence did not extend beyond the natural border of the country, the Bay of Bengal in the West and the Arakan Yoma in the East. The historian thus faces the question why and how the kings of the Mrauk U dynasty succeeded in transforming the coastal stretch from Negrais to Chittagong into a thriving, expansionist kingdom.

Among the favourable circumstances for Arakan's rise, we should first recall the considerable expansion of a predominantly Muslim trade in the Indian Ocean since the 15th century (Pearson/ DasGupta 1987). Muslim traders from the Coromandel coast probably visited Arakanese ports since that time. Though trade in the area

during the very early modern period is still little more than guess-work, we know by T.Pires' *Suma Oriental* that at the beginning of the 16th century, Arakanese traders came to Malaka (Cortesac 1978: 227-229). The Portuguese who were mere competitors in the larger Bay of Bengal trade, had arrived in 1516 in Bengal and were cordially invited to come and trade in Arakan. Beside the official *carreira* voyages to Chittagong and the turbulent stories of their community in that port, we know very little about the Portuguese traders in the northeastern Bay of Bengal through the 16th century. But there is little doubt that their numbers increased over the decades. They played an increasing role as mercenaries in the Arakanese army (like in Burma, Siam or even Tripura), a role that is well documented at the end of the 16th century when the Luso-Asiatic community represented a social and political force that the king of Arakan no less than Muslim governors or petty chiefs had to cope with. But as we saw earlier, Muslim influence was over, Muslim officials and traders still figured prominently at the court until the end of the century. The king and other members of the court were probably the greatest traders in the kingdom on the Arakanese side. Major items of export trade were rice, elephants and rubies while Indian textiles and luxury items for the court were imported. Detailed Dutch accounts show that the Arakanese rice was of good quality and very cheap. The ruby trade linked Arakan with Upper Burma by the Am and Talak passed crossing the Yoma (Leider 1994). The notorious slave trade that flourished in the 17th century was mainly in the hands of the Luso-Asiatic community. Only unqualified slaves could be sold to the Dutch or mainly in the hands of the Luso-Asiatic community. Only unqualified slaves could be sold to the Dutch or were exported to the markets on the Coromandel coast. A great – if not the greatest number remained in Arakan and became servants at the court, craftsmen or royal slaves tilling the fields of the king (Leider 1998A). Arakan's openness to trade repeatedly evidenced in letters to the Portuguese and the Dutch, clearly comes out as a mark of continuity of royal policy (Bouchon/Thomaz 1988; Van Galen 1998). Key elements of Arakan's policy in the early modern period were to incorporate the country into trading networks and to fuse the foreigners into a defence scheme. The king's policy attracted traders to the ports and offered excellent opportunities for those Portuguese who craved for fame and money on the margins of the *Estado da India*. Father Manrique says that, beside the Muslim guards and the Portuguese captains of the fleet, there was even a troop of Japanese guards at the court around 1630. This royal policy went beyond the fact of just attracting people; it took a more voluntary stance with the common deportation of people during times of war from Bengal and Lower Burma. The Mon soldiers, who were imported' at the beginning of the 17th century and allotted fields along the Kaladan river, are mentioned as the core troops of the Arakanese by the Mogul chronicler Talish (Sarkar 1936). The import of techniques and experience in the fields of construction, ship-building, artillery or metallurgy flowed to Arakan with the king's open doors' policy. It seems that favourable natural conditions coupled with the political skill of their kings provided the court with sufficient resources and lastly a freedom of action that enabled them to pursue an expansionist program. We should also mention that Arakan was a populous country. It seems that the main factors mentioned by A. Reid to explain the demographic weakness of Southeast Asia had not much relevance for Arakan up to the 17th century (CHSEA,

vol. 1. 1992: 462). There were for instance no deportations of Arakanese, no major wars or raids inside the country (with the eventual exception of Sandoway). Foreign observers in the 17th like Schouten, are unanimous on that point: Mrauk U and its surroundings were densely populated.

Having said all this, one could easily look upon Arakan as an autonomous monarchy on the periphery of Bengal and Burma that merely followed on a smaller scale what can be observed elsewhere on a bigger scale. Regarding Arakan's internal political development, we could thus face the hypothesis that a political centralization went hand in hand with the monopolizing position of the court in economic matters. Due to substantial gaps in our knowledge, this is a point open to further discussion. But on the basis of my own research, I believe that Arakan did not follow a similar course to Ava's 17th century history. So my interpretation of Arakan's history differs from the way that Burma's history is now generally represented.

Arakan in the 17th century presents a classical case of distributive economy. We lack any original Arakanese administrative documents from the 16th or 17th century, but there are a few indications about the relationship between the Portuguese and the king (see Guerreiro 1930) that show that the way the Arakanese king governed the country closely resembled the system as it existed during the early modern period in Burma. Local lords were 'eating' tracts of land given by the king; in return, they were collecting taxes in form of precious metals or crafted products such as boats (farmers or craftsmen charged as collectivities [25](#)), as well as rice or other natural products (farmers charged according to the size of their fields) (Leider 1998A). Most troops were actually part of service groups under the authority of the court, but it is plausible that local lords also called up troops.

Our perception of Arakan's institutional development from 1430 to 1680 is shadowy. We would generally admit that over such a long period, with extended control over a large area and the challenge of fighting off enemies (occasionally on two fronts as it was the case in the early 17th century), the kings needed to have a tight control over human resources and constantly stressed their authority. As analysis of the royal successions during the early and middle Mrauk U period shows that half of the kings who reigned between 1404 and 1692 had been nominated as im rhe. (einshe; prince designated as a successor to the throne). We know relatively few things about struggles for succession. Man: Pa (1531-1553) and Man: Phalon: (1571-1593) were strong contenders who willfully took the throne filling up power vacuums. Only Narapati is in fact acknowledged as a usurper by the chroniclers. The prophecies that were supposed to announce his arrival to power credit him with all the misfortune that befell the country some decades later.

Unlike the Burmese kingship, well known through its late 18th and 19th centuries court institutions, information on the institutional structures and functions at the court of Mrauk U is limited to the names of specific offices found in the native sources (chronicles, poetry) and in foreign accounts. Some of these functions are better known to us than others, because the context in which they are mentioned clearly indicates for example their military or police functions. Such in the case of the kuiy ran kri: (sometimes transcribed as 'coramgri' or 'karamgri'); he was a superior military officer at the head of the palace guard. Most of the time, civil and military functions cannot be clearly distinguished, and all the ministers can be termed in one way or the other royal advisors. The few lists which present a set of

high officials at the court (Havart 1693, vol. 2: 62-63, Leider 1998(B): 76, the Thwaan Aung 1927:52; Tak Thwan Ni 1996: 46-49) confirm a hierarchy of a few high ranking ministers, but leave open the question how the government was organized, what were the day-to-day tasks and responsibilities of individual fief-holders cum officials residing at the court and what were the relations among these ministers. The following

translations are based on my own perusal of a scanty source basis and have to be treated with caution (I have given a presentation with more elaborate comments in my doctoral dissertation (Leider 1998 (D)). The pran cui: Kri: was probably the highest function at the court, equivalent to a kind of prime minister and supreme judge 26 . In 1581, he was for instance in charge of the negotiations with the Burmese invaders 27 . The dha: puin kri: was a high ranking general or commander in chief: the term was

increasingly used during the 18th century. The kuiy ram kri: was commanding the palace guard and, if we follow foreign sources, he was frequently in charge of royal expeditions against Bengal. The terms cacke and juntat designate two groups of court officers whose numbers, sources suggest, varied between 4 and 9. The first term, given by father Manrique as chique or puchique and frequently transcribed in English publications as sitke, refers in Burma to a high ranking military officer, but in Arakan, we see them only at the audience hall and in processions where they appear as high officials of the court taking care of the protocol and of foreign visitors. The jvntat appear in the historiography as senior military officers; the rejuntat was an admiral of the fleet. The chan ke kri: was in charge of the royal elephants. Many of the high and responsible positions in the kingdom were given to close relatives of the king. The governors of Chittagong and Sandoway, the two most distant and important areas (as seen from the capital) were given to royal sons, brothers and uncles. On the other hand, it seems that many of the higher functions were inherited and transferred from generation to generation in a few high ranking families. This assumption is tentatively based on the famous example of the 'dynasty' of the minister Maha pana kyo (Mahapinnyagyaw) and oral traditions among Arakanese families in Bangladesh which refer the origins of their families to the ancient court.

The question of who attended the daily deliberations at the court where current political and military matters were discussed, is a slightly different one. Tak Thwan Ni has presented a document outlining the full composition of the court assembly in the 17th century, including local lords, minister, dignitaries and various officers (Tak Thwan Ni 1996). To my understanding this does not reflect necessarily the everyday situation at the court; moreover it does not reveal how political decisions were taken and which were the organizational links between members of the court respectively the king who, admittedly, lived in a very secluded palace area.

The overall picture is thus rather confusing. The whole structure of the court appears as a rather loose organization where it is difficult to appreciate in terms of power the relative weight of titles/functions vs. the persons in charge, and local lords and land-holders, queens, princes who commanded their own guards vs. Royally appointed commanders. While all those officials and ministers could be altogether called royal councils, at the moment, we do not know about any collective Arakanese term, in the same way that we talk about the Ihwat to (Hluttaw) in Myanmar history. In this

perspective, rather than looking for the symbolic 12 lords incidentally mentioned by father Manrique, it is more pragmatic to adopt a cautious approach of the question of the center-periphery relation in Arakan as far as the elite of local lords is concerned. The Kaladan-Lemro river system was the core area of the kingdom governed from the centrally located and well protected Mrauk U. It seems that from 1430 to 1680, the control of the kings over that area was never challenged; the rebellions that erupted here at the end the 17th century, vividly demonstrate how much things had suddenly changed. It is not exaggerated to say that this heartland was under tight control of the royal authorities and the movement of people under surveillance. Father Manrique's report on his difficulties to travel inside the country and Schouten's informations on the draconic restrictions imposed by the authorities in early 1661 to prevent any member of Shah Shuja's entourage to leave the country, bear testimony. Since the 13th century (Launggrak and earlier dynasties), kings reigning in that area had undertaken strenuous efforts to control the hilly jungle tracts lying in the north by attacking populations uniformly called Sak by the chroniclers. Mentions of the Sak in the historiography disappear only at the very end of the 16th century when the Mrauk U kings had extended their control up to southern Tripura.

To understand the political relationship between Arakan's heartland and its frontier districts, it is appropriate to pay attention to the cases of Chittagong and Syriam. Chittagong was both a thriving port and a fortress with garrison. But we may conventionally assign its name to the whole stretch of land between Ramu (an Arakanese place since the 15th century, now in Bangladesh) and the Feni river. Chittagong's hinterland in the 16th century had been Bengal lying to its north, but in the 17th century it became Arakan lying to its south and the jungles in the north up to the Feni river cut it off from Mogul Bengal [28](#) . We have earlier surmised that in the eyes of the Arakanese court, Syriam (the name of the port refers here to the indefinable area of Arakanese conquests in Lower Burma after 1598) should have followed the example of Chittagong: being a port with an Arakanese garrison, where the Luso-Asiatic community had a strong presence and impact on current affairs, and from where revenue (tax income, customs) would flow into the royal treasury. The term designating de Brito in both the Arakanese and Burmese sources, San Lyan ca:, eater of Syriam, shows that the traditional model of governing by delegating power, fully applied in the case of the Portuguese trader and captain. Unlike Chittagong where rebellions were few and mastered successfully by the kings, in Syriam, de Brito succeeded in eliminating any Arakanese control and king Man: Raja Kri: repeatedly failed to gain back the port. [29](#)

It does not seem that Arakan's control over Chittagong was the result of a single battle: it looks rather as if the Arakanese control was established progressively. During the first years, the territory was still administrated by two local Afghan lords called Adam Shah and Jalal Khan who around 1586 conspired with the Tripura king. Man: Phalon: crushed his enemies, but it is only in 1591 that a coin confirms the nomination of an Arakanese governor, a son of the king called Man: Co Lha. He was the first to use the title anok bhuran, king of the west, seemingly adopted by his successors up to 1608 [30](#) . If the nomination of Man: Co Lha actually did not happen before 1591, this means that the Arakanese went a long way (over 10 years) to nominate a member of their own court to

govern Chittagong. Then, as far as we know, up to the fall of the city in 1666, Chittagong was governed only by close relatives of the reigning kings 31 . The prestigious title of 'king of the west' which did not have any parallel elsewhere in the kingdom, gives-

-called himself 'sultan' a term which mirrors the Arakanese title bharan. Chittagong's governors had under their authority a garrison and a fleet of 100 boats and ships that was, Talish, annually renewed. They also minted their own coins since 1691. Recently, the Indian numismatist V. Chowdhury has made an admirable attempt at reconstructing the lign of the Arakanese governors in Chittagong combining the scarce written evidence with the invaluable testimony of the coins (Chowdhury 1997). The coins of the Chittagong governors were trilingual 32 but the texts in Arabic, Bengali and Arakanese were not identical. The Bengali and Arabic inscriptions bear titles like 'sultan' or 'shah sultan'. But, up to 1629, the Arakanese text clearly establishes the parental relationship with the reigning king, e.g. 'son of the great and just king' or 'uncle of Naradhipati'. So there would be not point in calling the early governors sovereign lords. But after 1629, the coins bear both in Arakanese and Arabic or occasionally Bengali, a quasi identical title which reads as lord of Chittagong (Sultan Chatgoon respectively Cac ta kan: man:) without any reference to the Arakanese king. This fact is even more striking when we remember that at the same time, the Arakanese kings abandoned any Arabic or Bengali legends on their coins and increasingly used their Pali names beside their Arakanese titles on their monolingual coins. Though we ignore if these later governors were more autonomous than their predecessors, it looks very much as if they were. Or at least as if they had a sense or greater autonomy than before. The change in coinage should also be seen as parallel to the transition from the earlier expansionist period of the Warrior kings (1571-1629) to the succeeding period of prosperous trade, cultural refinement, diplomacy and --somewhat more salient features of court intrigues during which the Chittagong pillar was, so to say, unshaken. The few things that we know about Chittagong's socio-political background as reflected in Portuguese sources of the early 16th century strengthens an interpretation along the lines suggested here. Chittagong had a cosmopolitan society of traders, adventurers, mercenaries, refugees who had arrived from many horizons. Its peripheral situation regarding both Arakan and Bengal had contributed much to this development and its dismal reputation in Portuguese writing as a lair of people without faith or morals illustrates that special status. There is no doubt that the Luso-Asiatic community, itself marked by internal divisions, benefited from a considerable autonomy even after Portuguese hopes of territorial expansion were ruined in 1615. Father Manrique's ravel to the court on behalf of the 'Portuguese captains' of Dianga, the main strong-hold of the Christians opposite of Chittagong, reveals actually both the weakness and the strength of this community. They came immediately under pressure when the court doubted their loyalty, but the Arakanese had to make compromises, because they counted heavily on their military support to protect the northeastern border against Mogal incursions.

To conclude this points, we might summarise by saying that the cases of Chittagong and on a restricted level, of the Luso-Asiatic community 33 , show that the

Arakanese model of governing the country in the 17th century favoured a *modus vivendi* connecting the centre with peripheral zones or particular communities where mutual interests were safeguarded and political and military charges largely lay on control and suppression of revolts, while after 1630, a balance was reached where the centre obtained sufficient recognition of its sovereign role and all parties involved profited from that kind of political arrangement.

This conclusion inevitably raises questions as to what kind of profits were obtained and in which way particular interests were safeguarded. And it brings us actually back to the title of this paper and the reasons of Arakan's political success in the 16th and 17th century.

A first reading of sources relating to Arakan's political development strongly suggests that the aggressive policy of its kings isolated the country from its neighbours and that this choice of isolation was a means of protection. In the second part of this paper, we have noted that pre-emptive strikes like the 1626 incursion into Lower Burma or the 1664 attack on Dhaka were meant as a form of dissuasion. One might also feel that the slave raids and the slave trade impeded Arakan's commercial relations with India and rendered normal relations with Bengal impossible. But we actually saw that there are few reasons to admit that Arakan's expansion and long-term resistance to foreign conquest were built on seclusion and a quest of autarcy.

An analysis of the foundations of the royal authority and the power base of the kings shows that Arakan's political success was built on openness and regional integration. In our context of autonomous history, the expression 'political success' denotes not only dynamic leadership and efficient political institutions sustaining the royal power but also connotes a broader idea of political identity. Though this point cannot be dealt with in detail, it should be briefly said that Arakan's identity as such and the political that the Arakanese believe to have been cast at the time of a visit of the Sakyamuni to Mount Selagiri, near Kyauktaw. Historically tainted claims that backed up Arakanese expansion as well as cultural aspects that cemented Arakan's remarkable dynamism would also take their place in this general picture of a socio-political identity.

When I claim that Arakan's political success was due to its regional integration I mean a complex texture of networks which connected Arakan to its neighbours, the Burmese hinterland as well as the larger Bay of Bengal. At the beginning of the third part, we have already dealt with the most important of these networks, trade. Trade flourished from the 15th to the end of the 17th when it was dealt a deadly blow by political deterioration [34](#). Traders can be identified as belonging mainly to two cultural communities, the Luso-Asiatic Christian community and the Indian Muslim community. In the way that they were dealing with the court in Muauk U and settling in the country, they had commercial and political interests and they were vectors and transmitters of the cultural values and standards. Ethnically and culturally, Arakan belongs to the Tibeto-burmese world and the sphere of Theravada Buddhism. But it successfully integrated members of these two foreign communities into its administrative structures and military establishment and it looks as if that process was longer and more relevant than similar developments in Lower Burma in the course of the 16th century. The local support of the Luso-Asiatic community had a strategic importance in Arakan's northwest, could have controlled the territory of Chittagong without the active support of the local Muslim elite. All this anticipates a

policy of religious and cultural tolerance though we should not lose sight of the fact that conditions probably varied considerably in Arakan's heartland and in its outlying districts. So did political imperatives.

The subject of cultural integration during the Mrauk U period is another subject which will need further investigation. What we know about it is but a caricature. Islamic mysticism touched Arakan with its cult of the pirs. But when was a first mosque built in Arakan? Oral traditions date the Santikan mosque back to the 15th century, but this view can not go unchallenged. The so called Buddermokan on Sittway island is claimed by believers of different faiths. The Rakhua maharajawan to kri: chronicle reports an attempt at Muslim conversions in the early 16th century. In the Mrauk U archaeological museum, a Persian inscription relates the conversion of a Muslim Persian to the Buddhist faith. We know still few things about the Indian and specifically Hinduist roots of Arakan's indianized culture. Both Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism flourished in Arakan, but at what stage the latter triumphed? We may also wonder what was the statute of wandering eremites, as some, like the sage Mraua, figure prominently in the Arakanese traditions. One remarkable feature has already been noted: that is the cultural and ethnic diversity that flowed to Arakan with successive streams of refugees flowing from West to East, and possibly in a lesser degree, from East to West. The systematic deportation of people from Bengal further added to the ethnic mix in Arakan.

Artistic expression is another layer of historical experience that complements our perception of Arakan's past. The meritorious building of pagodas and monasteries underscores the pride of the Mrauk U court and gives evidence of its significant wealth in the 17th century. We have earlier noted the transition in art and style from an earlier Mrauk U period (approx. 1530-1620) to the middle Mrauk U period (approx. 1620-1680). The earlier period boasts original features in architectural design that are not found in neighbouring countries. The recently unearthed ruins of the Kri: son: (90,000 Buddhas') pagoda (built in 1553) appear now as one of the most interesting sites in Mrauk U and will hopefully not become victims of the blitzkrieg archaeology recently deplored by the eminent Burmese scholar U Than Tun while talking about Pagan. This temple presents original 16th century traits in a much clearer way than the better known Tukkan sim (Dukkantacin) and Rhac son: (Shittaung) significantly disfigured by the renovations done during the colonial period. More research will also be needed to understand Arakanese religious architecture and sculpture in the context of the development of art in neighbouring Bengal and Burma. While for the moment, the use of concepts like 'network' or 'autonomous development' does not significantly contribute to our understanding of Arakan's art, one important point has come out clearly. Arakan underwent shifting influences from East and West as M. Collis suggested in his article on Arakan's civilization in the Bay (Collis 1925). But we might not completely agree with his intuitive interpretation of the Mrauk U period. Collis saw Arakan's rise since the 15th century mainly as an outcome of the opening of the country to the civilization of Muslim India. As we have seen, this is only a part of the whole picture.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to show that the Buddhist kingdom of Arakan, thriving on the fringes of two expensive empires, Mogul India and Burma, has its own autonomous history that has to be understood in the context of long-term

developments in the Bay of Bengal and with reference to its own cultural past. The reasons for Arakan's expansion can be found in historical models of the past, its own resources, leadership and political opportunities while the kingdom reached its material limits confronting an ever growing superiority of its neighbours. Arakan's decline is not part of the story told here, but the failure of renovating the kingship in the 18th century seems closely linked to the decline of trade, the country's isolation and the lack of dynamic political institution. During the early political or cultural sphere, but preserved its autonomy. In this paper, it has been suggested that Arakan's regional integration and its policy of openness provided the kingdom both with human and material resources that were keys to its political success. The distributive economy that underpinned royal authority depended on a constant flow of wealth; this fact accounts for the brutal decline of both trade and political authority at the end of the 17th century. No attempt has been made here at comparing Arakan with other areas, as in the actual state of our knowledge, such attempts bear the obvious risk of simplifications and merely end up casting our own verbal artifact (reconstructing a historical development) in a mould without too much further deliberation. In her *Circles of kings – Political Dynamics in Early Continental Southeast Asia*, R. Hagesteijn did not include Arakan, but her thesis that "the early Southeast state systems --- are involved in ---cyclic patterns of centralization and decentralization" cannot be substantiated with the Arakanese case (Hagesteijn 1989: 5) It rather looks as if the political compromise between the Arakanese overlord and local lords in Arakan strengthened regional autonomies and precluded any further centralization.

Bibliography

- BERNIER, Francois 1830. *Voyages de Francois Bernier contenant la description des Etats du Grand Mogol, de l' Hindostan, du royaume de Kachemire etc.* Paris.
- BERNOT, Lucien 1967. *Les paysans arakanais du JPakistan oriental (L histoire, le monde vegetal, et l' organization sociale des refugies Marma (Mog) Pairs/ Ln Haye: Mouton. Vol. 1: 451 p.*
- BLACKMORE Thaug 1985. *Catalogue of the Burney Parabeiks in the India Office Library.* London: The British Library. XIV-120p. (Oriental Doc. VII)
- BOUCHON Genevieve /Thomaz Luis Filipe 1988. *Voyage dans le delta du Gange et de l Irraouaddy – Relation portugaise anonyme (1521).* Pari: Fondation C. Gulbenkian. 477 p.
- Candamalalankara 1931-1932. *Rakhain rajawan sac kyam:.* Mandalay, Hamsawatipitakat. (vol 2) 405 p.
- CHSA (CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF SOUTHEAST ASIA) 1992. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Vol. 1: From Early Times to c. 1800. 655p.
- CHANDRA ROY, ATUL 1972. *A History of Mughal Navy and Naval Warfares.* Calcutta: The World Press Private. 163p.
- CHARNEY, Michael W. 1993. *Arakan, Min Yazagyi and the Portuguese: The Relationship between the Growth of Arakanese Imperial Power and Portuguese Mercenaries on the Fringe of Mainland Southeast Asia 1517-1617.* Ohio. 176p (unpublished M.A)
- CHARNEY, Michael W. 1994. *The 1598-99 Siege of Pegu and the expansion of Arakanese Imperial Power into Lower Burma' Journal of Asian History.* 28, 1: 39-57.

CHARNEY, Michael W. 1997. Crisis and Reformation in a Maritime Kingdom of Southeast Asia: Force of Instability and Political Disintegration in Western Burma (Arakan) 1603-1701' *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 394, 4: 1-35)

CHARNEY, Michael W. 1997. The Arakani Governors of Chittagong and their Coins' *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh (Humanities)* 42. 2: 145-162)

COLLIS, Maurice C. 1925. 'Arakan's Place in the Civilization of the Bay (A Study of Coinage and Foreign Relations)' *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 15: 34-52. (also published in *Burma Research Society Fiftieth Anniversary Publication* 1960: 485-504)

COLLIS, Maurice S. 1923. 'A glimpse of Arakan in 1630 AD' *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 13.

COLLIS, Maurice S. 1923. 'The City of Golden Mrauk U' *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, 13: 244-256.

COLLIS, Maurice S. 1923. 'The Strange Murder of King Thirithudhamma' *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, 13: 236-243.

COLLIS, Maurice S. 1923. 'The City of Golden Mrauk U' *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, 13: 244-256)

COLLIS, Maurice S. 1923. 'The Strange Murder of King Thirithudhamma' *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, 13: 236-243)

CORTESAO, Armando 1978. *A Suma Oriental do Tome Pires e o livro de Francisco Rodrigues*, Coimbra 503p.

FREDERICK [FEDERICI], Caesar [Cesare] 1581. 'The voyage and travel of M. Caesar Ferdericke, Marchant of Venice, into the East India and beyond the Indies' [1563-1581] (Translated from the Italian by Thomas Hickocke) in: *Hakluyt* 1904 (vol. 5), pp. 365-449.

GALEN, Stephan van 1998. The Serpent and the king – the Dutch-Arakanese relationship 1608-1683'. Paper presented at the conference on Myanmar Culture and Society: Traditional Spirit and Path to Modernity 22-24 July 1998 Chulalongkorn University Bangkok.

GUEDES, Ana Marques 1994. *Interferencla et Integracao dos Portugueses na Rirmania c. 1580-1630*. Lisboa: Fundacao Oriente. 261 p.

HAGESTEUN, Renee 1989. *Circles of Kings-Political Dynamics in Early Continental Southeast Asia*. Dordrecht/Providence: Foris Publication. 175p.

HAKLUYT, Richard 1904. *The Principal Navigations Voyages Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation: made by sea or over-land to the remote and farthest Distant uarters of the earth at any time within the compasses of these 1600 yeeres*. Glasgow: James Maclehose and Sons. 10vols.

HALL, D.G.E. 1936. 'Studies in Dutch Relations with Arakan in the Seventeenth Century' *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 26: 1-31.

HARVEY, G.E. 1922. The Fate of Shah shuja (1661)' *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 12.

HAVART, Daniel 1693. *Op en Ondergang van Cormandel*. In zija bimcnste Geneel open, en ten toon gesteld. Amsterdam. 3. vols.

LEIDER, Jacques 1994. 'La route de am. Contribution a Petude d' one route terrestre entre la Birmanie et le golfe du Bengele' *Journal Asiatique* 282:335-370.

LEIDER, Jacques 1998(A). 'Tazation et groupes de service sons la royaute

arakanese. Un rapport d'enquete de 1803 d'apers um manuscrit de la Bibliotheque nationale de Paris', *Aseanie* 1:67-89.

LEIDER, Jacques 1998(B). 'There Buddhist Kings with Muslim names – A Discussion of Muslim Influence in the Muauk U period' in: *Etudes birmanes en homage a Denise Bernot*. Paris: EFEO, pp. 189-215.

LEIDER, Jacques 1998(C). 'Bhangala: panlay o kun sway re: mha rakhuin pray pa wan re akhan: bhanta' Rakhuln Rui: ma maggajan: 2 (November), pp. 26-33. (Arakanese translation of the unpubl, conference paper 'Arakan's place in the trade network of the Bay of Bengal' presented at the UHRC January 1998 symposium "Port Cities and Trade Activities in Southeast Asian History", Yangon, IBC)

LEIDER, Jacques 1998(D). *Le royaume d'Arakan (Birmanie) Son histoire politique entre le début du XV^e et la fin du XVII^e siècle*. (unpublished doctoral dissertation) Paris: INA;CO. 511p.

LIEBERAMAN, Victor(B). 1980. 'Europeans, Trade and the Unification of Burma, c. 1540-1620' *Oriens Extremus* 27, 2: 203-226.

LONG, James 1850. "Analysis of the Bengali Poem Raj Mala, or Chronicles of Tripura' *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 19: 533-557.

MAJUMDAR, Ramesh C. 1973. *A History of Medieval Bengal*. Calcutta. 395 p.

MAUNG HTIN AUNG 1967. *A History of Burma*. New York/ London: Columbia University Press. 363 p.

NATHAN, Mirza 1936. *Raharistan –I Ghaybi. A history of the Mughal wars in Assam, Cooch Behar, Bengal and Orisada during the rigns of Jahangir and Shahjahan. Gauhati (Assam): Govt. of Assam, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Narayani Handiqui Historical Institute.*

OKKANTHA, Ashin Siri 1990. *History of Buddhism in Arakan*. Calcutta: University of Calcutta. 305 p (unpublished Ph. D. Thesis)

OVINGTON, John 1696. *A voyage to Suratt in the year 1689 giving a large account of that city and of the English Factory there (Appendix: A description of the Kingdoms of Arracan and Pegu)* London: J. Tonsen. 606 p.

PARKER, Geoffrey. 1988. *The Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800*. Cambridge.

PEMAUNG TIN 1987. *History of Burmese Literature*, Yangon: U Min Naung (4th ed.)

PEARSON, M.N./ DASGUPIA Ashin (ed.) 1987. *India and the Indian Ocean 1500-1800*. Calcutta: Oxford University Press. 363p.

PHAYRE. A.P. 1841. 'Account of Arakan' *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 1:23-52.

PHAYRE, A. P.1844. *On the history of Arakan: The Historical Coin'* *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 15, 171: 232-237.

PHAYRE, A.P. 1882. 'Coins OF Arakan, of Pegu and of Burma' *Numismata Orientalia* 3, 1:1-47.

PHAYRE, A.P. 1883. *History of Burma*. Londin: Tribner.

QANUNGO, Suniti Bhushan 1988. *History of Chittagong (to 1761)*. Chittagong. 670p.

RAYCHAUDHURI, Tapen 1962. *Jan Company in Coromandel 1605-1690: A Study in the Interrelations of*

European Commerce and Traditional Economies. The Hague.

RAYMOND, Catherine 1995. 'Etude des relations religieuses entre le Sri Lanka et I' Arakan du XII^e au XVIII^e siecle: documentation historique et evidences

archeologiques' *Journal Asiatique* 283, 2: 469-501.

THA THWAN AUNG 1927. *Rakhuin maharajawan to kri:.* Sittway. 147 p.

SALMON, THOMAS 1735. *Der gegenwartige Staat des Konigreichs Arrakan.* Altona, pp. 133-154.

SAN SHWE BU 1918. *The legend of the anway Pagoda,* *Sandoway' Journal of the Burma Research Society* 8: 164-166.

SAN SHWE BU 1919. *'Wunti Nat'* *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 9: 52-53)

SAN SHWE BU 1919. *'U Ba Gyan, Governor of Sinden, Arakan'* *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 9: 151- 153.

SAN SHWE BU 1921. *The legend of the early Aryan Settlement of Arakan'* *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 11: 66-69.

SAN THA AUNG 1979. *The Buddhist art of Ancient Raknine (An Eastern Border State beyond Ancient India east of Vanga and Samatata)* Yangon: U Ye Myint. 121 p. (+93 planches). 2e ed. 1997)

SARKAR, Jadunath 1907. *'The Conquest of Chatgaon, 1666 AD'* *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 3, 6: 406-417.

SARKAR, Jadunath 1907. *'The Feingi Pirates of Chatgaon, 1665 AD'* *Journal & Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Numismatic Suppl.* 3: 419-425.

SCHOUTEN, Gautier 1727. *Voyage de gautier Schouten aux Indes orientales 1658-1665.* Rouen. (2 vols.)

SERAJUDDIN, Alamgir M. 1986. *'Muslim Influence in Arakan and the Muslim names of the Arakanese Kings: a Reassessment'* *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh* 31, 1: 17-23.

SHARIF, A.1966. *'On Arakan and the Arakanese'* in: Habibullah, A.B.M. (ed.) *Nalini Kanta Bhattasali Commemoration Volume,* Dacca: Dacca Museum, pp. 351-360.

SHWE ZAN, 1995. *The Golden Mrauk U – An Ancient Capital of Rakhine.* Yangon. 200p.

SHORE, John 1790. *'The translation of an inscription in the Maga Language engraved on a silver plate found in a cave near Isla'mabad'* *Ashlatick Researches* 2: 383-387.

SIDDIQ KHAN, M. 1936-1937. *'Muslim Intercourse with Burma. From the earliest times to the British Conquest'* *Islamic Culture* 10, 3: 409- 427; 11: 248-266.

SUBRAHMANYAM, Sanjay 1990. *Improvising Empire – Portuguese Trade and Settlement in the Bay of Bengal 1500-1700.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

SHWE ZAN, 1995. *The Golden Mrauk U – An Ancient Capital of Rakhine.* Yangon 200 p.

TARAFDAR, M.R. 1966. *Bengal's Relations with her Neighbours: a Numismatic Study'* in: Habibullah, A.B.M. (ed.) *Nalini Kanta Bhattasali Commemoration Volume,* Dacca: Dacca Museum, pp. 239-245.

TAK HTWAN NI (Mrauk U) 1985. *'Rakhuin a mrok kri: mya:'* [Arakanese cannons] *Cac twe ko lip maggajan (Sittway College Magazine)* 1984-1985: 81-85.

TEMPLE, Richard Carnac 1925. *'Buddermokan'* *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 15: 1-33.

THA THWAN AUNG 1927. *Rakhuin maharajawan to kri:.* Sittway. 147 p.

TOSI, Clemente P. 1669. *Dell India orientale desrittione geografica et historica.* Rome: Ercole. (2. vols)

TUN SHWE KHAING 1995. *A Guide to Mrauk U.* Yangon. 110 p.

TUN SHWE KHAING 1996. *A Guide to Mahamuni.* Yangon: U Hla Sein. 103 p.

(Rakhine Book Series)

WICKS, Robert 1992. Money, Markets and Trade in Early Southeast Asia. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University. 354 p.

WINIUS, George D. 1983. 'The Shadow Empire of Goa in the Bay of Bengal' Itinerario VII, 2: 83-101.

WOLTERS, O.W. 1982. History, Culture and Region in South-East Asian Perspectives. Singapore.

YEGAR, Moshe 1972. The Muslims of Burma. Wiesbaden. Harassowitz. 151 p.

Ref.-

1. I prefer the westernized spelling Arakan for purely practical reasons. The official spelling in Myanmar is Rakhine which might eventually be pronounced correctly by an English language speaker, but is easily misspelt by a non English speaker. The spelling used by the Arakanese of southeastern Bangladesh is Rakhaing. As modern Burmese does not generally use the y sound, one finds commonly the transcriptions Yakhine or, occasionally, Yakhaing. In this paper preference is generally given to the Arakanese pronunciation, e.g. Mrauk U instead of Myauk U as long as these spellings have been established in English language publications on Arakan.
2. I kindly acknowledge the lively and thoughtful discussions with Stephan van Galen (University of Leiden) and Michael Charney (University of Michigan) since our first Arakan workshop in Leiden (1998). [top](#)
3. The Mrauk U period, named after the royal capital, covers the period from 1430, the presumed date of the foundation of the city, until 1785 when the Burmese conquered the country. [top](#)
4. In this paper, the name Burma (or Myanmar, as the country is now officially called) is applied conventionally to the territory of the modern Union of Burma (resp. Myanmar). Expressions like "Kingdom of Burma" or "Burmese King dom" refer to the Kingdoms of Pagan, Ava, or Prgu and cover varying geographical realities. [top](#)
5. Though Burmese and Arakanese languages are closely related and use the same scrip; the pronunciation ---considerably. In an incresing number of English language publications on Arakan Printed in Myanmar during the last years, Arakanese authors rarely transcribe Arakanese words and names uniformly. It is thus left upon the readers to finds out that ce "man; Mang" correspond to the Burmese "Min" meaning prince, dog, lord. With exception of geographical terms; that may be found on maps or that renders are familiar with, I have opted for a translitteration of Arakanese words, following the system of the Bibliographic birmane of D. not. Occasionally both the translitteration and a more conventional transcription are given. [top](#)
6. The most important is the Rakhuin rajawan sac, written by the Arakanese monk Candamalalankara and published in Mandalay in 1931/ 1932. his work will be referred to as CL. [top](#)
7. Phayre made noteworthy contributions to the study of Arakan's history and numismatics. See Phayre 1841, 1844, 1846, 1882, 1883. [top](#)
8. We find a different perspective in nooks dealing with the history of Bengali literature where due importance is given to the Bengali writers at the count of Arakan (Sukumar Sen History of Bengali Literature, Delhi, 1960; Suniti Kumar Chatterji. The origin and development of the Bengali language, Calcutta 1926; M.E. Haq, Muslim Bengali literature 1957). [top](#)
9. For an investigation on the origins of the expression, se Bernot 1967. [top](#)
10. Brithsh Library OR 3465 A. f.128 (of the Burmese pagination!). It is noteworthy that in his work, Candamalalankarn (1931, vol. II:7) did not include this sentence. [top](#)
11. We would like to mention Daw Khin Than's work on the Mrauk U Period Administration

(14041638) (1995), U Kyaw Win U's Arakan's History during the later Mrauk U period (1638-1784) as well as U Lha Thwan Phru's edition of the Majjhima are: to pum: kyam: (1992); all these are MA theses submitted at the Yangon University. The latter work has been published in 1998. [top](#)

12. The well known works of the late U San Tha Aung need to be read with critical eyes. Recently published guide books to Mrauk U (Tun Shwe Khaing 1995; Shwe Zan 1994) are actually not scholarly works but contain a lot of useful information. [top](#)

13. In this regard, the work of Ashin Sakkinda of the PEAL editors is remarkable. [top](#)

14. This outline of Arakan's development during the early and middle Mrauk U period draws on my doctoral thesis *Le royaume a Arakan – Son histoire politique entre le debut du XV e et la fin du XVIIe siecle* (Paris, 1998). [top](#)

15. Phayre and Harvey do not have critically examined the king's life; most obviously the informations from the Arakanese and Burmese sources have not been checked against the political situation in Bengal at that time. [top](#)

16. Arakanese sources are confusing and not without ambiguity. Moreover the British historians like Phayre and Harvey, still considered by many people as authorities on Arakan's history, did not take into account all the available evidence. [top](#)

17. Such a hypothesis is supported by the mention of the minister Wimala as the erstwhile author (1536) of ports of the Rakhun Maharajawan to Kri: of tha Thwan Aung (1927). [top](#)

18. Curiously their son bears the same Arakanese name as Filipe de Brito y Nicote: Na Anga. This is indeed a spelling found in the Arakanese sources while the Burmese sources have the better known Na Janka as found in Western sources, Xenga, Changa or Zinga. The mysterious half-Indian son is said to have rebelled against his father colluding with Burmese allies. [top](#)

19. M. Charney links the 1534 attack against Arakan with the problems that ensued between the sultan of Bengal, Mahmud shah, and Goa, when, in 1533, the sultan threw into prison Martim Afonso de Mello and 53 other Portuguese and a Portuguese fleet cannonaded Chittagong. No reason is given why there should be a connection between the events. Charney also does not seem to admit the existence of a resident Portuguese community in the area (see Charney 1993: 44-45). [top](#)

20. Harvey unfairly passed over Arakan's expansion to the northeast under Man: Phalon: (1967:141) who is not even mentioned, while Phayre confines himself to a single sentence which acknowledges the conquest: "Meng Phalaung held all Chittagong, part of Noakhali, and of Tippera" (1883-173).

21. It is during this period that the Portuguese are mentioned for the first time in the Rajamala, the chronicle of Tripura. [top](#)

22. The formulation as found in Candamalalankara needs a critical reading: it literally says that the Mogul and Afghan lords sent annual presents and further mentions that the kings of Ceylon and Portugal and the Muslim king paid their respect and sent trading ships (vol: 92:93). [top](#)

23. De Brito has left himself on the events, the *Relation del sitio que El Rey de Arracan, y el de Tangu, pusieron por Mar y Tierra sobrola Fortaleza de Serion en la India de Portugal el Ano de 1607* published in the *Documentacao Ultramarina Portuguesa* vol. 11: 233-241. [top](#)

24. Trilingual Arakanese coins are known from the second part of the 16th century 1622. [top](#)

25. Such a collectivity would be a group villages or hamlets called kywan: (administrative tract or circle) in the Kaladan and Lemro valleys (taluk in Bengali). [top](#)

26. This holds true if we identify (hypothetically) the pran cui: kri: with the pran cui tara: sa kri: [top](#)

27. CL 71. This term should not be confused with an identical word used for a village chief in Burma. [top](#)

28. Chinttagong came first under Muslim control in the 14th century (Fakhruddin); in later periods, land-roads were built to connect it to central Bengal. Talish writes that in the 17th century, impenetrable jungles separated the Mogul territories from Arakan Chittagong. [top](#)

29. The revolt of the Anok bharan i.e. 'lord of the west' (we know this governor only by his title) in

1608, and the revolt of Man: Re (Mangat Rai) alias Muzaffar Shah in 1638 (against the usurper Narapati) may be considered as the two major rebellions of Chittagong governors. It is not clear if the crushing of Alat man. ('the middle brother')Cakrawate: in 1612 was the consequence of a revolt of the latter against his brother Man: khamon: who had ascended the throne in 1612. Cakrawate: was the father of Dom Martim, the Arakanese prince who made a brilliant career in the Portuguese army. [top](#)

30. Contemporary Portuguese sources use the term 'Anapora' or 'Anaporan' to designate the governor of Chittagong. But the use of the term can actually not be ascertained by known Arakanese sources for the tenure of Mahapanakyo (?1595-1597). Islam Shah (1597-1598) and Hital Shah alias Mahasahasura alias Senapati (Port. Sinabadi) (1598-1607?). The governor who was either a brother or a son of Man: Raja kri: reigning in 1608, is only known by this title though! [top](#)

31. The nomination of the minister Mahapanakyo, the noteworthy, wise and loyal minister of Man: Phalon: and his son, appears as the exception confirming the rule. [top](#)

32. Half and quarter issues were bilingual, combining either Arabic and Arakanese or later, Bengali and Arakanese. [top](#)

33. I have more extensively dealt with the case of the Luso-Asiatic community in a paper entitled 'The Portuguese in Coastal Burma and Arakan- A critical approach in the context of new research' at the Symposium in memory of U Pe Maung Tin, London, SOAS, 11-13 September 1998. [top](#)

34. As far as the relations with Bengal were concerned, we should not be completely blinded by the Mogul sources which relate mainly the negative impact of the slave trade during the Mogul period. Bengal itself had been an export market of slaves in the 16th century. We have to concede that we know still too little about the relations between Arakan and the sultanate, but there are no stringent reasons to suppose that relations were as hostile as they were later. [top](#)