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Arakan and Bengal : the rise and decline of the Mrauk U kingdom (Burma) from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century AD

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CHAPTER TWO

THE ORIGINS OF THE MRAUK U KINGDOM (1430 – 1593)

The sixteenth century saw the rise to power in south-eastern Bengal of the Arakanese kingdom. At the same time the Mughals entered Bengal from the northwest and came into contact with the Arakanese. The arrival of the Mughals and the Arakanese in Bengal would spark a conflict between both parties for control over the economic heart of Bengal situated around Dhaka and Sripur. The war over Bengal would last for approximately ninety years. Starting in the early fifteenth century this Chapter describes the origins of the Mrauk U kingdom and the beginnings of the Ninety Years' War.

2.1 The early years of the Mrauk U kingdom

From the third decade of the fifteenth century the Arakanese kings of Mrauk U extended their hold over the Arakanese littoral. The coastal areas and the major islands Ramree and Cheduba were slowly brought under their control.¹ During the sixteenth century successive Arakanese kings were able to gain control over the most important entrepôt of Bengal, Chittagong. The control over Chittagong was the key to Arakan's economic growth and its military successes during the last part of the sixteenth and most of the seventeenth century. Mrauk U was, in other words, to grow into a regional power from the sixteenth century onwards. This Chapter seeks to identify the circumstances under which from the middle of the sixteenth century the Arakanese gained control over south-eastern Bengal in general and its main sea port Chittagong more in particular. The role of a large and diverse community of Portuguese soldiers and traders in this process will receive special attention. The Portuguese would become an important element in Bengali politics from the early sixteenth century onwards. The alliances the Arakanese were able to forge with the Portuguese would prove crucial in the exercise of Arakanese control over this part of Bengal and the further development of the Arakanese state.

¹ Leider, 'On Arakanese territorial expansion: Origins, context, means and practice' in Gommans and Leider, *The Maritime Frontier of Burma*, pp. 127-149; 127-131.

The foundation of Mrauk U

The early history of the formation of the Mrauk U kingdom is not well known. From what we know today it seems the early kings slowly gained authority over the Arakanese littoral by military means and diplomacy. Mrauk U was chosen as the site for the Arakanese capital in 1430.² According to Arakanese chronicle traditions the founding father of the Mrauk U dynasty, Man Co Mwan (c. 1404-1433), was exiled from Arakan by Burmese troops from the kingdom of Ava. He subsequently regained control of the kingdom after he invaded Arakan from Bengal.³ The exact circumstances surrounding Man Co Mwan's invasion are vague, but all different chronicle traditions reserve an important role for assistance provided by the Bengal sultan Jalal ud-Din (1415/6-1432/3).⁴ According to the Arakanese chronicles, Mrauk U would remain tributary to the Bengal sultans for several decades afterwards. The foundation myth of the Mrauk U state points to the close relations between Bengal and Arakan from at least the fifteenth century. The legendary stories surrounding the founding of Mrauk U are not confirmed by other sources; especially the involvement of the Bengal sultanate cannot be confirmed by for instance Bengali history.⁵ The history of the Bengal sultanate during the time of sultan Jalal ud-Din provides no clues at all to his involvement in the creation of Man Co Mwan's new kingdom. The evidence for the existence of a tributary relationship between Arakan and Bengal afterwards is scant and largely based on a few sultanate coins attributed to the Arakan mint.⁶ In the tales about the origin of the Mrauk U kingdom, control over Arakan is however closely associated with access to Bengal's (military) resources. The importance of the foundation myths lies therefore more in the way in which the Arakanese have perceived their relationship with Bengal. Earlier examples of this close connection between Arakan and south-eastern Bengal can be traced during the Vesali period (c.600 and 1000) when Arakan and south-eastern Bengal shared a common political culture.⁷ There are strong indications that the Candara dynasties of Harikela

² For various legendary explanations of the name Mrauk U see San Baw U, 'My rambles among the ruins of the golden city of Myauk-u', *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, 11.3 (1921), pp. 163-169, ch 1-3; 13.2 (1923), pp. 99-105, ch. 4-5; 16.1 (1926), pp. 36-42, ch. 6-7; 23.1 (1933), pp. 13-19, ch. 9; ch 4, pp. 99-103. Leider, 'Taxation', p. 74-75.

³ Exiled in 1406 the Laungkrak king Naramittha returned to Arakan taking the name of Man Co Mwan. Leider 'On Arakanese territorial expansion', pp. 128-129 ; Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 58-64.

⁴ Although the foundation myths purport to describe the early fifteenth century, there are good reasons to assume that the various chronicle traditions actually refer to a much later period of c. the seventeenth century when the Mughals had become a potentially serious threat to Arakanese rule in south-eastern Bengal. Leider has pointed to the abundant use of anachronisms and the frequent erroneous references to Indian or Bengal rulers not contemporary to Man Co Mwan. Jalal ud-Din is also not named as such, but reference is made to the Bengal sultan. See Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 60-62 and Leider, 'These Buddhist kings with Muslim names'. S.E. Hussain, *The Bengal Sultanate. Politics, Economy and Coins (AD 1205-1576)* (Delhi: Manohar, 2003) pp. 111-113.

⁵ Hussain, *The Bengal Sultanate*, p. 113.

⁶ Hussain, *The Bengal Sultanate*, pp. 156,162, 168, 195.

⁷ Vesali was an early Arakanese city located in the Kaladan valley.

(Chittagong) and Arakan were linked and that the region of Harikela was culturally and politically dominated by the descendants of the Candra dynasty from Vesali.⁸

Man Co Mwan was succeeded in 1434 by his brother Ali Khan (1434-1458).⁹ Ali Khan brought parts of the Arakanese littoral under control of Mrauk U and is also believed to have campaigned against Ramu, Cukkara, and Chittagong. Chittagong remained under the control of the Bengal sultans.¹⁰ Ali Khan's successors, Baco Phru (1458-1481) and Do Lya (1481-1491) continued to extend Mrauk U's control to the east and west. Chittagong was probably attacked in 1459 and 1481 or both. Although it seems the Mrauk U kings established a temporary hold over the area between Chittagong and the Naf, it is unclear to which extent they were able to control the city.¹¹ The fifty years between 1480 and 1530 have been described by Leider as the least known period of the Mrauk U dynasty. It seems the hold of Mrauk U over the Arakanese littoral declined and the kingdom was apparently gripped by several succession struggles.¹² In 1513 the Arakanese king Man Raja was put to flight because of incursions by the Sak from Tripura. The Tripura governor of Chittagong was styled 'Vanquisher of Arakan' following the 1513 raid on Arakan.¹³ Some scholars have even gone as far as to suggest that numismatic evidence dated to 1526/7 proves that during the reign of the Bengal sultan Nasir ud-Din Nusrat Shah (1519-1531) coins were minted in Arakan in the name of Nusrat Shah's son Ghiyath ud-Din Mahmud Shah, suggesting Arakan briefly lost its independence to the Bengal sultanate.¹⁴ M. Robinson and S. Goron have however convincingly shown that the Rupees attributed to the 'Arakan mint' in fact belong to a category of coins minted at Satgaon. As there is no compelling evidence to suggest a Bengali occupation of Arakan, the notion of Bengali sultans minting coins in Arakan should be dismissed.¹⁵

The reign of the Arakanese king Man Pa (1531-1553) has always been regarded by Arakanese historiographers as one of the most glorious and important periods in the history of Mrauk U, and a sharp contrast with his immediate predecessors. Man Pa is famous for

⁸ Coins struck in east Bengal were for example exact copies of Vesali coins. Kyaw Minn Htin, 'Historical Geography and Urbanization in Ancient Arakan, Myanmar. The archaeological landscape of the old capitals to AD 1400', 2nd Singapore Graduate Forum on Southeast Asia Studies (Asia Research Institute / National University of Singapore, 26-27 July 2007), pp. 2-6. S.M. Ali, 'Chandra kings of Pattikera and Arakan', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan* 6 (1961), pp. 267-274.

⁹ The Arakanese name of this king is Man Kha ri, but he is best known by his Muslim name. Leider, 'These Buddhist kings with Muslim names', p. 207.

¹⁰ Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 66-68.

¹¹ Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 70-74.

¹² See Bibliothèque nationale à Paris Mss. Anglais 26. *Extrait d'une chronique Arakanaise*. Kindly provided to the author by Jacques Leider.

¹³ Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 76-77.

¹⁴ Hussain quoting also João de Barros. Hussain, *The Bengal Sultanate*, pp. 153, 156, 162, 168.

¹⁵ M. Robinson and S. Goron, 'The so-called "Arakan" mint rupees of the Bengal sultans', D.W. Macdowell, S. Sharma and S. Garg eds., *Indian numismatics. History, art, and culture. Essays in honour of dr. L.P. Gupta* 2 vols. (Delhi: Agam Prasad, 1992), pp. 2:221-228; 2:225-228.

defending Arakan against Burmese and Portuguese invasions, for leading a successful campaign against south-eastern Bengal and conquering Chittagong. Apart from this he is also credited with the building of some of the most famous religious edifices, like the Shittaung temple where he had himself depicted as a god standing on Ganesa with his Arakanese and Bengali wives on his side, a symbol for his conquests in Bengal.¹⁶ The palace walls and some parts of the city's defences were probably also first constructed by Man Pa.¹⁷ The demographic, economic or military explanations for this expansion of Mrauk U's influence are not well known yet. The following paragraph will provide a closer look at the political situation in Chittagong during the sixteenth century.

2.2 Portuguese and Afghans in Bengal

In the early sixteenth century the political situation in Chittagong was very unstable. At this time there were several contenders for supremacy in south-eastern Bengal. Tripura rajahs, Bengal sultans and Mrauk U kings all attempted to control the port city. These three native powers sought the assistance of independently operating groups of warlords from Afghan and Portuguese descent. As a consequence the city and its environs often changed hands. In 1512 Rai Chaichag, the Tripura general, conquered the city from the Bengal sultan Ala ud-Din Husain Shah (1493-1519). Leider has suggested that the Arakanese king Gajapati (1513-1515) subsequently removed the Tripura governor of Chittagong and conquered the city. In the light of the prevailing instability in Arakan itself and the, be it meagre, evidence of Arakanese dependence on the Bengal sultanate, it seems more likely the Arakanese assisted the Bengal crown prince Nusrat Khan in his attack on Chittagong in 1515-1516. An Arabic inscription dated 1515-1516 (AH 921) discovered in Chittagong commemorates the construction of a mosque by a Majlis Khurshid as *wazir* and *sar-i-laskhar* of the *thana* Chittagong on orders of Husain Shah.¹⁸ This inscription suggests that either the Arakanese campaign against Chittagong, as described by Leider, was not successful or the Arakanese fought on the side of the sultanate. The latter option seems the most convincing. The Arakanese king heading the expedition would have been either Man Co the elder (1515) or Sajata (1516-1521).¹⁹

¹⁶ See frontispiece. Shittaung, or shrine of 80,000 images. M. Gatellier, 'Le temple Shitthaung à Myohaung, depositaire des traditions de l'Arakan', *Arts Asiatiques* 48 (1993), pp. 110-126.

¹⁷ Leider 'On Arakanese territorial expansion', p. 131.

¹⁸ Hussain, *The Bengal Sultanate*, p. 153.

¹⁹ *Rajamala*, p. 543 in 'Analysis of the Bengali Poem Raj Mala or Chronicles of Tripura' ed. and trans., *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 19 (1851), pp. 533-557; J.N. Sarkar ed., *The history of Bengal* vol. 2 (Dhaka: The University of Dhaka, 1948), pp. 142-159; G. Bouchon and L.F. Thomaz eds., *Voyage dans les Deltas du Gange et de l'Irraouaddy 1521* (Paris: Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian, 1988), pp. 15-70; Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 76-79, 86-88.

In this turbulent period the first Portuguese arrived in Bengal and a large number of Afghans moved from northern India to Bengal. The Portuguese and Afghans would soon become major political and commercial powers in the area as warrior colonists.²⁰ The arrival of the Afghans was a direct result of the 1526 invasion of Delhi by Babur, the first Mughal emperor, when he dislodged the Afghans from Delhi. As a result, thousands of refugee Afghans moved into Bengal, where they established themselves as warlords. The dominant positions that these Afghans would claim in Bengal has lead Eaton to designate the period between 1537 and 1612 ‘the Afghan age’ in Bengali history.²¹ The Afghans would in the latter part of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century become the backbone of a coalition of *Bhara Bhuiyas* - or local lords – who tried to withstand the Mughal advance in Bengal.

The Portuguese arrived in 1516 on a trading mission, sailing from Pasai on Sumatra. Two years later in 1518 the first official Portuguese mission, headed by Dom João da Silveira, landed on the Arakanese coast somewhere near the Mayu estuary on their way to Chittagong. This first official Portuguese mission set the tone for the further involvement of the Portuguese in southeast Bengal and Arakan. When the mission arrived in Chittagong they brought with them into port a prize that belonged to a relative of the governor of the city and they were immediately suspected to be pirates. It did not take long for hostilities to break out between the Portuguese and the governor of the city. As a consequence the Portuguese had to spend the monsoon period outside Chittagong as they were no longer welcome in the city.²²

The Arakanese apparently soon realized the potential benefits of an alliance with the Portuguese as they were quick to request their assistance in the struggle over Chittagong. According to a letter from one of the Portuguese captains, Dom João de Lima, the Arakanese asked for help in regaining Chittagong from the Bengal sultanate at Gaur. Similarly, in a letter to the king of Portugal, an Arakanese king, probably Sajata, mentioned the visit of Dom João da Silveira and promised the Portuguese every kind of assistance if they wanted to trade in this part of the Bay of Bengal.²³

From 1518 onwards the Portuguese would play an important role in this region as merchant warriors. Already from their first appearance in the Bay of Bengal the Arakanese kings regarded the Portuguese as potential military allies. In this respect they were not alone; the Bengal sultans and other local lords also forged important alliances with the Portuguese communities in Bengal.²⁴ In south-eastern Bengal the Portuguese were only one of several groups of mercenary soldiers. In an Asian context these groups of mercenaries cum traders,

²⁰ Rita Joshi, *The Afghan nobility and the Mughals* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1985), pp. 18-19, 95-97, 72, 76.

²¹ Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, pp. 137-138.

²² Bouchon, *Voyage*, pp. 362-363.

²³ Bouchon, *Voyage*, pp. 359-363. Leider is not sure of the name of this king. Leider, ‘On Arakanese territorial expansion’, p.131.

²⁴ Bouchon, *Voyage*, passim. Hussain, *The Bengal Sultanate*, pp. 172-173.

were in effect comparable to groups like the Afghans, Mughals and other Turkish warrior colonists.²⁵ This meant that also in Bengal they operated in the same context as Turkish, Afghan and Abyssinian warlords. The Portuguese in fact formed micro-societies integrated into the local political and social life of the Arakan-Bengal continuum.²⁶ The gradual rise to power of the Arakanese in south-eastern Bengal seems to be closely connected to the development of an Arakanese-Portuguese alliance. I suggest that the rise of the Mrauk U kingdom to the status of a regional power should be understood taking into account the contribution of the Portuguese warriors. I will demonstrate that the Arakanese take-over of Chittagong at the end of the eighties of the sixteenth century cannot be explained without describing the Portuguese contribution. The power of the Portuguese reached its peak in the 1590s when a large portion of the Portuguese warriors serving the Arakanese kings became wealthy local lords, with their own landed estates.

The memoir of the 1521 Portuguese mission to the Bengal sultan Nasir ud-Din Nusrat Shah in Gaur, the so-called *Lembrança*²⁷, suggests that only five years after their arrival in Bengal, the Portuguese had already become an important factor in Bengal politics. The *Lembrança* provides an important insight into the political situation in Chittagong during the early sixteenth century. It shows that the hold of the Gaur sultanate on Chittagong was weak, and that groups of mercenary warriors, both Portuguese and Turkish, played an important role in the struggle for control over Chittagong.²⁸ As the anonymous author of the *Lembrança* wrote on returning to Chittagong after his mission to Nusrat Shah:

I saw Rafael Perestrelo entrenched on the top of a hill, which was so well fortified, that it could have served as a base for the destruction of the whole of Bengal... I saw him in the company of the Rume [Turk] Ali Agha and his men, all armed with good arquebuses, lances and shields; and with them were all Rafael Perestrelo's Portuguese followers equipped as archers, most of them clothed in the style of the country...It was then that the [newly appointed] governor [of Chittagong] arrived in a village one

²⁵ Frederick C. Lane and Niels Steensgaard quoted in Geoffrey Parker, *The military revolution and the rise of the West*, p. 115. F.C. Lane, *Venice and History* (Baltimore, 1966), chp. 23 and 24; N. Steensgaard, 'Violence and the rise of capitalism': F.C. Lane's theory of protection and tribute', *Review* 5 (1981), pp. 247-273. See also G.B. Ness and W. Stahl, 'Western Imperialist armies in Asia', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29 (1977), pp. 2-29.

²⁶ J. Leider, 'The Portuguese communities along the Myanmar coast', *Myanmar Historical Research Journal* 10 (Yangon: Universities Historical Research Centre, 2002), pp. 53-77; pp. 54-57.

²⁷ *Lembrança d'algumas cousas que se passaram quando António de Brito e Diogo Pereira foram a Bengala, assi em Bengala como em Tenaçarim e em Pegu onde também fomos* {A record of the events which took place when António de Brito and Diogo Pereira travelled with us to Bengal, Tenasserim, and Pegu} in G. Bouchon and L.F. Thomaz eds., *Voyage dans les Deltas du Gange et de l'Irraouaddy 1521* (Paris: Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian, 1988), pp. 207-350.

²⁸ Bouchon, *Voyage*, pp. 103-195.

league from the town. António de Brito ordered the factor and Gonçalo Tavares and me to go and greet him with some of the others. On the way we met Cristóvão Jusarte with Portuguese followers and Ali Agha [the Turkish warlord] with his companions all coming back. They were dressed in such a manner that it was impossible to distinguish the Portuguese from the Rumes [Turks]. They were all carrying arquebuses, bows and arrows and we almost thought that they were going to attack us. We then met with, and spoke to the governor and we came back to the town with him; we left him in his residence.²⁹

The report illustrates the importance of the Portuguese and Turkish warlords in the area early on in the sixteenth century. They would emerge as a constant factor in the battle for dominance in Chittagong during the next two centuries. The *Lembrança* also shows the weak hold of the Gaur sultanate on Chittagong. It provides an illustration of the competition for supremacy between Portuguese and Turkish warlords. A story of the audience with Nusrat Shah further confirms this picture. The author of the *Lembrança* relates how Nusrat played two rival Portuguese ambassadors against each other and sent each ambassador with a different set of promises to Chittagong. In the *Lembrança* Chittagong comes forward as a classic example of a frontier town. The Gaur sultan controlled Chittagong by managing conflict on the basis of allocating overlapping rights to rival factions.³⁰

Men like Cristóvão Jusarte and Rafael Perestrelo are described by contemporary Portuguese chroniclers by a wide variety of terms; such as *arrenegados* (renegades), *alevantados* (pirates), or *chatins* (mercenaries) to distinguish them from traders and soldiers operating from within the *Estado*, who were known as *casados*. The men that formed this community operated on the frontier of Portuguese-Asian society, and their goal was upward social mobility. By living in both worlds they could rise in status in two worlds, in their host society as well as in the Portuguese-Asian community. The careers of Filipe de Brito de Nicote, Manuel de Mattos and Domingos Carvalho are striking examples of successful *chatins* who used their career in the service of the Arakanese kings to enhance their status in Portuguese-Asian society.³¹ First we will return to Arakan to discuss the reign of king Man Pa (1531-1553), perhaps the most famous of all Arakanese kings.

²⁹ *Lembrança*, pp. 337-338.

³⁰ J.J.L. Gommans, 'The embarrassment of political violence in Europe and South Asia c. 1100-1800' in J.E.M. Houben and K.R. van Kooij eds., *Violence Denied. Violence, non-violence and the rationalization of violence in South Asian cultural history* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999), pp. 303-309; J.C. Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition. Essays in Indian Ritual, kingship, and Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 108-127.

³¹ Subrahmanyam, *Improvising empire: Portuguese trade and settlement in the Bay of Bengal 1500-1700* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. xvi-xix and M. A. Lima Cruz, 'Exiles and Renegades in early sixteenth century Portuguese India', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 23,3 (1986), pp. 249-262.

2.3 *Man Pa*

The Arakanese king Man Pa (1531-1553) is regarded as the *pater patriae* by the Arakanese. Man Pa restored royal control over the Arakanese littoral and defended its sovereignty against attacks from Portuguese (1534) and Burmese (1546) invaders. The extensive building programme carried out by this king included the building of the palace and city walls and several of the most remarkable religious edifices in Mrauk U.³²

The circumstances under which Man Pa ascended the throne are unclear.³³ The start of his reign marks the end of a relative dark age in Arakanese historiography, following the somewhat obscure years between 1480 and 1530 during which Arakan was invaded by Tripura and probably beset by civil war. Man Pa was a son of king Man Raja (1501-1513) and had been the governor of Sandoway in the southern part of the Arakanese littoral. It seems Man Pa became king after a violent clash with his predecessor, probably Sajata. The extensive building projects of Man Pa are proof of a prospering Arakanese economy at this time. Arakanese chronicles attribute to the reign of Man Pa a sharp increase in the number of foreign merchants visiting Arakan, a further sign of economic growth during these years.

Man Pa established Arakan's position as a regional power in a series of armed conflicts with the Bengal sultanate, the Burmese and Portuguese *chatins*. On 17 February 1534 a fleet of Portuguese *chatins* sailed up the Kaladan river with the objective of plundering Mrauk U.³⁴ The Portuguese penetrated Arakanese defences far up the river and were only just beaten off by the use of fire ships. In the narrow upper reaches of the Kaladan these fire ships were difficult to avoid and forced the Portuguese to retreat.³⁵ Leider has suggested that the reason the Portuguese had attacked Arakan must have been the growing wealth of the Mrauk U kings.³⁶ Their intimate knowledge of the Kaladan river system suggests moreover that they had visited Mrauk U on earlier occasions. The Portuguese attack and earlier other invasions probably hastened the development of Mrauk U into a fortified city.³⁷

³² The following description of the reign of Man Pa is largely based on Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 89-133.

³³ San Baw U, 'My rambles among the ruins of the golden city of Myauk-u', ch. 7, pp. 39-40.

³⁴ Possibly they were lead by Affonso de Mello who had earlier in 1533 led an expedition to Chittagong, where had landed with five ships and two hundred men. Hussain, *The Bengal Sultanate*, p. 169.

³⁵ San Baw U, 'My rambles among the ruins of the golden city of Myauk-u', Chapter 2, pp. 164-165.

³⁶ In 1607 a Portuguese text written to promote the incorporation of Lower Burma into the *Estado da Índia* recalled how the Arakanese king Man Pa was the first Asian ruler to refuse the Portuguese tribute: *o qual Mannio [Man Pa] fio primeiro rei que negou as pareas a el rei de Portugal*. Anon., *Questão acerca do direito do reino de Pegu e como pode pertencer a Sua Majestade* published in M.A. Marques Guedes, *Interferência e Integração dos Portugueses na Birmânia, ca. 1580-1630* (Lisbon: Fundação Oriente, 1994), pp 202-224, 218. See also Leider, 'The Portuguese communities along the Myanmar coast', p. 64.

³⁷ Leider has attempted a first description of the citadel and its outer defenses. Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 95-101 Archaeological research will have to determine which parts of the fortifications were built at what time. Bob Hudson, *Ancient geography and recent archaeology: Dhanyawadi, Vesali, and Padaw* paper read at the conference The Forgotten Kingdom of Arakan: From Dhanyawadi to 1962, Chulalongkorn University Bangkok 2005. The stone fortifications of the city were augmented by wet moats and canals enabling the Arakanese to

The defences of Mrauk U were first put to the test in 1546 when the Burmese king Tabin-shwei-hti (Man tara rhwe thi 1531-1550) invaded Arakan. Arakanese chronicles reveal that from 1544 Burmese troops had repeatedly invaded the south of Arakan.³⁸ According to the Burmese chronicle of U Kala the invasion of Arakan could have been prompted by earlier Arakanese support for the king of Prome in his battle with the Burmese. The presence of a rebellious brother of Man Pa at the Pegu court is presented as another reason for Tabin-shwei-hti to invade Arakan. The existence of the rebellious relative of the Arakanese king is confirmed by Arakanese chronicles and an early seventeenth century Portuguese source. Leider has remarked that the Burmese invasion had a clear economic and political motivation. From a commercial point of view Arakan and Mrauk U were the last piece in a conscious effort by Tabin-shwei-hti to control the trade between Burma and the Bay of Bengal. Pegu, Martaban and Moulmein had earlier fallen into his hands. Mrauk U, with its trans-Arakan Yoma connections, could effectively short circuit Burmese efforts to control the trade of Upper Burma. Arakan thus was a major objective for any Burmese king wanting to maximize income from Bay of Bengal trade. On the political level the rebellious brother of Man Pa provided the Burmese king with an excellent excuse to install a puppet king in Arakan. Burmese and Arakanese chronicle traditions agree on the failure of the Burmese invasion of Arakan. Although Tabin-shwei-hti initially overran Arakanese defences in Sandoway and managed to secure a base near Mrauk U in the Lemro valley, his attack on Mrauk U failed. The Burmese in fact lost the initiative and after a short lived siege of the city they were in turn besieged by Arakanese troops who managed to cut off Burmese supply lines and forced Tabin-shwei-hti to the negotiating table. In the end Tabin-shwei-hti was forced to retreat to Lower Burma without having achieved his aim. Man Pa had successfully defended his capital Mrauk U.³⁹ According to Phayre the Burmese invasion initially opened fresh opportunities for the Tripura Raja to regain some ground in the Ramu area, which he subsequently had to leave to the Arakanese after the Burmese had been defeated at Mrauk U.⁴⁰

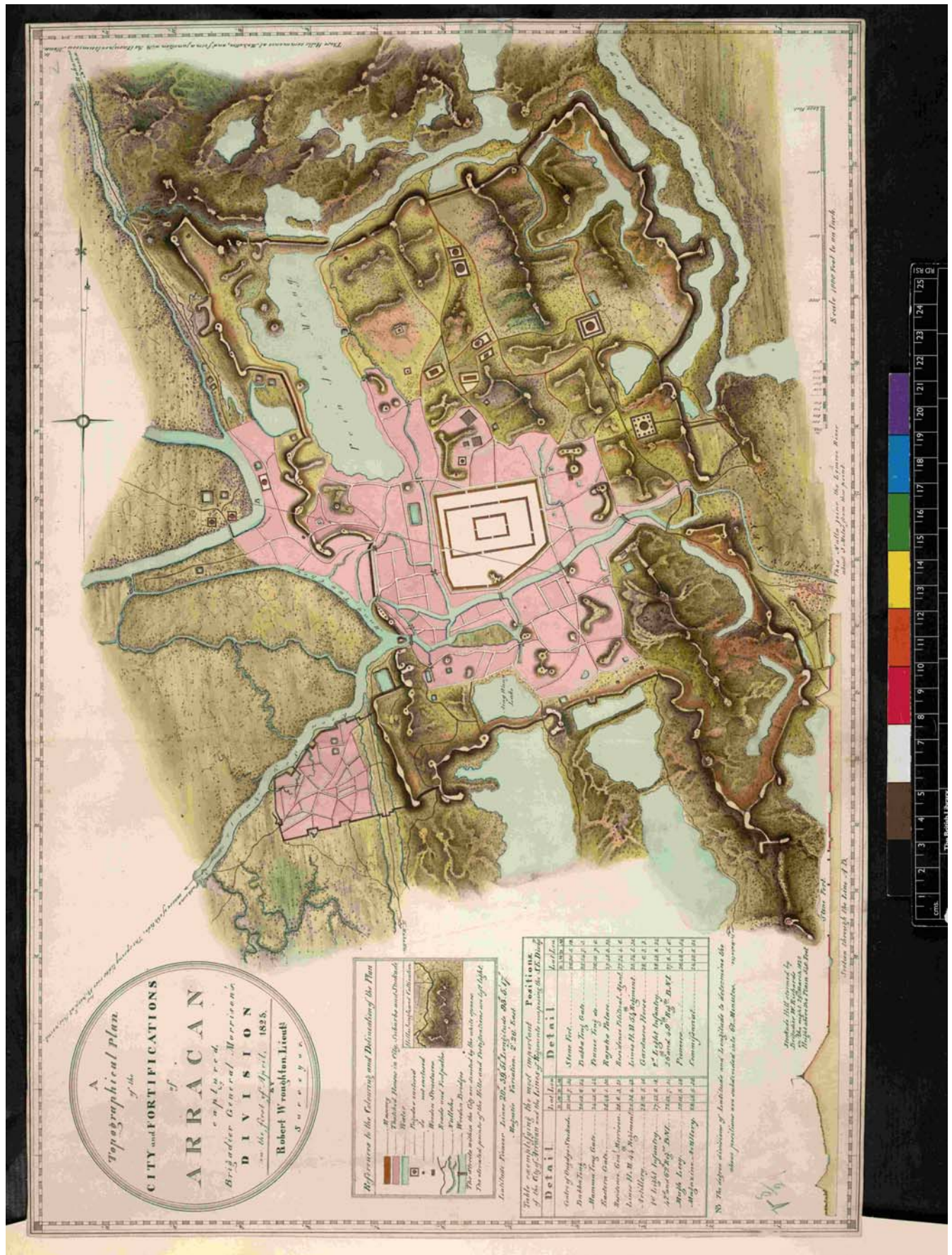
inundate large areas around the capital to defend the city. A recently discovered inscription indicates that officials were appointed for the upkeep of the sluices which were crucial for the functioning of the aquatic defenses. For a description of the fortifications as found by the British in the nineteenth century see Copy of a despatch from Brigadier-General T.W. Morrison, commanding south-eastern division to W.L. Watson, deputy Adjutant-General of the Army, dated Arakan camp 2 April 1825 in H.H. Wilson ed., *Documents illustrative of the Burmese war* (Calcutta, 1827), pp. 129-134, repeated in R.W. Pogson, *Narrative during a tour to Chateegaon, 1831* (Serampore, 1831), p. 166.

³⁸ San Baw U, 'My rambles among the ruins of the golden city of Myauk-u', Chapter 7, pp. 41-42.

³⁹ Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 102-119 provides an extensive comparison between Arakanese and Burmese chronicles regarding the Burmese invasion.

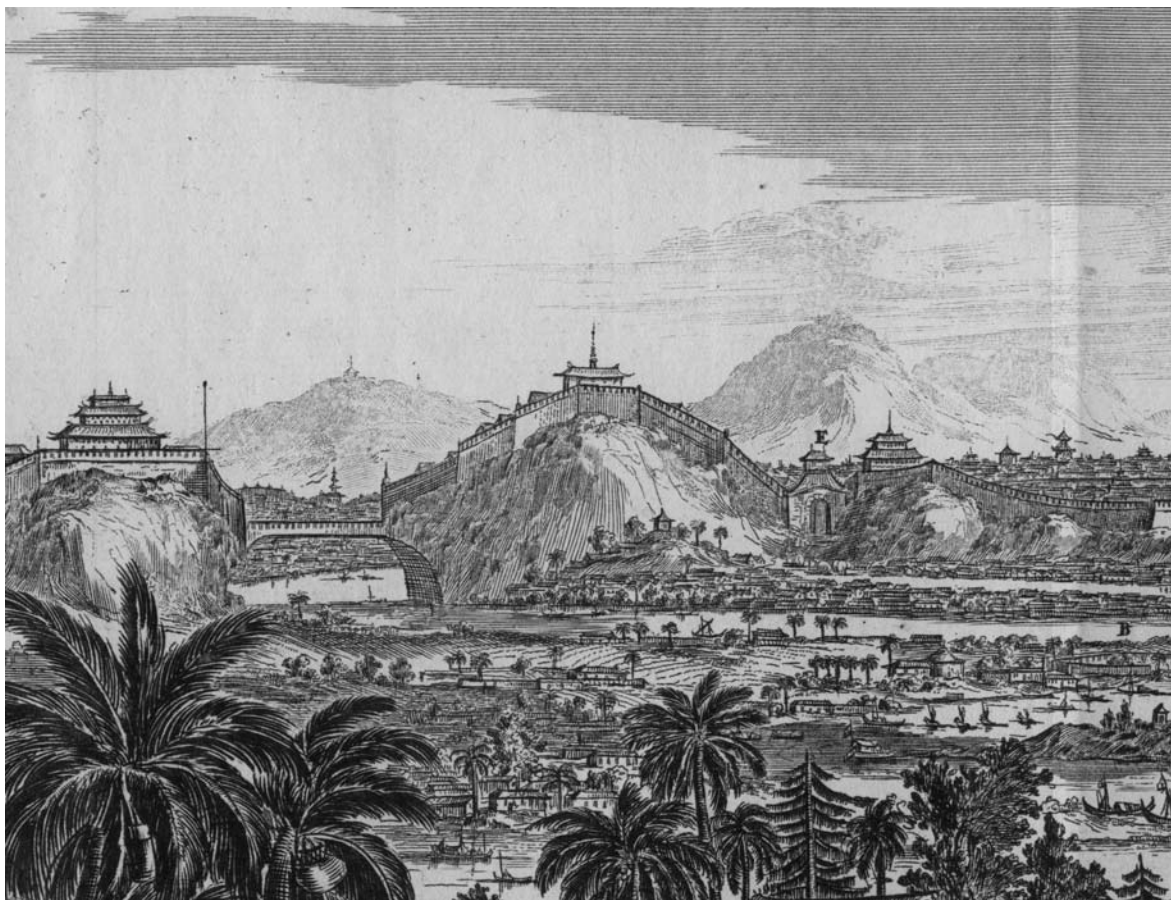
⁴⁰ Phayre, *History of Burma*, pp. 79-80.

Next page: Illustration: Map of Mrauk U. The 1825 map of Mrauk U by Robert Wroughton, provides the best representation of the city and fortifications of Arakan as they were to be seen in 1825 to date 'A topographical plan of the city and fortifications of Arracan by Robert Wroughton, 1825: 1:12,000'. BL Mss. Add. 57,699 (2).





Letse-kan gate in 2000 AD and a Dutch artist's impression c.1663 of Mrauk U's walls from Wouter Schouten, *Oost-Indische Voyagie...* (Amsterdam: Jacob Meurs en Johannes van Someren, 1676).



The most important events of Man Pa's reign had however occurred several years before the Burmese invasions. Probably in 1539-1540 Man Pa successfully conquered Chittagong. Although Arakanese chronicles do not agree to the exact date and circumstances of this conquest, a Buddhist votive inscription found in Chittagong and dated to 1542 proves that Arakan controlled Chittagong in 1542.⁴¹ In the late 1530s the Afghan warlord Sher Shah (d. 1545) defeated the last independent sultan of Bengal Ghiyath ud-Din Mahmud Shah (1533-1538).⁴² The Afghans, who had formed the ruling class of the Lodi sultanate, had earlier been driven from Upper India to Bihar by the invading Mughals.⁴³ Sher Shah managed to conquer most of Bengal but was unable to control south-eastern Bengal. In Chittagong a conflict erupted between two local governors, Amirza Khan and Khuda Bakhsh Khan, who had earlier been appointed by Ghiyath ud-Din Mahmud Shah. Man Pa probably used this conflict to intervene in Chittagong. Although there is little evidence, apart from the claims in the Arakanese chronicles, for the Arakanese occupation of Chittagong under Man Pa, the Buddhist inscription found in Chittagong confirms the Arakanese presence in Chittagong in 1542. Although the Arakanese chronicles are 'conflicting, confused and at times 'fancy', Leider has argued that a critical analysis of the Arakanese chronicles provides three incontestable facts. First, the Arakanese conquered Chittagong and its hinterland and probably also took possession of Sandwip, closing the door to maritime aid that might be sent to the city. Second, the Arakanese king obtained a princess from a Bengali lord, following a military success on the battlefield or as the result of a compromise. Leider rejects the idea that this princess, known as Pesida, was the daughter of the Mughal emperor, Sher Shah, or the Bengal sultan as is claimed by the Arakanese chroniclers. According to oral traditions the queen at the left of the statue of king Man Pa in the inner passages of the Shittaung temple, reproduced on the cover of this dissertation, represents this Bengali princess.⁴⁴ Third, the deportation of a large number of Bengalis to Arakan is seen by Leider as proof of Man Pa's conquest. At the same time Leider rejects the conquest of Bengal by Man Pa as far as Dhaka, the embassy of Man Pa's chief minister Mahapanakyo to Delhi and the royal pilgrimage to Bodhgaya. The stories in the chronicles describing the conquests of Man Pa in Bengal are according to Leider clearly anachronistic and probably eighteenth century reconstructions of Man Pa's reign.

The importance of these stories is therefore not their factual or fictional content, but the way in which these stories legitimize the conquest of Bengal by later Arakanese kings. In

⁴¹ J. Shore, 'The translation of an inscription in the Maga language engraved on a silver plate found in a cave near Islamabad', *Asiatick Researches* 2 (1790), pp. 383-387. Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp 127-139 see also Leider 'On Arakanese territorial expansion', p. 131.

⁴² Basheer Ahmad Khan Matta, *Sher Shah Suri. A fresh perspective* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 95, 115-120.

⁴³ Eaton, *Rise of Islam and the Bengal frontier*, pp. 137-138.

⁴⁴ See the cover illustration of this dissertation.

fact they formulate an irredentist claim on Bengal. The chronicles all agree in claiming Arakanese sovereignty over Bengal long before Man Pa's first conquest. All chronicles used by Leider describe how the king, advised by his ministers, reclaims the 'twelve towns of Banga'. In this view those areas of Bengal had been ceded to the Bengal sultans by Man Pa's predecessor Man Co Mwan when he accepted Bengali aid in his attempts to recover the kingdom. In this way Man Pa not so much occupied south-eastern Bengal but restored Arakanese control to an area which had earlier belonged to the Arakanese.⁴⁵ This wish to legitimize war is engrained in the conception of kingship of the Buddhist *cakravartin* king.⁴⁶ In the end if one thing can be said of the reign of Man Pa, it is that he had proven Arakan could now claim to be a substantial power in the region.

The important position the Portuguese *chatin* community in Chittagong acquired during the sixteenth century is reflected in the appointment of Nuno Fernandes Freire as customs collector by Mahmud Shah (1533-1538) in 1537. He was given this position in recognition of Portuguese assistance to sultan Mahmud Shah during his struggle with Sher Shah (1539-1545).⁴⁷ The upheaval in Bengal during the middle of the sixteenth century left even more room for an autonomous position of the Portuguese community. The Afghan sultans of Bengal had to focus on the Mughal presence on their borders and left the way open for Man Pa to conquer Chittagong. The precise circumstances of Man Pa's conquest of Chittagong are vague and there is no firm evidence as to the extent and duration of the conquest. The Tripura chronicle *Rajamala* mentions the flight of the Afghan governor of Chittagong to Tripura.⁴⁸ It seems that the Arakanese hold on Chittagong was only temporary, and after some years control over Chittagong reverted to Afghan warlords or to the powerful king of Tripura Vijayamanikya (1536-1563).⁴⁹

The 1534 Portuguese attack which was successfully repulsed by Man Pa no doubt still served to strengthen the Portuguese presence in the Bay of Bengal and perhaps brought home to the Arakanese the effectiveness of western firearms.⁵⁰ It is clear that all local powers in the Bay of Bengal were eager to use western firearms technology to their advantage. The Arakanese, the Burmese and the Bengal sultans all frequently employed Portuguese gunners and firearms in their armies. As Lieberman has observed, the Portuguese possessed

⁴⁵ Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, p. 138.

⁴⁶ The royal rhetoric with regard to Burma's wars with Ayutthaya and the Ayutthayan wars with Cambodia are other examples in this respect. See, Chutintaranond, *On both side of the Tenasserim range. History of Siamese-Burmese relations* (Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, 1995) p. 62 cited in Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, 138. See also Anaukpetlun's demand in 1614 that the Arakanese should handover the celebrated white elephant captured after the 1599 siege of Pegu. NA VOC 1057, fol. 127-140 Letter of Wemmer van Berchem to Pieter Both in Batavia, dated Masulipatnam 16 August 1614, fol. 129v-130.

⁴⁷ J.J.A. Campos, *History of the Portuguese in Bengal* (Calcutta: Butterworth & Co., 1919), pp. 38-39.

⁴⁸ Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 164, 166, 173; *Rajamala*.

⁴⁹ Leider 'On Arakanese territorial expansion', p. 132.

⁵⁰ Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 137-138 and Leider, 'On Arakanese territorial expansion'.

arquebuses and small cannon superior to local weapons hitherto available. European cast-metal muzzle loaders were less likely to burst, their trajectories were longer and more accurate, and their shots were heavier than those of Asian cannon of the same weight.⁵¹

The political situation in Chittagong after the death of Sher Shah in 1545 allowed the Portuguese to gain even more influence as the last bits of central power in Bengal vanished. In 1569 the Portuguese felt apparently strong enough to murder the Afghan governor of the city.⁵² Until the consolidation of Arakanese power in 1590 the Chittagong area remained a contested frontier between Bengal, Tripura and Arakan.

After the death of Man Pa the Arakanese throne was taken by his son Man Tikkha (1553-1555). It seems that during the reign of this king Arakan again lost its control over Chittagong. The fact that the Koethaung, a large temple in Mrauk U constructed by Man Tikkha, appears not to have been finished is illustrative of the loss of control over Chittagong.⁵³ With the loss of control over Chittagong the ambitious building programme began by Man Pa suddenly came to a halt during the reign of his son Man Tikkha. It is very well possible that the loss of their Bengal resources necessitated the Arakanese kings to stop the construction of the larger temples because they could no longer count on the expertise of the Bengali craftsmen and lacked a substantial part of their income.

Man Tikkha was followed by king Man Co Lha (1556-1564). During the reign of this king the Muslim governor of Chittagong appealed to the Arakanese for help against an invasion of the Tripura king. A decade later the Arakanese king Cakrawate (1564-1571) assisted the Tripura king in a confrontation in south-eastern Bengal with Afghans and rebellious Tripura soldiers. A Muslim inscription of 1568 and the report of the Italian Cesare Fredrici prove that by that time Chittagong was certainly again under the control of the Bengal sultans.⁵⁴ On the basis of numismatic evidence it has even been suggested that Arakan itself had somewhat earlier, c. 1555-1558, lost its independence to the Bengal sultans. Robinson has however shown that this idea was based on an incorrect reading of coins minted at Satgaon, which were earlier attributed to the 'Arakan mint'.⁵⁵

⁵¹ V. Lieberman, *Burmese Administrative Cycles - Anarchy and Conquest c.1580-1760* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 27-29.

⁵² Campos, *History of the Portuguese in Bengal*, p. 269.

⁵³ The Koethaung, or 'shrine of the 90,000 images', is with the Shittaung and the Dukhanthein one of the three largest temples in Mrauk U. It was excavated in 1997. From the excavations it appears that the temple was never finished. P. Gutman, *Burma's lost kingdoms*, pp. 106-112.

⁵⁴ Leider, 'On Arakanese territorial expansion', p. 132.

⁵⁵ In the same article Robinson dismissed a similar argument made with regards to a coin of Ghiyath ud-Din Mahmud Shah (1526-7) vide infra. Robinson, 'The so-called "Arakan" mint rupees of the Bengal sultans', pp. 221-228. See also A.B.M. Habibullah, 'Arakan in the pre-Mughal history of Bengal', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 11 (1945), pp. 33-38, 34.

2.4 *Man Phalaung*

The Arakanese king Man Phalaung (1571-1593) finally brought Chittagong firmly under Arakanese control. Man Phalaung also repelled a Burmese invasion, and put an end to invasions of the Sak, an ethnic group of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The subjugation of these hill tribes and the recognition of Arakan as a superior power by the Tripura king paved the way for Arakanese control over Chittagong. The Mughal victories in Bengal over the Afghan sultans probably also contributed to Man Phalaung's success.

The strong relationship between Arakanese rule in Chittagong and the local Portuguese elite appears in the name of this Arakanese king. The nickname Man Phalaung means 'Portuguese king'.⁵⁶ In the great temple built by Man Phalaung in Mrauk U, the Dukhanthein, the figure of a Portuguese man stands amongst the statues of local lords.⁵⁷ This illustrates the position the Portuguese had acquired as allies and local strongmen in the Arakanese littoral at the time of Man Phalaung. The temples built by Man Pa and Man Phalaung are in themselves a lasting testimony to their conquests in Bengal. The revenues resulting from these victories, both financially and demographically, must have contributed in no small means to their ability to build edifices like the Shittaung and Dukhanthein.

⁵⁶ The name Man Phalaung is in local traditions in several different ways connected with the Portuguese. One explanation that is usually given is that Man Phalaung was born after Man Pa's victory over the Portuguese in 1534, while other stories connect this king's name with the growing importance of the Portuguese in the Arakanese army. Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, p. 513. The king's Pali name was Sirisuriyacanda mahadhammaraja. Leider, 'These Buddhist kings with Muslim names', p. 210.

⁵⁷ It is not impossible that this man represents for instance Filipe de Brito, Manuel de Mattos or another contemporary leader of the Portuguese community in Arakan.



Dukhanthein temple, late sixteenth century - with a Portuguese man and an Arakanese lady paying obeisance to the Buddha from the central inner chamber.

In 1581 Man Phalaung crowned his second son Man Co Lha⁵⁸ as *anauk-bhuran*, or ‘lord of the west’ referring to his position as governor of south-eastern Bengal.⁵⁹ The rule of the Mrauk U kingdom in Chittagong was however far from secure during the last half of the sixteenth century. In 1586 for instance Man Co Lha had to face armed opposition from a coalition that consisted of local Chittagonian Muslims and local Portuguese who had sought the help of the Tripura king Amaranabikya. Ralph Fitch, an English merchant, who visited Chittagong in 1586 described the turbulent situation in the area called Porto Grande (Chittagong):

From Satagan [Satgaon] I travelled by the country of the king of Tippara [Tripura] or Porto Grande with whom the Mogores [Mughal] or Mogen [Arakanese] have almost continuall warres.⁶⁰

Prince Man Co Lha defeated the Tripura army and he and his father Man Phalaung sent a punitive expedition to Udaipur, capital of the Tripura kingdom.⁶¹

The diaries of the Austrian nobleman Georg Christoph Fernberger illustrate the circumstances under which the Arakanese came to power in Chittagong. Fernberger was an adventurer who travelled to Chittagong in 1589 in what must have been a ‘Grand Tour’ in the true sense of the phrase. Fernberger has left us a telling account of the political situation in Chittagong at that time.⁶² On 24 October 1589 Fernberger arrived at the port of Chittagong. He noted in his diary that he witnessed a conflict between the Arakanese prince Man Co Lha and the governor of Chittagong, whose name has escaped history. Before Fernberger’s eyes a story unfolded that had long been characteristic of the political landscape in Chittagong. At the day of his arrival Fernberger noted in his diary⁶³:

The governor of Chittagong had rebelled against his lord the king of Bengal, Nandia Sundar, son of the king of Arakan.⁶⁴ The governor had taken a fort in which he had positioned 800 large and small guns. He hastened to defend the fort with 5,000 men and fifty elephants against the siege laid by the king. He also tried to win over to his

⁵⁸ Not to be confused with the Arakanese king Man Co Lha (1556-1564).

⁵⁹ Leider, *Le royaume d’Arakan*, p. 197.

⁶⁰ Quoted in H. Hosten, ‘Jesuit letters from Bengal, Arakan, and Burma (1599-1600)’, *Bengal Past and Present* 30 (1925), p. 53.

⁶¹ Leider ‘On Arakanese territorial expansion’, p. 134; Leider, *Le royaume d’Arakan*, pp. 158-165.

⁶² G.C. Fernberger, *Georg Christoph Fernberger. Reisetagebuch (1588-1593) Sinai, Babylon, Indien, Heiliges Land, Osteuropa. Lateinisch-Deutsch* ed. and trans. R. Burger and R. Wallisch (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999).

⁶³ Fernberger, *Reisetagebuch*, pp. 112-115, my own translation.

⁶⁴ Apparently a Bengali name for Prince Man Co Lha, the *anauk-bhuran*.

side the captain of the Portuguese fleet, António de Sousa [Godinho].⁶⁵ He promised to give the fort to the Portuguese if he emerged victorious. That is why the Portuguese captain offered him his assistance. Daily the governor and the Portuguese made sorties from the fort and fought small battles [with the king]. On the day that we arrived in the harbour of Chittagong 300 Indians and several Portuguese fell on the battlefield. The king had by that time already arrived in Chittagong and was present with his and his father's troops (40,000 men, of whom 10,000 were arquebusiers⁶⁶, 370 armed elephants, and 4,000 large and small canons). He had encircled the fort of the rebellious governor on land and on the river, where he had more than 4,000 small boats. In order to make victory easier the king tried to convince the Portuguese to change sides. He sent his brother to the Portuguese captain as an emissary, with 200 men and fifty elephants with white flags and some presents, to win him over to the Arakanese side. The Portuguese agreed to the proposals of the king under the following conditions: The king would withdraw from the island of Sandwip, the revenue of which is enough to sustain the whole army, he would give them half the guns and 20,000 Lari, and both sides would release their prisoners. The rebellious governor then made a new offer to the Portuguese. He promised them even more than before and tried to keep the captain to the agreement concluded between them earlier. He now not only promised the fort, but also to put himself and his family into the hands of the Portuguese and he even agreed to be baptised. But as the Portuguese had already concluded a peace with the king their ships had sailed to the king's fleet and they now fought with those they had earlier fought against. The rebellious governor could not withstand the siege for more than three days now that the Portuguese had left him and he gave himself up to the king. The king took from the fort most of the bigger war material, elephants and money, but he let the governor live. The king even left this man in charge of the fort. People say that this was smart to leave the governor in command of the fort now that he owed his life to the king. The governor would now know that he could not trust the Portuguese and would probably not try the same thing again.

Fernberger in fact witnessed the last phase in the Arakanese struggle for dominance over Chittagong and noticed the important role the Portuguese played in the area. All earlier sources only indicate the way in which the Portuguese were involved in the struggle over the

⁶⁵ Sanjay Subrahmanyam provides more details about the life of De Sousa in 'The Tail Wags the Dog or Some Aspects of the External Relations of the Estado da India, 1570-1600', *Moyen Orient & Ocean Indien* 5 (1988), pp. 131-160; pp. 149-150.

⁶⁶ Fernberger has *sclopetarii* which for the sixteenth century would translate as arquebusiers, see Bert S. Hall, *weapons and Warfare in Renaissance Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 181.

Karnafuli estuary, Fernberger's description gives a lucid picture of exactly how the conflict could unfold. Although the Arakanese king Man Phalaung had already in 1581 crowned his second son Prince Man Co Lha *anauk-bhuran*, the diary of Fernberger shows his rule in Chittagong was an uncertainty before 1589.⁶⁷ Although Leider has suggested that 1578 is a plausible date from where on the Arakanese gradually established their control over Chittagong, it is only after the 1589 conflict had been resolved in favour of the Mrauk U state that we can say that the Arakanese controlled Chittagong.⁶⁸ The year 1590 therefore seems an appropriate starting point for the dating of Arakanese rule in Chittagong. This date is supported by the fact that the first coin issued by Man Co Lha as governor of Chittagong is also of 1590 (BE 953).⁶⁹

The organization of the kingdom

There is little well dated material to describe the organization of the Mrauk U kingdom. We have to rely on a few lists of functionaries at the Arakanese court of uncertain date and provenance, and difficult to interpret Dutch renderings of Arakanese names and titles. Leider has discussed and compared references to the administration of the kingdom in his dissertation.⁷⁰ This discussion forms the basis for the analyses of a Dutch list of functionaries at the Arakanese court dating from the 1680s presented here. The list was made on the basis of information provided by Dirk Vonck, the last Dutch factory chief in Arakan.⁷¹ Although the information thus dates from the end of the seventeenth century it is inserted here to extend our understanding of the functioning of the administration of the Arakanese kingdom. Apart from the observations made by Vonck this description of Mrauk U government will be augmented by information on the Mrauk U court from the VOC archives. The VOC documentation on the other hand does cover almost the whole seventeenth century.

The Arakanese nobility in the service of the king are referred to in Arakanese chronicles as *amhu amat*.⁷² The honorific *to* added to *amat* is sometimes found in Dutch sources as *Ammato*, i.e. *amat-to*. Dutch sources also refer to the Arakanese nobility as *Sit-*

⁶⁷ Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, p. 197.

⁶⁸ Leider, 'On Arakanese territorial expansion', p. 133.

⁶⁹ On this coin, dated BE 953, Satui Co Man styles himself as 'the son of the great king of the law' see V. Chowdhury, 'The Arakani Governors of Chittagong and their Coins', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh* 42 (1997), p. 149, see also M. Robinson, 'The coinage of Chittagong under Arakanese rule (1575-1666)', B. Kluge and B. Weisser eds., *XII. Internationaler Numismatischer Kongress. Akten II* (Berlin, 2000), pp. 1338-1341.

⁷⁰ Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 370-384. See also Leider, 'Taxation', p. 76.

⁷¹ After leaving Arakan, Dirk Vonck presented Daniel Havart with an interesting overview of the composition of the government of Arakan during the last years of Candasudhammaraja's reign. D. Havart, *Op- en ondergang van Cormandel. In zijn binnenste geheel open, en ten toon gesteld* 3 vols. (Amsterdam, 1693), pp. 2:62-63.

⁷² From *mhu*, 'govern' or 'administer' and *amat* 'minister'.

kes.⁷³ In this manner the population of Arakan was divided in three groups: the royal family, the ministers and the general population. In describing the functioning of the administration of Arakan it is not always possible to distinguish between members of the royal family and ministers as often only ministerial titles are provided in the sources. Local lords were often identified with the name of their fief with the designation *ca* added to the name of their apanage, e.g. *Laungkrak ca*.⁷⁴ Ministers and local lords as a group were hierarchically distinct from village leaders generally identified as *rwa su kri* or *rwa ca*.⁷⁵ Equally they would be named after their village or group of villages such as the *Louwedansougrij* from the Dutch sources, which title probably refers to the *Louwe taung su kri*, or chief of the village of Louwe.⁷⁶

In general the king's ministers are divided in two groups, the ones on the left and the ones on the right. This division is a main characteristic of the lists of ministers that have survived. In Dutch sources this division translates at times in designations as 'the white *Sit-ke* and the black *Sit-ke*', but also the Arakanese terminology is used referring to the left hand man or *leiwei-mran* and the right hand man or *leirei-mran*. It is thought that some functions at the Arakanese court were divided this way to balance power between court factions. Havart for instance writes that there are 'two judges who on a day to day basis take turns in guarding the palace, they have jurisdiction over judicial cases in the whole country and have four captains under them.' Havart said that the Arakanese government, perhaps best described as the king's Privy Council, consisted of the following men:

1. A 'state-governor'⁷⁷ [the king's first minister], who takes care of all the affairs of state when the king is not at the court.
2. A Bailiff and a Commander of the Guards⁷⁸, both of whom are under the command of the prime-minister.
3. An admiral, who has the command over the sailors on the fleet and the soldiers on the ground. The admiral furthermore has four important adjutants.
4. A governor over the Elephants, this person is the fourth most important man in Arakan.
5. A Chancellor.⁷⁹

⁷³ Dutch: *Sikken, Sicque*. Transcribed by Leider as *cac-ke*. Normally known in Arakanese and Burmese history as military officers but in the contemporary Dutch sources as well as in Manrique they are not associated exclusively or specifically with the military but with the nobility in general. Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, p. 379.

⁷⁴ Longrasa in Dutch sources.

⁷⁵ From *rwa*, 'village' and *su kri* 'headman'. In Dutch sources commonly as *Rosa* or *Roos*.

⁷⁶ Taung or 'river' Louwe is a village not far downstream of Mrauk U in the Kaladan valley.

⁷⁷ *Rijks-bestierder* in Dutch.

⁷⁸ A *Bailjuw* and a *Opperste wagtmeester* in Dutch.

⁷⁹ *Rijks Cancelier* in Dutch.

6. Two judges, who on a day to day basis take turns in guarding the palace, they have jurisdiction over judicial cases in the whole country and have four captains under them.
7. A secret councillor of the king, who is also the chief spy. He has many other ordinary spies below him and they have to bring a daily report to the king on everything they have heard and seen in the country.
8. A chief monk who has thousands of monks under him, all dressed in yellow robes, with a yellow cap on their head.
9. A sheriff.⁸⁰
10. A chief of the import and export duties⁸¹, who has two secretaries and a large number of 'soldiers'⁸² to help him.
11. The court is furthermore served by a number of eunuchs, of whom two are important. One eunuch is the king's chamberlain and treasurer and the other is charged with the supervision of the farmers in the neighbouring villages, he is also the master builder [architect] of the king and supervisor of all the [construction] works in the country.⁸³

Under the first heading we can recognize the *pran cui kri*, or prime minister as Leider calls him. Little is known from the chronicles about the functions of this man and other than his appearance in the list of Havart he is scarcely referred to by in Dutch or other non-Arakanese sources. His position as substitute of the king is confirmed by the Bengali poet Daulat Qazi who wrote that his patron Ashraf Khan was made *lashkar-wazir*⁸⁴ or 'chief minister and commander of the army'. He describes how when king Sirisudhammaraja (1622-1638) went on a hunting expedition 'Ashraf Khan went to his court' and sat with the ministers.⁸⁵ The Commander of the Guards can be identified as the *ko-ran-kri*.⁸⁶ This functionary is referred to most in Arakanese and non-Arakanese sources. The *ko-ran-kri* was not only in charge of the palace guards, *ko-rans*, but also of the army as a whole. He is seen leading most military operations when the king does not take charge himself. The bailiff is more difficult to identify but in all probability could be associated with the figure of the *cachma* or *sangma* of the Dutch sources. No Arakanese equivalent of this Dutch rendering of what must have been an Arakanese title has been found as yet. The figure of the *cachma* appears right from the arrival of the VOC in Dutch sources and throughout the whole seventeenth century this official remains one of the most important functionaries in the kingdom. The admiral or commander

⁸⁰ *Schout* in Dutch.

⁸¹ *Licentmeester* in Dutch.

⁸² *Rakkers* in Dutch.

⁸³ *Fabriek, en opperhoofd van alle des koninks en 's Lands werken* is the Dutch expression used here.

⁸⁴ Obviously referring to the *sar-i lashkar wa wazir* a title also used by the Bengal sultans. Hussain, *The Bengal Sultanate*, p. 153.

⁸⁵ Ghosal, 'Missing links', p. 258.

⁸⁶ In Dutch sources the *korangerij*.

of the army could well be associated with the *dha puin kri*, literally the sword bearer, or commander of the army. In Dutch sources *dabein*. His adjutants or captains could be the *sonodo*, the *sattannangh*, and the *rijsondaer*. These are all Dutch renderings of as yet untraced Arakanese titles. *Rijsondaer* could possibly refer to the Arakanese title *juntat* a military commander mentioned by Leider in his description of the king's council. The governor of the elephants, the *chan ke kri*⁸⁷ was in all probability in charge of royal hunting expeditions in search of elephants, he might as well have been a military commander or a councilor. The chancellor in Dutch sources indicated as *rusappe* or chief writer of the king. The two judges or *taya thugyi*, the secret councilor or *nakhon*, the chief monk or *sangha raja*, the sheriff and the chief of the import and export duties or *katto* complete the king's council. The control over the harbor, or *bandel*, was in the hands of the *kotwal*. The eunuchs mentioned by Havart were important in that they managed the affairs of the palace, controlled access to the king and were in charge of royal domains. It has to be remembered that at the time Havart wrote the function of the *anauk-bhuran* was no longer relevant as the Arakanese had by then lost control over Chittagong.

The nobility in the service of the king would meet almost daily in the palace to discuss matters of state. It is striking that the chief of the Dutch factory was also allowed to be part of these gatherings and attended these meetings also on a very regular basis.⁸⁸ Daulat Qazi described the cosmopolitan character of these meetings:

The chief minister [Ashraf Khan] returned to court. When Sri [sic] Ashraf Khan sat in court, the pick of the Mughals, and the Pathans, numerous Hindus, both native and foreign, countless Brahmins, Ksatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras also sat in rows.⁸⁹

It is however clear that only the members of the king's Privy Council, as it was described above, were allowed to enter the private audience chamber of the king and then only when called in by the eunuchs. The rest, including the Dutch chief had to wait in the outer-courtyard or *pas* as the Dutch called it, until the king gave a public audience if they wished to speak to him personally.

⁸⁷ In Dutch *Sanegrij*.

⁸⁸ See for a good example: NA VOC 1149, fols. 524-567v. Diary of Arent van der Helm 1644 [Extract uijt Dachregister gehouden door den oppercoopman Arent van den Helm vant gepasseerde int Coninkrijck Arracan 't sedert 19en februari pasado tot 30en october 1644].

⁸⁹ Ghosal, 'Missing links', p. 258.

2.5 Mughal expansion in Bengal

During the decades following the first appearance of Akbar's armies in Bengal in 1574, Mughal rule was far from secure. Mughal authority was threatened by a wide variety of local lords, collectively known as the *Bhara Bhuiyas*, or 'the twelve kings', although we should not take the number literally.⁹⁰ The number twelve is however significant here. Twelve is an auspicious number in India and the occurrence of similar lists of twelve governors in for example nearby Assam and indeed in Arakan itself cannot be considered a mere coincidence. In this particular instance the number may as well refer to the twelve governors that the former sultans of Gaur appointed at their coronation, as reflect a territorial mandala.⁹¹ In Arakan a similar arrangement has been described by Sebastião Manrique for the coronation of king Sirisudhammaraja in 1635 (1622-1638), who had also twelve lesser kings crowned before he himself ascended the throne.⁹²

Apart from opposition by the *Bhara Bhuiyas*, internal struggles in the Mughal camp also weakened imperial authority. It is important to note that Afghan and Portuguese warrior colonists would be closely connected to, or formed part of the *Bhara Bhuiyan* coalition. Sometimes these men were local lords themselves, and sometimes they acted as mercenaries in the service of a local chieftain. The Arakanese kings would over the years support these *Bhara Bhuiyas* in their struggle against the expansion of Mughal power in Bengal, but the alliance would be an ever changing one with local lords shifting their allegiance from the Arakanese side to the Mughal and back again. The Arakanese on the other side also joined the struggle for dominance in Bengal. The *Bhara Bhuiyas* thus were not a homogenous group. The different local lords freely and frequently shifted their allegiance to take advantage of the unsettled affairs in Bengal.

The years following Akbar's invasion of Bengal were characterized by instability. The emperor's policy of posting disaffected officers in Bengal made the province an ideal breeding ground for subversive activities. In 1579 a rebellion broke out which was led by two Mughal officials. Imperial authority was restored in some parts of Bengal after 1583 when Akbar sent a large military force to quell the rebellion.

The internal struggles in the Mughal camp prompted local lords to challenge imperial authority and to form local alliances against the Mughal emperor.⁹³ One of the leaders of the

⁹⁰The *Bhara Bhuiyas*, alternatively written by Portuguese authors as *Bojões*, or in English as 'Boyons'. Hosten relates Bhuiyas here to *Bhati* 'a low lying country' as explained by 'Abul-fazl in the *Ain-i-Akbari*, which would give the meaning the 'Twelve lords of Bengal' Hosten, 'The Twelve Bhuiyas of Bengal', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 9 (1913), pp. 437-449. Arakanese chronicles also refer frequently to the 'twelve cities of Bengal'. See Leider, 'On Arakanese territorial expansion', *passim*.

⁹¹ This way the mandala is used as a model for describing patterns of diffuse political power. O.W. Wolters, *History, Culture and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives*, rev. ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1999), p. 27.

⁹²Manrique, *Itinerario*, pp 1:351-393; Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, p.207 n.206.

⁹³ Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, pp. 144-146.

Bengali opposition against Mughal rule was the Muslim leader and Afghan Isa Khan. This chieftain controlled a large part of the eastern delta from his stronghold Katrabo. Isa Khan in time became the leader of the *Bhara Bhuiyas*.⁹⁴ The Bengali's superiority in riverine warfare secured the *Bhara Bhuiya* coalition their first crushing naval victory over Mughal forces in 1584 against the forces of the subahdar Shahbaz Khan.

In 1583 Shahbaz Khan, already a veteran in the Bengal theatre was appointed as subahdar. Shahbaz Khan started his campaigns as subahdar by marching to Bardwan where he defeated the Afghan commander Bahadur Kuruh, who fled to Orissa. He then sent a detachment of troops to Ghoraghat to protect the north from attacks from Kuch Bihar or Mymensingh. At the same time troops were sent to Bardwan and further south to Hugli (Satgaon) to guard the frontier with Orissa.⁹⁵ In 1584 Shahbaz Khan continued his campaign with an attack on Isa Khan's dominions in Vikrampur. The subahdar moved his troops via Khizrpur to Sonargaon and he plundered Isa Khan's main stronghold, Katrabo while the latter was campaigning elsewhere. Shahbaz Khan then constructed a fort on the west bank of the Brahmaputra, at Tok where the river is joined by the river Lakhia and the river Banar. After a stand off which lasted seven months, the Afghan soldiers in the service of Isa Khan cut the embankments of the Brahmaputra, resulting in the flooding of the Mughal fort and batteries. After a hasty retreat to Bhawal, half way on the road to Dhaka, the Khan regrouped and did battle with Isa Khan on 30 September 1584. The battle was a resounding success for Isa Khan. Shahbaz Khan had to beat a hasty retreat to Tanda, leaving behind most of his possessions and his men as slaves to the conquering Bengalis.

The Mughals soon discovered that their standard tactics did not work as well in eastern Bengal as elsewhere. The favourite instrument of war of the Mughal nobility, the cavalry, could not be deployed to advantage here. The multitude of rivers, streams and creeks prevented an effectual use of their cavalry and infantry. As Gommans has argued, the natural location at which the mounted archers had to halt was Bihar at the head of the Bengal delta. This area can be described as the last natural campsite for the mounted armies of the Mughals.⁹⁶

The lands east of the formidable Brahmaputra-Meghna river system remained for a long time a safe haven for all those opposing Mughal rule in Bengal, or as the Mughals would call it a *bulghakkhana* – a 'house of strife'.⁹⁷ The river formed a barrier behind which they could always retreat in time of need, safe from further attacks by the Mughal cavalry. The logistics of warfare in Bengal proved to be a difficult art to master for Mughal forces in the following years.

⁹⁴ Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, pp. 146-147.

⁹⁵ Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, pp. 201-203.

⁹⁶ Gommans, *Mughal warfare*, p. 27.

⁹⁷ Gommans, *Mughal warfare*, pp. 27-28.

The 1579 rebellion in the Mughal camp had dealt a severe blow to ideas the emperor might have entertained about expanding the empire further into the heart of Bengal. The following years from a Mughal point of view would be spent securing the borders with Orissa, Bihar, Kuch Bihar, and Mymensingh. The campaigning season of 1585 again proved how precarious the Mughal hold on Bengal still was. At the end of March 1585 Mughal forces captured two forts at Tribeni near Hugli at the junction of the Ganges, Jamuna and the Saraswati, but at the same time Mughal headquarters at Tanda were threatened by Tahir Ilanchaq, who almost succeeded in setting fire to the town. The *Akbarnama* lays the blame of the failure to pacify Bengal at disagreements and mutual jealousies within the imperial camp.

The result of the failed campaigns after the rebellion of 1579 was that in 1586 Shahbaz Khan had to resort to a policy of conciliation and gifts to placate local rulers. Both the Arakanese 'Old Chronicle' and the *Akbarnama* report exchanges of gifts and diplomatic overtures between the two states at this time. The text of the *Akbarnama* is not entirely clear as to the extent of Mughal power in Bengal at the time. Eaton, on the authority of Beveridge's translation of the *Akbarnama* writes that: 'In February 1586, in fact, imperial commanders pushed all the way through the jungle and riverain tracts to Chittagong, on which occasion the city's Arakanese ruler sent gifts of elephants to the Mughals'. Sarkar on the other hand seems quite confident when he reports that at this time: 'The conquests now extended up to the port of *Sātgānw*'. The text of the *Akbarnama* reads: *tā bandar Sātgānw chīragī yāft*, meaning literally 'At the harbour of Satganw he [Shahbaz Khan] found victory'.⁹⁸

There can be no doubt that Satganw should be read as Satgaon here. The same orthography is used for Satgaon on several other occasions in the *Akbarnama*. It is furthermore consistent with the rest of the narrative on the state of affairs in Bengal. In addition it is hard to perceive how a Mughal raiding party would have crossed through hostile *Bhati* to Chittagong without the assistance of a fleet.⁹⁹ According to the Arakanese chronicles and the *Rajamala*, the Arakanese king Man Phalaung from his basis in Chittagong campaigned in 1586 and 1587 successfully against Tripura, where he raided the capital Udaipur.¹⁰⁰ As noted earlier these military successes laid the basis for Arakanese control over the Chittagong area. It is not without its significance here that Man Phalaung in 1586 named his son Man Sawlha *anouk bhuran* of Chittagong. A Mughal raid on Chittagong at precise this time as suggested by Eaton seems therefore in the light of the preceding arguments highly unlikely.

⁹⁸ Abul Fazl Allami, *Akbarnama*, Abdul Rahim ed. 3 vols. (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1873-1887) p. 3:479; Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, p.148 n.38, quoting Abul Fazl, *The Akbarnama of Abu'l Fazl*, H. Beveridge trans. 3 vols. repr. (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 2000), p. 3:722; Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, p. 206.

⁹⁹ 'This was one of the marvels of good fortune, for there was no great officer except Wazit Khan. Neither was there a fleet, which is the chief means of making war in that country, whereas the enemy had a large supply of war-boats.' Abul Fazl, *The Akbarnama*, p. 3:722.

¹⁰⁰ Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 158-166.

The campaigns of Rajah Man Singh

The most successful instruments of war for the Mughal generals in Bengal during these early days thus proved to be ‘bribery, cajolery, diplomacy, impressive displays of military power, and sowing the seeds of dissention within the enemy ranks’.¹⁰¹ In the *Akbarnama* the first eight years following Shahbaz Khan’s defeat are passed over almost in silence with regard to the affairs of Bengal. It is striking that the author of the *Akbarnama* suddenly remains silent on the subject of Bengal and shifts his attention from Bengal to campaigns of the Rajput general Raja Man Singh in the neighbouring province of Bihar in 1587, and later in Orissa (from the 1590s).¹⁰² This silence on Mughal affairs in Bengal provides a strong indication of the lapse of imperial authority in Bengal. From the description of the Bihar and Orissa campaigns it becomes moreover apparent that the Mughals had realized that they had to control these two border areas before they could seriously take on local centres of power in Bengal. The *Akbarnama* does however give a few glimpses of the state of imperial authority in Bengal. Abul Fazl mentions several raids of local *zamindars* and Afghan warlords on Ghoraghat, Tajpur, Purnea, and Darbhanga in the 1590s.¹⁰³ It seems that the Bengal army was used in the conquest of Bihar and Orissa instead of being deployed in Bengal.¹⁰⁴

The province of Orissa after the defeat of the Afghan sultans had become one of the areas that provided a safe haven for Afghan soldiers of fortune. Man Singh succeeded in removing the Afghans from Orissa and submitted local rulers to the Mughal emperor. The successes in Orissa however came at a prize. The Afghan chiefs Khwaja Sulaiman, Khwaja Usman, Sher Khan, and Haibat Khan revolted and in February 1593 plundered Satgaon. From Satgaon they moved on to Bhushna. At Bhushna they captured the fort, killed Chand Rai, son of the local *zamindar* Kedar Rai, and finally went off to join Isa Khan, who at that time still controlled Dhaka. The fort at Bhushna controlled overland access to south-eastern Bengal from west Bengal. The loss of Bhushna therefore was a severe blow to Mughal ambitions in the Southeast. This meant that after the Orissa campaigns the north-western frontier of Bengal had been more or less secured, but the south-eastern part of Bengal saw a concentration of warlords hostile to Mughal rule.¹⁰⁵ As we saw earlier in this Chapter the rise of Arakanese influence in south-eastern Bengal continued unabated during the same period

¹⁰¹ Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, p. 143; Gommans, *Mughal warfare*, p. 27.

¹⁰² Abul Fazl, *The Akbarnama*, pp. 3: 779, 872, 878-880, 933-937, 940-941, 997.

¹⁰³ Ibidem, pp. 3: 871-873

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem, pp. 3: 935.

¹⁰⁵ Abul Fazl, *The Akbarnama*, pp. 3:968-969.

Conclusion

From the foundation of Mrauk U in 1430 the Arakanese kingdom gradually expanded from its nucleus in the Kaladan valley to the rest of the Arakan littoral. The backgrounds of the success of the Mrauk U kingdom are however still unclear. In the previous Chapter the economic geography of Mrauk U was suggested as one of the factors contributing to the emergence of the Arakanese kingdom in the Kaladan area. Mrauk U was situated on a low ridge overlooking the Lemro and Kaladan rivers at a spot from where both plains could be easily controlled. The lands around Mrauk U are moreover the most fertile and the easiest to cultivate in the Arakan littoral. Mrauk U could therefore easily develop into a local market and provided its inhabitants security from aggression from the hill tribes and Upper Burmese polities. Mrauk U was also located far enough from the sea to be safe from sea-borne invasions as well as natural threats such as cyclones and tidal waves. Mrauk U thus provided a relatively stable and safe environment for the development of the Arakanese kingdom. Although culturally and ethnically the Arakanese are closely related to the Burmese, they also had historically close economic and political ties with Bengal. The foundation myth of the Mrauk U kingdom provided a clear example of the strong connection between Arakan and Bengal. Exactly how the Arakanese were able to prevail over their competitors in their bid to control Chittagong is however not clear yet. The role of a large group of Portuguese mercenaries could be a vital clue, but as we have seen these same Portuguese also provided military services to other local lords in south-eastern Bengal. It seems however that the Arakanese were better able to forge successful alliances with these Portuguese communities than other local powers. Perhaps Arakanese and Portuguese naval capabilities were complementary to such an extent that when combined they provided a military force that had no match in the Arakan-Bengal continuum.¹⁰⁶

The fact that the Arakanese were successful in their wars in the Chittagong area is however beyond doubt. Man Pa in 1534 first defeated a Portuguese attempt to take Mrauk U and in 1542 there is definitive proof of an Arakanese conquest of Chittagong. In 1546 when the Burmese king Tabin-shwei-hti invaded Arakan, Man Pa was also able to resist the Burmese force. After the death of Man Tikkha it seems the Arakanese lost control over the city of Chittagong from the late 1550s. The conquests of Man Phalaung at the end of the sixteenth century secured Arakan's hold over Chittagong. Man Phalaung, nicknamed the 'Portuguese king', successfully built on the efforts made by Man Pa to control Chittagong. At the same time as the Arakanese entered south-eastern Bengal, the Mughals approached Bengal from the west. As both parties drove their armies towards the economic centre of Bengal a struggle between the Arakanese and the Mughals for control over Bengal seemed

¹⁰⁶ For a good comparison of Burmese and Western naval capabilities in the early modern period see M.W. Charney, 'Shallow-draft boats, guns, and the Aye-ra-wa-ti. Continuity and change in ship structure and river warfare in precolonial Myanma', *Oriens Extremus* 40.1 (1997), pp. 16-63.

imminent. The following Chapters will describe how the Arakanese kingdom expanded its influence along the shores of the Bay of Bengal towards Burma and Bengal.