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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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The Arakanese king Man Pa (c. 1531 – 1553) depicted as a god standing on Ganesa with his Arakanese and Bengali wives on his side. Mrauk U, Shittaung temple.

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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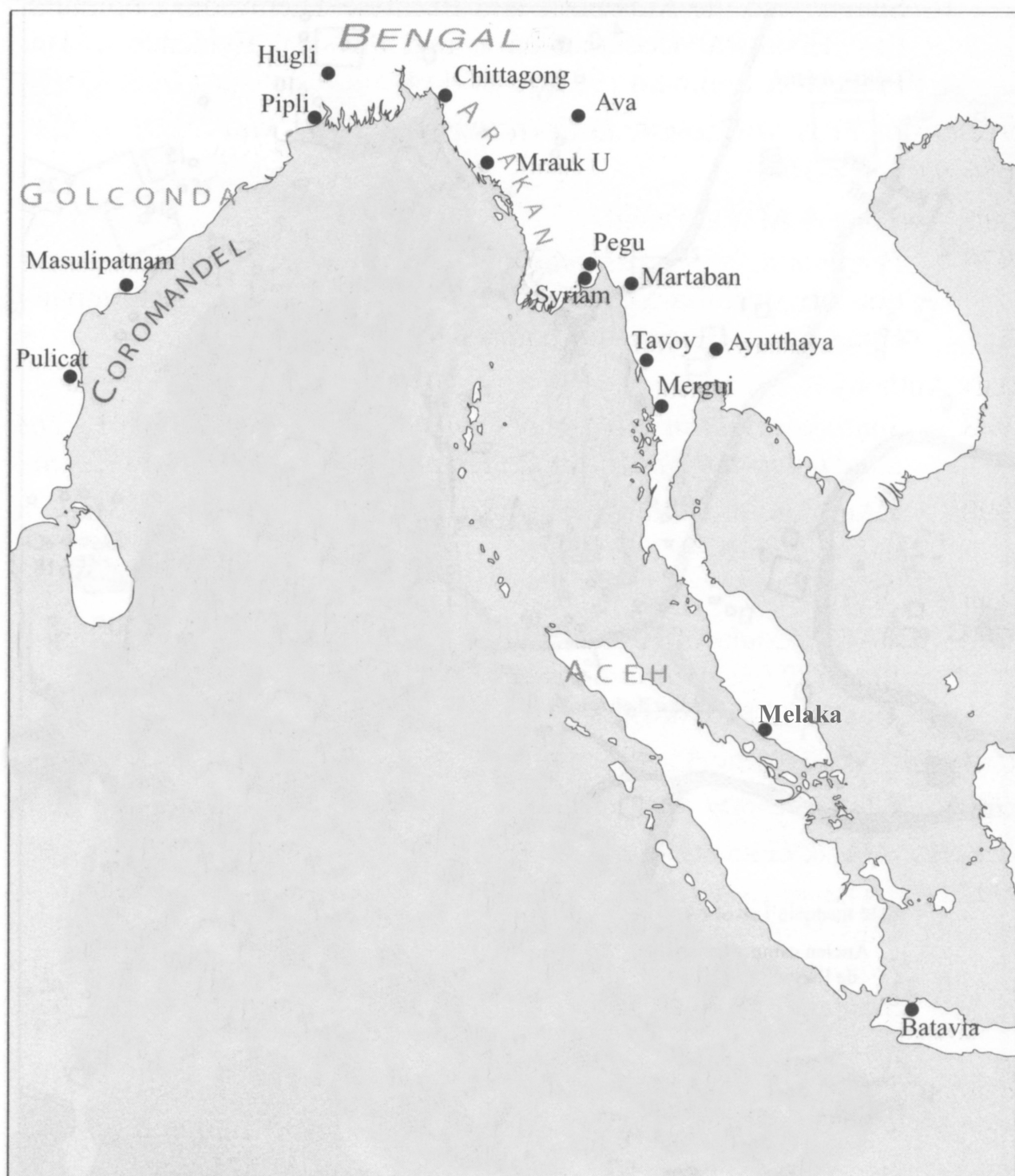
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ARAKAN AND THE BAY OF BENGAL



To my parents

PREFACE

Arakan ... is a sort of wild and jungly Holland, being made up of islands intersected by branches of the sea ...¹
 [Thomas Campbell Robertson, British commissioner of Arakan 1825-1826.]

After having arrived in Mrauk U at midnight in a dugout canoe in January 1999 Arakan would never again be far away in my thoughts. The journey on the Kaladan river that preceded it would prove to be symbolic for the course my research has taken; taking a wrong turn here and there, foundering occasionally, but ever penetrating further into ‘the land of the great image’. Writing this dissertation has been tough at times, as these things ought to be, but mostly it has been a great joy and I have seen it as a privilege. My journey would not have been possible without the help and support of many people and as it is customary to attach to a work such as this an almost interminable list of those to whom the author feels indebted I shall make no exception to this custom, and with good reason.

First, I wish to thank Peter Marshall for directing my interests towards Asian studies and guiding me on my first awkward steps into the field. The enthusiasm with which my research has been received in Arakan has been immensely stimulating and has contributed in no small means to the fact that this book is now, at last, finished. I must thank, Aung Kyaw Zan, Phyu Phyu Sann and Aung Tho Oo for the warm welcome I received in Burma and Arakan and for their help in many ways. Discussions with Tun Aung Chain, Thibaut d’ Hubert, Pamela Gutman, Om Prakash, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Cathérine Raymond and Swapna Bhattacharya provided useful insights and fresh perspectives. I wish to thank Hans de Jonge, Michiel de Jong, Ivo van Loo and Sjaak van Galen for their editorial suggestions and continuing encouragement. I am indebted to Azimi Nezimuddin, Anne van Galen, and Rinia Steegstra for their help in translating various texts that would have otherwise been inaccessible to me. I must also express my appreciation to Kyaw Minn Htin who guided me on several occasions during my trips to Arakan and was a pleasant companion from whom I have learned much about Arakan and Arakanese history.

I am particularly grateful to the board of the NVAO for having allowed me time off from work to complete this book. I would like to thank the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) for sponsoring the 1999 Academy Colloquium on coastal Burma that brought together a wide variety of specialists on Lower Burma. The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) who made an extended field trip to Arakan possible in 1999, and the VSB fund

¹ Thomas Campbell Robertson, *Political incidents of the first Burmese war* (London: Richard Bentley, 1853), p. 4.

for providing financial support for a year at the School of Oriental and African Studies in 1996. I also express my thanks to the staffs of the National Archives and the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in The Hague, the British Library, the Oriental and India Office Collections and the Bodleian Library who have all provided me patiently with countless books, manuscripts, maps &c.

I am extremely grateful to my wife Tanja, who has supported this project from start to finish and accompanied me on many research trips. I thank her for her encouragement and support, without which I never could have completed this work. My children Jan and Ella have already probably heard more than they ever wanted to about Arakan, the Mughals and Burma. The joy and happiness which they provide have certainly stimulated me to finish this project. Finally, thanks go to my parents, to whom I dedicate this work.