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

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Citation
Galen, S. E. A. van. (2008, March 13). *Arakan and Bengal : the rise and decline of the Mrauk U kingdom (Burma) from the fifteenth to the seventeeth century AD*. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/12637

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INTRODUCTION

> After he ascended the Ganges, leaving four very famous cities behind, he descended to a city that belonged to [the] Maharaja, where there is an abundance of aloe-wood, of gold and silver, gems and pearls. After he had left this, he undertook a journey of 13 days through the mountains in the east looking for carbuncles, and he first returned to Cernovis and after that to Buffetania. After that he reached - travelling by sea during a month - the mouth of the river of Arakan and in six days he reached the city with the same name that was situated further on. Seventeen days through mountains without any dwellings, subsequently fifteen days through a vast plain he entered a river bigger than the Ganges, which the inhabitants name Dava [i.e. the river of Ava]. Then, he was brought, sailing upriver during one month, to the most noble city of all cities, that is called 'Ava', 15,000 feet in circumfence.[1]
> [Nicolo di Conti, Venetian merchant and traveller, narrative of his journey from India to Burma – first half of the fifteenth century.]

> The fort […] consists of three concentric walls […] which form the citadel. These walls are of considerable thickness and extent, constructed with large stones, and with a degree of labour, such as a powerful state alone could have commanded. Where the masonry is dilapidated, the interstices have, by the Burmans, been filled up with piles of timber. This interior work is comparably trifling to that by which, in former days, the defects in the circumvallation of hills appear to have been supplied. At every point where the continuity of their natural outline is broken, artificial embankments, faced with masonry, some of a very great height, connect them with each other. […] The extent of the circumvallation is about nine miles. At the gateways the stone walls appear to have been of considerable elevation and great solidity, but where the steepness, or altitude of the hill rendered artificial defences of less importance, a low wall of brick or stone has been carried along the summit. These defences are said to have been constructed several centuries ago.[2]
> [Brigadier-General T.W. Morrison, commander of the British forces invading Arakan, commenting on the defences of Mrauk U – 2 April 1825.]

When somewhere during the first half of the fifteenth century the Venetian merchant Nicolo di Conti travelled through the Bay of Bengal he passed through the kingdom of Arakan.[3] Di Conti did not have much to report about Arakan. The capital city, Mrauk U, did not stand out

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[1] '*Gangem ascendens quator ciuitatibus famosissimis post se relictis ad Maaratiam prepotentem urbem desvendit, ubi ligni aloes aurique et argenti, gemmarum quoque ac magrarirarum magna uis. Hac relicta cum montes ad orientem sitos carbunculorum gratia .xiii. dierum itinere petisset, primum Cernouem deinde Buffetaniam rediit. Mari deinceps cum mense integro ad hostium Rachani fluuii peruenisset, atque inde eiusdem nominis ciuitatem supra flumen sitam diebus sex petisset. Per desertos habitaculis montes decem et septem, inde per campos patentes .xv. diebus profectus, flumen maius Gange est ingressus, Daua ab incolis appellatum. Tum fertur mensis nauigatione aduerso flumine ad ciuitatem nobilissimam omnium, que dicitur Aua .xv. mil.pas. circuitu amplexam*'. From the travels of Nicolo di Conti (c. A.D. 1396-1469) as recorded c. A.D. 1445 by Poggio Bracciolini, *De Varietate Fortunae* ed. O. Merisalo (Helsinki: Suamalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1993), p. 158. See for a recent appraisal of the various editions of Conti's travels Kennon Breazeale, 'Editorial Introduction to Nicolò de' Conti's Account', *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research* 2.2 (2004), pp. 100-110.

[2] 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.

[3] In this dissertation Arakan will be used to refer to the area which is in Arakanese known as *Rakhaing* or *Rakhine*. Arakan is a corruption of *Rakhaing*, used in western sources since the early sixteenth century. The Arakanese traditionally derive this name from the Pali *Rakkha*, or the Sanskrit *Raksasa* synonymous with the Burmese *Bilu* or Ogre. The Arakanese are by the Burmese also referred to as *Myammagye* or 'Great Burmese', the Burmese tracing their decent from the Arakanese. BL OIOC, Mss. Eur. C 13, Copy of a journal of progress and observations during the continuance of the deputation from Bengal to Ava in 1795 in the dominions of the Barma monarch by dr. F. Buchanan, fols. 172, 176-177; Pamela Gutman, *Ancient Arakan: with special reference to its cultural history between the 5th and 11th centuries* (PhD thesis: Australian National University, 1977), pp. 1-3.

amongst the many cities and countries he had visited.[4] The only thing he recalled about Arakan was that it was situated on the bank of a river and surrounded by a tract of uninhabited mountains. For Nicolo di Conti Arakan was just another harbour en route to his next destination, the magnificent city of Ava.

Four hundred years later, when the British laid siege to Mrauk U, they on the other hand were struck by the formidable remains of what appeared to have been a powerful state, but what was at that moment little more than a virtually deserted border area between the Burmese and British empires.[5] The centuries between the arrival of Nicolo di Conti and the British annexation of Arakan in 1825 had apparently witnessed a remarkable expansion and subsequent decline of the Mrauk U kingdom in Arakan.

Today we know that the Arakanese kingdom had indeed from the fifteenth century grown from a small agrarian kingdom, with its nucleus in the heart of the Kaladan valley, to a significant regional power by the early seventeenth century. During this period the rulers of Sri Ayodhyapura, as Mrauk U was also known, were able to assert their influence across the northern shores of the Bay of Bengal.[6] In the first decades of the seventeenth century Arakanese kings received tribute from local rulers between Dhaka and Pegu, cities more than a thousand miles apart.[7] From the middle of the seventeenth century the Arakanese kingdom was gripped by a seemingly sudden decline that would culminate in civil war at the end of the century and the loss of control over south-eastern Bengal, eventually followed by the conquest of Arakan by the Burmese king Badon alias Bodawpaya in 1784.[8]

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[4] As the exact date of Di Conti's visit to Arakan is not known it is possible that he visited Arakan at a time when Laungkrak was the capital city. Mrauk U was founded in 1430.

[5] *An Account of the Burman Empire and the Kingdom of Assam. Compiled from the works and M.S. documents of the following most eminent authors and public functionaries, viz. Hamilton, Symes, Canning, Cox, Leyden, F. Buchanan, Morgan, Towers, Elmore, Wade, Turner, Sisson, Elliot, &c, &c.* (Calcutta, 1839), pp. 84-86 .

[6] The name Sri Ayodhyapura refers to the magnificent city of the Sanskrit epic the Ramayana. Ayodhya literally means 'not to be warred against'; the undefeatable. The name was of course used as well by the Siamese for their capital Ayutthaya. Letter from governor-general C.J. Speelman to king Candasudhammaraja, dated 20 September 1682. *Dagh-register gehouden int Casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlandts-India anno1624-1682* 30 vols. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1887-1931), vol. 1682 entry for 23 September 1682, pp. 1127-1129.

[7] The Mughal rulers of Bengal were forced to build a string of forts to defend the areas around Dhaka and Hugli against the Arakanese. See especially the forts at Khizrpur (Hajiganj Fort), Idrakpur and at Bandar (Sonakanda Fort). N. Chowdhury and B. Ahmed, *Mughal Monuments of Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Traditional Photo Gallery, 2006), pp. 112-117. The *thanadar* of Mukhwah near Calcutta famously stretched an iron chain across the river to try and keep Arakanese vessels at bay. BL OIOC Mss. 478 Salimullah, *Tarikh-i Bangala* translated by F. Gladwin as, *A narrative of the transactions in Bengal during the Soobahdaries of Azeem Us Shan, Jaffer Khan, Shuja Khan, Sirafraz Khan and Alivardi Khan translayed from the original Persian* (Calcutta, 1788), p. 84. R.C. Temple ed., *The diaries of Streynsham Master 1675-1680 and other contemporary papers relating thereto* 2 vols. (London, 1911), pp. 2:15, 66. The Burmese created special companies of soldiers and set up a fleet of war boats to protect Pegu. *Hamsavati sittan* of 1802 in Frank N. Trager and William J. Koenig, trans. and eds. *Burmese Sit-tàns 1764-1826: records of rural life and administration* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1979), p. 73.

[8] BL OIOC Mss. Eur. D 151. Translation of a letter from the Rajah or principal of the Burmas to the collector of Chittagong, 9 May 1787; G.E. Harvey, *History of Burma. From the earliest times to 10 March 1824, the beginning of the English conquest* (London: Frank Cass & Co, 1967), p. 267.

The rapid rise and decline of the Arakanese kingdom between the early sixteenth and the end of the seventeenth century is the subject of this dissertation. It is my contention that the expansion and subsequent disintegration of the Arakanese kingdom was closely connected to its ability to control large parts of south-eastern Bengal, especially the area around Chittagong. Control over south-eastern Bengal and Chittagong was the key to the success of the Arakanese kingdom and was achieved by the establishment of a close cooperation between the Arakanese and Portuguese renegades, or *chatins*, living in Bengal. The loss of control over the Chittagong area would from the middle of the seventeenth century lead to the demise of the Mrauk U kingdom.

Arakan and south-eastern Bengal

From the middle of the sixteenth century Arakanese kings gained a dominant position over the city of Chittagong and south-eastern Bengal. This area shares many geologic and climatologic characteristics with the Arakan littoral. South-eastern Bengal is defined here as comprising the area classically known as Vanga or Banga within the two main streams of the Ganges - from the Hugli to the Padma-Meghna, and the lands east of the Brahmaputra delta between Dhaka and Bhalua to Ramu (Panwa), classically known as Harikela.[9] The first Arakanese claims to kingship in this part of Bengal can be dated to the middle of the fifteenth century, and would only be relinquished at the end of the eighteenth century. Arakanese chronicles point to the important relation between Bengal and Arakan already in the beginning of the fifteenth century. The various chronicle traditions regarding the foundation of the Mrauk U kingdom all describe how the exiled Arakanese king Man Co Mwan (c.1404-1433) conquered Arakan with the help from a Bengal Sultan.[10] As this conquest took place at the end of the second decade of the fifteenth century we may assume that this was during the reign of the Bengal Sultan Jalal ud-Din Muhammad Shah (1415-1432).[11] Although the divergent accounts of the various Arakanese chronicles shroud the exact circumstances surrounding the establishment of the Mrauk U dynasty in mystery, they all point to the strong relationship between south-eastern Bengal and Arakan from the early fifteenth century

[9] In the early part of Muslim rule in Bengal Vanga would be referred to as 'Bang' and it continued to be so known till the name 'Bangalah' got currency in the mid 14th century to denote the whole region of Bengal (present Bangladesh and the Indian province of West Bengal). A.M. Chowdhury, 'Vanga' in *Banglapedia. National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2006).

[10] See Jacques P. Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan, Birmanie. Son histoire politique entre le début du XV^e^ et la fin du XVII^e^ siècle* (Paris; École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2004), pp. 60-62 and for a discussion on the duration of the reign of this king and his name Leider, 'These Buddhist kings with Muslim names... A discussion of Muslim influence in the Mrauk U period', P. Pichard and F. Robinne ed., *Études birmanes en hommage à Denise Bernot* (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1998).

[11] Jalal ud-Din faced several rebellions early on in his reign but restored control of the Bengal sultanate over south-eastern Bengal and Chittagong by 1420. Richard M. Eaton, *The rise of Islam and the Bengal frontier, 1204-1760* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 52-55.

onwards.[12]

In Arakanese traditions the reign of the *pater patriae* king Man Pa (1531-1553) is generally taken as the beginning of Arakanese control over the area. Firm evidence of Arakanese control over south-eastern Bengal is first available for the reign of his son king Man Phalaung (1571-1593).[13] During the heyday of the Mrauk U kingdom contemporary authors testify to the importance of Chittagong for Arakan. In 1649 the Augustinian friar Sebastião Manrique in his *Itinerario de las Missiones de l'India Oriental* called the city 'The Masterkey to the Arakanese Empire'. In the *Itinerario*, Manrique described how strategically important Chittagong was as a political and military cornerstone, and one of the main centres of trade and distribution in the Bay of Bengal.[14]

The Arakanese chronicle traditions describing the conquests of Man Pa in Bengal are quite explicitly anachronistic and we must assume that they are eighteenth-century reconstructions of Man Pa's reign. The importance of the claims to Arakanese sovereignty in Bengal in these stories is the way in which they legitimize the conquest of Bengal by later Arakanese kings. These chronicles claim Arakanese sovereignty over Bengal long before Man Pa's first conquest.[15] From an Arakanese perspective Man Pa only reclaimed what the Arakanese chroniclers call the 'twelve towns of Banga': this part of Bengal had according to them only 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 over an area which had earlier belonged to the Arakanese.[16] The claims to Arakanese dominion in Bengal are also illustrated by the use in seventeenth century Bengali, Persian, Portuguese and Dutch sources of the name Magh or Mog to denote the Arakanese dynasty. Seventeenth-century Arakanese kings were portrayed as Magh princes. Magh in this context is a corrupt form of Magadha, the birth-place of Buddhism and the seat of Buddhist culture in the Ganges delta. Bengali poets active at the seventeenth century Arakanese court frequently used terms such as the Magadha empire, or Maghi era when talking about Arakan and Arakanese rule in Bengal. In portraying themselves as heirs to the Buddhist kings of Magadha the Arakanese kings sought to

[12] For a discussion on the various chronicle traditions see Leider, 'These Buddhist kings with Muslim names'.
[13] Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, p. 166.
[14] S. Manrique, *Travels of Fray Sebastian Manrique 1629-1643* ed. and trans. C.E. Luard and H. Hosten 2 vols. (Oxford: The Hakluyt Society, 1927), pp. 1:283-284.
[15] See for instance the story of king Datha Raja who allegedly resettled rebellious Bengalis in the Arakan littoral in 1156. 'Summary of the work done by Maung San Shwe Bu, Honorary Archaeological officer for Arakan', *Report of the Superintendent Archaeological Survey Burma* (Rangoon, 1919), pp. 55-57.
[16] Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, p. 138.

legitimize their rule in south-eastern Bengal.[17] The adoption of titles of Bengal sultans and Muslim names is another example of how Arakanese kings made clear their claims to this part of Bengal.[18]

The central role in Mrauk U history of south-eastern Bengal in general and Chittagong in particular has earlier been noted by D.G.E. Hall, Jacques Leider and Michael Charney. In the recent historiography of the Mrauk U period the fall of Chittagong to the Mughals at the hands of Buzurg Ummed Khan in 1666 is regarded by most scholars as marking the definitive end of an Arakanese Golden Age.[19] This theory was initially suggested in the late 1930s by D.G.E. Hall, who based his assertion on research done on the basis of printed Dutch source material.[20] Leider and Charney have also assumed that the control over Chittagong was vital to the Arakanese kingdom in their analyses of Arakanese history.

Charney has divided early modern Arakanese history into an Early and Late Mrauk U dynasty period. He has suggested a caesura in Arakanese history in 1603, in the middle of the reign of Man Raja-kri, on the basis of a theoretical framework that stresses the importance of trade surpluses and the availability of firearms. Charney argues that the 1603 break away of Arakan's main Portuguese ally, Filipe de Brito de Nicote[21], was of prime importance to the decline of the Mrauk U dynasty, which according to him commenced about the beginning of the seventeenth century, and abated only briefly under the influx of VOC-derived resources during the 1630s to 1660s. The final blow, that irreparably damaged the stability of the Mrauk U kingdom, was in his view the loss of Chittagong in 1666.

Leider has divided what he calls the later Mrauk U period (1578-1692), or *Le grand siècle arakanais* into two stages. The first, from 1571 to 1622, he describes as *L'âge des rois guerriers*, and the second he has christened *L'âge des seigneurs du palais d'or*, from 1622 to

[17] Perhaps the Arakanese regarded Magadha as their 'charter state' in a sense as suggested by V. Lieberman, *Strange parallels. Southeast Asia in global context, c. 800-1830. Volume 1: Integration on the mainland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 77-78; A. Sharif, 'On Arakan and the Arakanese' in A.B.M. Habibullah, *Nalini Kanta Bhattasali commemoration volume. Essays on archaeology, art, history, literature and philosophy of the Orient, dedicated to the memory of dr. Nalini Kanta Bhattasali [1888-1947 A.D.]* (Dhaka: Dhaka Museum, 1966), pp. 351-360. Cf. S.C. Das, 'A note on the antiquity of Chittagong, compiled from the Tibetan works Pagsam Jon-Zan of Sumpa Khan-po and Kahbab Dun-dan of Lama Tara-Natha', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 67 (1898), pp. 20-28.

[18] For instance Husain Shah by the Arakanese king Man Khamaung. Leider, 'These Buddhist kings with Muslim names', p. 211.

[19] Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 190-345; M.W. Charney, 'Rise of a mainland trading state: Rakhaing under the early Mrauk U kings, c. 1430-1630', *Journal of Burma Studies* 3 (1998), pp. 1-34. And Charney, 'Crisis and reformation in a maritime kingdom of Southeast Asia: Forces of instability and political disintegration in Western Burma (Arakan) 1603-1701', *Journal of the Economic and Social history of the Orient* 41,2 (1998), pp. 185-219.

[20] D.G.E. Hall, 'Studies in Dutch Relations with Arakan', *Journal of the Burma Research* Society 26 (1936), pp. 1-31 and Hall, 'The Daghregisters of Batavia and Dutch Trade with Burma in the Seventeenth Century', *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 29 (1939), pp. 139-156.

[21] For an overview of the career of De Brito see Cayetano J. Socarras, 'The Portuguese in Lower Burma: Filipe de Brito de Nicote', *Luso-Brazilian Review* 3.2 (1966), pp. 3-24.

1692. In short his reasons for this division are as follows. The year 1578 is an approximate starting point for dating Arakanese control over Chittagong, while 1692 marks the beginning of a relatively dark age in Arakanese history. The division between the period of the warrior kings and that of the lords of the golden palace is seen by Leider mainly in the fact that the period of 1622 to 1692 marked the height of Arakanese power and wealth in a relatively stable environment. Leider also suggests that the loss of Chittagong in 1666 heralded the end of the Mrauk U kingdom. Clearly for both authors the fall of Chittagong in 1666 marks the definitive end of an Arakanese Golden Age.[22]

In the various debates that focus on the history of Arakan during the Mrauk U period Chittagong has thus always figured rather prominently. The importance of Chittagong in an Arakanese context has however been more or less assumed rather than explained. The question why Chittagong was so important to Arakan that its loss seems so closely connected to the demise of the Mrauk U kingdom has not yet been asked. In this dissertation I will address the question why Chittagong was so important for the Arakanese kingdom.

I will argue that the death of king Sirisudhammaraja (1622-1638) marks a decisive turning point in the early modern history of Arakan. In 1638, or the year 1000 according to the Arakanese era, not only the old royal line of the Mrauk U kings came to an end, it also marked the start of a gradual withdrawal by the Arakanese from south-eastern Bengal. Interestingly also eighteenth century Arakanese historians seem to have viewed the death of Sirisudhammaraja as the beginning of the end of the Mrauk U kingdom.[23] Far from wanting to support millennialistic ideas, it will be shown that from 1638 onwards several important trends combined which resulted in the gradual decline of the Arakanese kingdom during the last part of the seventeenth century.

It should come as no great surprise that the revision of the history of Arakan that is provided here has implications for how the historical development of neighbouring states like Burma and India should be perceived. This dissertation consequently does more than present a novel approach to Arakanese history; it also suggests new openings for research for historians of Mughal India and Burma. This dissertation shows that the Arakanese kingdom controlled far

[22] The best account for the battle for Chittagong is provided by Shihab ud-Din Talish, *Fathiyyah-i-ibriyyah* [The victories that give warning] Bodleian Library, MS. Bod. 589, folia 106-176v. Parts were translated by J.N. Sarkar as 'The conquest of Chatgaon, 1666 AD', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 3.6 (1907), pp. 405-417 and 'The Feringi pirates of Chatgaon, 1665 AD', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 3.6 (1907), pp. 419-425.

[23] San Shwe Bu, 'Report of the honorary archaeological officer, Arakan, for the year ending 31st March 1922', *Report of the Superintendent, Archaeological Survey, Burma. For the year ending 31st March 1922* C. Duroiselle ed. (Rangoon: Office of the Superintendent Government printing Burma, 1922), pp. 59-63; San Shwe Bu, 'Report of the honorary archaeological officer, Arakan, for the year ending 31st March 1925', *Annual report of the Archaeological Survey of India 1924-25* J. Marshall ed., (Calcutta; Government of India central publication branch, 1927), pp. 30-35. Daw Kyan, 'Rakhine Man Raja Kri Catam', *Myanmar Historical Research Journal* 14 (Yangon: Universities Historical Research Centre, 2004), pp. 29-36, 33.

larger areas of Bengal for a much longer period than was hitherto assumed. It will be argued that the withdrawal of the capital of the Bengal *subah* from Dhaka to Rajmahal by Shah Shuja in the 1630s was not caused by the often quoted 'unhealthy climate of Dhaka'[24], but was simply necessary because the Mughals were forced to admit defeat in their wars with Arakan over eastern Bengal. From the moment Akbar's armies set foot in Bengal in the 1570s to the loss of Chittagong in 1666 Arakanese and Mughal armies fought prolonged campaigns for the control over eastern Bengal. The Arakanese – Mughal conflict could in this light be described as a Ninety Years' War, lasting from c.1574 to 1666. The reconstruction of this war in this dissertation in fact implies that from the first estimate of Bengal's revenue by Todar Mal in 1582 to Shah Shuja's settlement of 1658 between 30 and 50% of the potential revenue of Bengal was situated in an area over which the Mughals and the Arakanese battled for control.[25] For the middle of the seventeenth century this adds up to an estimated 5 out of 10 million Rupees. We can now safely say that these revenues would have been constantly fought over by Bengal *zamindars*, the Mughals and the Arakanese.

From this dissertation it will become clear that the Mughals needed a much longer period of time to bring Bengal under their authority than was hitherto assumed. Eaton's suggestion that the Mughals had completed the conquest of Bengal in 1612 will be proved to be incorrect. The Mughal conquest of Bengal was only complete in 1666, after the fall of Chittagong.[26] The impact of the war over Bengal between the Arakanese and Mughals on the Bengal economy was significant. During the Mughal-Arakanese conflict over Bengal the centre of gravity of the Bengal economy would shift from the southeast to the northwest. Incessant warfare between Arakan and Mughal India would destroy the economic centres east of Dhaka and rendered Chittagong, geographically speaking the best seaport for all Bengal, useless as an entrepôt. The uncertainties of war drove the large European trading companies far into west Bengal, to places such as Hugli, Calcutta and Chinsura where they were safe from Arakanese attacks.

Similarly it will be made clear that the removal of the Burmese capital from Pegu to Ava in 1634 was not so much the result of a carefully planned withdrawal of the Toungoo kings to their agrarian domains in Upper Burma, but was in fact the immediate result of a prolonged Arakanese-Burmese war which by the 1630s had several times resulted in the sacking of the Burmese capital at Pegu. Again, the reliance on Burmese sources alone has produced in Burmese historiography a singularly one-sided picture of Burmese and

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[24] First suggested by Sir Jadunath Sarkar ed., *The History of Bengal. Muslim Period 1200 A.D. – 1757 A.D.* vol. 2 2nd reprint (New Delhi: B.R. Publishing corporation, 2004), p. 334.
[25] For Todar Mal's settlement see Abul Fazl Allami. *The A-in-i Akbari*, H. Blochmann and H.S. Jarrett trans. 3 vols. 2nd rev. ed. (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1977-1978), pp. 2:129-162, for Shah Shuja's see Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, pp. 198-200 and infra Chapter 8.
[26] Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, pp. 137-138.

Arakanese history.

Sources

There are unfortunately very little contemporary Arakanese language sources which would enable the reconstruction of the rise and decline of the Mrauk U kingdom as proposed in this dissertation. Fortunately due to the openness of the Arakanese kingdom to the wider world of the Bay of Bengal mercenaries and traders from all over Asia and Europe visited or came to live in Arakan. This openness resulted in a wide variety of (primary) non-Arakanese language sources in a large number of different languages. In this study I have used a substantial corpus of published Portuguese sources, Spanish, Italian, and German texts; mostly written from Portuguese perspectives. Published and unpublished Persian chronicles have provided insights from Mughal India. But most of all the use of hitherto largely unused primary sources left by the Dutch East India Company (*Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, or VOC), has allowed the construction of a narrative which explains the rise and decline of the Mrauk U kingdom in a way that is very different from earlier historiography. VOC sources used in this dissertation cover the period from 1608 to 1682 and consist mainly of hundreds of *missiven* (letters) sent between Arakan and the Company's Asian headquarters at Batavia, the *dagh-registers* (diaries) kept at Arakan and Batavia, letters and resolutions of the *Heeren XVII*, the board of directors of the VOC in the Netherlands and *generale missiven* (letters) and resolutions of *Gouverneur-Generaal en Raden*, the governor-general and council at Batavia. Although only a few examples of the *dagh-registers* from Arakan have survived, they are of primary importance because they consist of day-to-day observations of VOC employees on Arakan, its trade and its politics. They provide verbatim reproductions of conversations between VOC employees and court officials and observations on Arakanese society. Originally there must have been a continuous collections of these *dagh-registers* for Arakan and even for Chittagong, but the majority of the Arakan diaries and all the Chittagong diaries have probably been destroyed during the early years of the nineteenth century on orders of the then Governor-General Herman Daendels.[27] The *dagh-registers* preserved in the National Archives (NA) at The Hague have survived because they were sent to the *Heeren XVII* in the Netherlands to serve as background information for the *generale missiven* and the copies of the *missiven* sent from Arakan to Batavia. The bulk of the VOC material on Arakan is contained in the *missiven*. Copies of the *missiven* sent from Arakan to Batavia were in general forwarded to the Dutch Republic to provide the Board of the VOC with the necessary information for their policy decisions. These letters refer in the first place to the commercial

[27] J.A. van der Chijs, *Inventaris van 's Lands Archief te Batavia (1602-1816)* (Batavia, 1882), p. iv and M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofsz, R. Raben and H. Spijkerman eds., *De archieven van de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie. The archives of the Dutch East India Company (1602-1795)* (The Hague, 1992), p. 73.

situation in Arakan and the results of the VOC's investments in the Arakanese markets. They provide information on the market structure, give analyses of market forces and describe the other players on the market. But this is only part of the information contained in these letters. They usually also provide a synopsis of the information contained in the *dagh-register*, they give an overview of the situation at the Mrauk U court and provide information on Arakan's relations with its neighbours - especially when these might impair the Companies trade in Arakan. Apart from the Company's sources, seventeenth century Dutch and other European travel literature has also provided a wealth of information.

Although this dissertation is therefore for a significant part based on non-Arakanese language sources, I have tried to present the reader with a distinct Arakanese perspective on the development of the political and economic history of the Mrauk U kingdom. This has been possible thanks to the recent publication of the groundbreaking dissertation on Arakanese history based primarily on Arakanese historiography by Jacques Leider. Leider has produced a truly monumental monograph on Arakanese history from the early fifteenth to the late eighteenth century, *Le royaume d'Arakan, Birmanie. Son histoire politique entre le début du XV^{e} et la fin du XVII^{e} siècle*.[28] Leider's work is the first attempt to present an overall picture of Arakanese history according to modern standards. Leider has incorporated in his study a rigorous critique of the available Arakanese historiography, making his book indispensable for anyone wishing to study Arakanese history. Michael Charney's innovative research on the formation of religious identities in Arakan, also based largely on Arakanese chronicles, has also proved valuable in this respect.[29]

Outline

The first Chapter of this dissertation deals with the geographical context and more specifically Arakan's place in the trading networks of the Bay of Bengal. This first Chapter seeks to identify a useful construct to approach Arakanese history, and will look specifically at concepts such as 'The Indian Ocean' or the 'Bay of Bengal' as ways to situate Arakan's historical development in a broader context. The Chapters that follow provide a detailed and chronological perspective on the history of Arakan during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Chapter two will start with a description of the early years of the Mrauk U kingdom, followed by an analysis of the impact of the arrival of the Portuguese in Arakan. The reigns of the Arakanese kings Man Pa and Man Phalaung will be discussed as well as the first battles between the Arakanese and the Mughals. In this second Chapter the relationship

[28] Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*.

between Arakan, Bengal and the growing community of Portuguese adventurers in the Bay of Bengal will be the central theme. The Chapter will describe the collapse of the Bengal sultanate and the subsequent rise to power of the Arakanese kingdom. At the same time the Mughals entered Bengal and came into contact with the Arakanese. The Mughal invasion of Bengal would spark a Ninety Years War between the Arakanese and the Mughals, with both sides wanting to exploit Bengal's riches. The role of the Portuguese community in Arakan and Bengal will receive special attention.

The third Chapter is devoted to the reign of king Man Raja-kri. During the reign of this king Arakan's relationship with the Portuguese changed rapidly. If the Portuguese were at first seen as just another kind of mercenaries, they soon developed into allies with a local powerbase. This dramatic change prompted Arakanese fears over growing Portuguese influence in the area and led in turn to several punitive expeditions by Man Raja-kri to local Portuguese communities. Man Raja-kri's own position indeed was far from safe as Arakanese pretenders to the throne allied themselves with these Portuguese, as did rival local lords. At the same time the Mughals marched through Bengal with varying success. The Mughal advance led to a series of armed engagements with the Arakanese, both parties slowly converging on the Dhaka area. In Chapter three it will also become apparent that the success of the Mughal campaign in Bengal was not matched by a comparable westward advance of Arakanese influence beyond the Brahmaputra. Although Man Raja-kri found a trustworthy ally in Raja Ananta Manik of Bhalua, it appears that after a military debacle in Lower Burma in 1608, he had his hands more than full with rebellions in his own kingdom.

In Chapter four we will see how from 1610, three sons of Man Raja-kri: Man Nui, Cakrawate and the future king Man Khamaung fought each other in and around Chittagong in a succession struggle for the Arakanese crown that lasted for almost three years. Man Khamaung was successful in consolidating the hold of the Mrauk U kingdom on south-eastern Bengal and restoring order in Arakan itself. The decisive 1615 battle with a Portuguese fleet sponsored by the *Estado da Índia* on the river Kaladan closed the door to Portuguese ambitions in Arakan. On top of this Man Khamaung also successfully withstood successive Mughal and Burmese attempts to invade Arakan.

Chapter five will start with the entrance of the rebellious Mughal prince Shah Jahan into Bengal in 1623. The Mughal governor of Bengal Ibrahim Khan remained loyal to the Mughal emperor Jahangir and died in a battle, trying to prevent the prince to enter Bengal. The resulting unstable political situation in Bengal opened the gates for a series of devastating invasions by the Arakanese. In 1626 the Arakanese king Sirisudhammaraja sacked Dhaka,

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[29] Michael W. Charney, *Where Jambudipa and Islamdom converged: Religious change and the emergence of Buddhist communalism in early modern Arakan (fifteenth to nineteenth centuries)* (PhD thesis: The University of Michigan, 1999).

setting fire to the city and leading the population away as slaves to Arakan. The Mughal emperor appointed a quick succession of governors which served to further destabilize Bengal. The death of Jahangir in October 1627 again had a negative impact on the Mughal's capability to rule effectively in Bengal.[30] The sack of Dhaka initiated the collapse of Mughal authority in eastern Bengal. Following the sack of Dhaka Bengal would pay a heavy tribute to Arakan.

On the Burmese front the Arakanese, in a loose alliance with the king of Siam, were at war with the Burmese king Anaukpetlun from c. 1610.[31] This I will argue finally resulted in the resettlement of the Burmese capital from Pegu to Ava in 1634. During the reign of Sirisudhammaraja there was a flurry of diplomatic activities coinciding with the start of royal trading missions emanating from the Arakanese court to the ports in the Bay of Bengal. One of the results of this activity was the permanent settlement of a VOC factory in Arakan, although the VOC was unwilling to commit itself in a military alliance with Arakan.

In 1635, following the great famine of 1631-1634, Sirisudhammaraja's official coronation finally took, place Arakan's power had reached its zenith.[32] At this point in time Arakanese military power was deemed so effective that the Portuguese *Viso-Rey* in Goa asked the Arakanese king for help in an attempted recovery of Hugli in 1633 from where the Portuguese had been forcefully removed a year earlier.[33] Arakanese fleets operated freely in coastal waters from Bengal to Tenasserim. In both cases the expansion of Arakanese influence prompted her enemies to retract their capitals further inland. The Mughals felt so insecure in Dhaka that the seat of the Bengal *subahdar* was moved as far inland as Rajmahal.

In 1638, three years after his coronation, Sirisudhammaraja suddenly died. The events leading up to his death are a much debated issue in Arakanese historiography. The upheaval following the death of Sirisudhammaraja precisely at the turn of the first millennium of the Arakanese era seems thus to have been anticipated in Arakanese society for a long period of time and today is still perceived by the Arakanese to be a decisive moment in Arakanese history.[34] The revolution following the death of the king in 1638 should indeed be seen as the turning point in Mrauk U history.[35]

In Chapter six the rule of Narapati-kri and his nephew Satuidhammaraja (1645-1652) will be analyzed. Narapati-kri was during his reign confronted with uprisings emanating from

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[30] '*In Bengalen is voor ons niets te doen aangesien dit lant nogh geheel en al in oorlogh staat.*' Letter from Marten IJsbrantsz to Coen, dated Pulicat 30 july 1628. H.T. Colenbrander ed., *Jan Pietersz. Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf in Indië* 7 vols. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1919-1953), pp. 7:1350-1352.
[31] Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf* , p. 2:236.
[32] Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, p. 251 : L'apogée de la puissance militaire (1622-1652).
[33] *Dagh-register* 1633-1634, pp. 241-242 entry for 8 February 1634.
[34] Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, p. 149.
[35] Stephan van Galen, 'Arakan at the turn of the First Millennium of the Arakanese Era' in Jos Gommans and Jacques Leider eds., *The Maritime frontier of Burma. Exploring political, cultural and commercial interaction in the Indian Ocean world,1200-1800* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002), pp. 151-162.

the ever more powerful community of Arakanese and Portuguese in south-eastern Bengal. These groups had direct access to Bengal's riches and therefore became more influential and assertive. In an attempt to curb the power of his Bengal frontier the Arakanese king initiated a policy of depopulation of south-eastern Bengal. The king hoped the resettlement of large groups from the Chittagong area to the plains of the Kaladan would eventually strengthen the Mrauk U king's position. This policy ended in disaster and rather served the opposite effect. The Arakanese king gradually lost his control over this part of Bengal. With the death of Narapati-kri in 1645 and the succession of Satuidhammaraja a gradual restoration of central authority in the Arakanese kingdom can be observed, not however a complete restoration of Arakanese control over south-eastern Bengal.

In Chapter seven we will discuss the final phase in the decline of the Mrauk U kingdom during the reign of king Candasudhammaraja (1652-1685). Candasudhammaraja was 13 or 14 when he succeeded his father Satuidhammaraja as king of Arakan in 1652. The reign of Candasudhammaraja would last until his death in 1685. It is during this period that the resettlement programme and destruction of Chittagong would culminate in the loss of Chittagong to the Mughal empire and eventually even result in the destruction of the Mrauk U kingdom as a whole. The rosy picture that is today generally painted of Candasudhammaraja's reign as the height and culmination of the Mrauk U dynasty seems to have been based primarily on one source, the seventeenth century travelogue of the Dutch physician Wouter Schouten.[36] In Chapter seven it will become clear that the reign of Candasudhammaraja was all but peaceful and should rather be seen as the last phase of a long decline that had set in with the usurpation of the Mrauk U throne in 1638 by Narapati-kri. The Arakanese kingdom finally collapsed after the reign of Waradhammaraja (1685-1692) when Mrauk U ceased to be a threat to Mughal supremacy in Bengal.

In Chapters two to seven, the Ninety Years' War (c.1574 to 1666) between the Arakanese and the Mughals over south-eastern Bengal is the central theme in the discussion of the rise and demise of the Mrauk U kingdom. In Chapter eight it will be argued that the control over south-eastern Bengal, the economic centre of Bengal during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was the cork on which the Arakanese kingdom thrived. Maurice Collis, San Shwe Bu, D.G.E. Hall, Michael Charney and Jacques Leider all have suggested that trade provided the Arakanese kings with revenues that enabled them to consolidate their hold over other local centres in the Arakanese littoral and which were also an important instrument in the expansion of the Arakanese kingdom.[37] These assumptions have until now been based on

[36] Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 287-288 and passim.
[37] Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 417-418; Maurice Collis and San Shwe Bu, 'Arakan's place in the civilization of the Bay: a study of coinage and foreign relations', *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 15.1 (1925), pp. 34-51; Hall, 'Studies in Dutch relations', pp. 1-31; Charney, 'Rise of a mainland trading state', pp. 1-4.

a more or less superficial understanding of the mechanisms of Arakanese trade. Chapter eight will attempt to provide a more detailed analysis of the development of trade in Arakan during the seventeenth century. The discussion will focus on the slave and rice trade and compare royal revenues from trade with the estimated tax income from south-eastern Bengal. The Mughal estimates of the Bengal revenues provide a clear illustration of the wealth of eastern Bengal. It will be argued that Arakan itself only permitted a small scale trade that paled into significance with the incomes derived from Bengal. The rice trade as the central pillar of the Arakanese economy will also be discussed. The extremely low price of rice in Arakan should, apart from the favourable climate, also be attributed to the use of slave labour. Concerning the slave trade I will suggest that the demand for slaves by the VOC eventually led to a fundamental change in the nature of the slave trade in Arakan. Before the early seventeenth century the trade in human beings mainly was a by-product of war or a result of poverty. It was a trade driven by supply. The need for cheap labour for Batavia and the Spice Islands created a stable and almost insatiable demand for slaves. This demand would fundamentally change the Arakanese slave trade. Dutch demand created a constant and predictable market for slaves in Arakan. This new market stimulated the Portuguese *chatins* operating under the umbrella of the Arakanese king to conduct regular raids on Bengali villages in the Ganges delta.