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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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CHAPTER FIVE

MRAUK U AT ITS ZENITH (1622-1638)

> The city of *Rosanga* [Arakan], ruled by king Sudharma [Sirisudhammaraja], a very image of virtue, and in prowess, like the morning sun, is renowned in the world. He looks after his subjects as if they were his sons. Five hundred elephants carry on his commands. The entire kingdom is in peace and no one is envious of another. Nobody is in distress and all the people are happy through the grace of the king. One day king Sudharma went on expedition hunting into the forest with his army. Elephants of diverse colours were with him. Coloured flags covered the sky. Thousands and thousands of soldiers and horses, without a limit to their number also followed him. The glory of the king's boat was beyond measure. The boat could cover in one day a journey of ten days. The dazzling boat gave out lustre of lightning. Its pillars were of emerald and the roof was of silver. Its stem with a gold peacock looked wonderful. The king thus reached the forest. The soldiers pitched their respective tents and lived happily in these. Various musical instruments were played. The courtesans sang and danced sweetly.
> [Daulat Qazi, *Sati Mayna-O-Lora Candrani*.][1]

The reign of Man Khamaung brought stability to the Arakanese kingdom and enabled the ambitious king to expand Arakanese influence in south-eastern Bengal. Although the circumstances surrounding the death of Man Khamaung in 1622 and the succession by his son Sirisudhammaraja (1622-1638) are not clear there are no indications of a succession struggle. Sirisudhammaraja, who was between 18 and 20 when he ascended the throne, married his half-sister who would become the influential queen Nat Shin May.[2] The rebellion of the future Mughal emperor Shah Jahan against his father Jahangir had on the other hand severe consequences for the already weak position of the Mughals in Bengal. It seems the situation was now the reverse of that a decade ago when Man Khamaung ascended the Arakanese throne after defeating his relatives in a war of succession. The Arakanese were now in a strong position to extend their control over south-eastern Bengal. Sirisudhammaraja would continue to expand Arakanese influence across the Bay of Bengal. In years to come Arakanese fleets would command the deltas of the Ganges and Irrawaddy. The king would actively engage in diplomacy, sending missions to all major powers in the Bay of Bengal, and fitting out his own trading mission at the same time. The reign of Sirisudhammaraja however ended with Mrauk U's power at its zenith, with the mysterious death of the king and a coup d'état by one of his ministers.

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[1] Quoted in Ghosal, 'Missing links', p. 258. Sudharma is a sanskritization of the Pali name of king Sirisudhammaraja. Rosanga the Bengali name for Arakan from the Arakanese *Rakhine*.
[2] Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, p.252

5.1 Sirisudhammaraja and Shah Jahan in Bengal

In 1623 the rebellious prince Shah Jahan moved from the Deccan to Orissa and Bengal. The Mughal governor of Bengal Ibrahim Khan remained loyal to Jahangir and died in a battle, trying to prevent the prince to enter Bengal. Sarkar has suggested that Bengal suited Shah Jahan very well as he could hope to forge alliances with local rulers already uneasy with the extension of Mughal authority. Mirza Nathan's account of the prince's activities after his entry in nearby Orissa indeed seems to confirm this. In Cuttak Shah Jahan received Miguel Rodrigues, the Portuguese governor of Hugli and Pipli. On this occasion lavish gifts were exchanged and a new alliance formed. Similarly the defeat of Ibrahim Khan at Rajmahal in April 1624 was hastened by the defection of the imperial fleet commanded by Mir Shams, the Portuguese Manuel Tavares and the son of Musa Khan, Ma'sum Khan. The Portuguese and Ma'sum Khan both represented groups that had a long tradition in resisting the extension of Mughal power in Bengal. Ma'sum Khan obviously was one of the last of the once formidable *Bhara Buyias*. The fleets of the Portuguese and Ma'sum Khan would prove very helpful indeed for Shah Jahan in his later battles with his father's general Mahabat Khan and his brother sultan Parviz. It is also not surprising that immediately following Shah Jahan's arrival in Dhaka in May 1624 an Arakanese embassy arrived to assure the rebellious prince of the sympathy of their king Sirisudhammaraja.[3] According to Nathan the Arakanese king possessed 10,000 war-boats, 1,500 elephants, and one million infantry. The embassy supposedly brought a *peshkash* worth 100,000 Rupees, for which in return Sirisudhammaraja received robes of honour and a *firman* confirming him in his territories.[4] The grant of this *firman* has a certain irony to it. The entry of Shah Jahan into Bengal probably diverted attention from the defence of the borders with Arakan. It is clear that Sirisudhammaraja, despite the meek appearance of his ambassadors before the rebellious prince, in the beginning of his reign continued his father's campaigns into Bengal. Hendrick Lambrechts, a VOC merchant, reported in a letter to his superiors that in 1623 the young king Sirisudhammaraja returned to Arakan with no less than c. 30,000 Bengali slaves. The captives were described as strong and healthy, which the Dutch merchant ascribed to the abundance of rice and other foodstuffs in Arakan.[5] In the same letter he described that the young king on 4 December 1623 paid him a visit aboard the VOC's yacht *Medenblick* at anchor at Urittaung. Sirisudhammaraja explained the Dutch merchant that he was at that moment setting out for a new campaign into Bengal.[6] This puts the friendly reception of the Arakanese ambassadors in Dhaka by Shah Jahan in May 1624 in a different perspective. It now seems that it was

[3] Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, pp. 305-311; Nathan, *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, pp. 2:689-694, 711.
[4] Nathan, *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, p.2:711.
[5] NA VOC 1083 Letter from Hendrick Lambrechts from the yacht Medenblick at anchor before Urittaung (Arakan) dated 5 December 1623, fol. 188-190.
[6] Ibidem.

probably Shah Jahan who thought to profit most from a friendship with the powerful Arakanese Raja.

After he had stayed one week in Dhaka Shah Jahan continued his campaign for the Mughal crown. Bihar was captured with ease. From Bihar the prince decided to proceed westward and occupy Jaunpur, Benares, Allahabad, and Awadh. From Awadh he planned to march on the capital Agra. His plans were however not successful. By the time he wanted to march on Agra the imperial army had reached the prince. Awadh was soon vacated and Shah Jahan finally met his adversaries in a battle near the river Tons where, at the end of October 1624, he was thoroughly defeated.[7]

The unstable political situation in Bengal as described earlier opened the gates for a series of devastating invasions by the Arakanese. After the 1623 raid, it seems that Sirisudhammaraja in 1624, perhaps after his ambassadors had visited Shah Jahan in Dhaka, raided Bhalua, returning to Arakan with a rich booty.[8] After the defeat of Shah Jahan, Mahabat Khan was installed by Jahangir as *subahdar* of Bengal, who in his turn left his son Khanahzad Khan as governor of Bengal. The extent of the Arakanese incursions after the departure of Shah Jahan is illustrated by a report from Jan van der Burch, a VOC merchant who was in Mrauk U in December 1625. On 5 December 1625 Jan van der Burch described that the king had brought from Bengal 10,000 slaves. According to the Dutch merchant these slaves were the result of last year's campaign when Sirisudhammaraja had conquered Sripur.[9]

Possibly because of the threat of Arakanese invasion the new governor of Bengal Khanahzad Khan did not reside at Dhaka. Khanahzad Khan instead installed Mulla Murshid and Hakim Haidar as governors in Dhaka.[10] Mulla Murshid and Hakim Haidar would be confronted with the full force of the Arakanese when the young king in 1626 marched on Dhaka.[11] The *Fatiyyah-i-ibriyyah* describes how during their government Dhaka was sacked by Sirisudhammaraja.[12] The sack of Dhaka would have taken place somewhere early in 1626 as in June 1626 following Mahabat Khan's defection to Shah Jahan, Khanazad Khan was recalled from Bengal and as a consequence his deputies were recalled from Dhaka as well.[13]

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[7] Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, pp. 311-313.
[8] Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, p. 312. The VOC bought in c. December 1624 400 slaves in Arakan. These slaves must have been the result of the raid described by Nathan. In 1623 the VOC was not allowed to buy slaves who had been in Arakan for more than a year. NA VOC 1084 Letter from Marten IJsbrantsz from Pulicat to the chamber Amsterdam dated 28 April 1625, fol. 167r and .N. A. VOC 1083 Letter from Hendrick Lambrechts from the yacht Medemblick at anchor before Urittaung (Arakan) dated 5 December 1623, fol. 188-190. For the functioning of the slave trade see Chapter 8 of this dissertation.
[9] NA VOC 1087 Report on Arakan by Jan van der Burch dated 5 December 1625, fol. 170r-172v. The report does not mention the sack of Dhaka. The capture of Sripur is mentioned as the main result.
[10] Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, p. 313.
[11] NA VOC 1094, fol. 245v-246r Letter from Marten Ysbrantsz., dated Pulicat 4 June 1626.
[12] Talish, *Fatiyyah-i-ibriyyah*, fol. 177b erroneously has 1033 AH (1623 AD) as the end date of Khanahzad Khan's *subahdarship* in Bengal, this must be a mistake as in 1623 Ibrahim Khan was still governor.
[13] NA VOC 1094, fol. 245v-246r. In a letter from Pulicat dated 4 June 1626 Marten IJsbrantsz. reported that the

The *Fatiyyah-i-ibriyyah* describes how the Arakanese set fire to the Mughal capital of Bengal, plundered its surroundings, and led the populace away as slaves.[14] Shihab ud-Din Talish mockingly describes that while Mullah Murshid and the Hakim Haidar were busy discussing literature the Arakanese king entered the city which they were supposed to defend.[15]

king of Arakan claimed a large victory in Bengal this year.
[14] Talish, *Fatiyyah-i-ibriyyah* , fol. 155b.
[15] Talish, *Fatiyyah-i-ibriyyah* , fol. 177b.

Arakanese *jelias* at sea near Pipli with the Mughal governor on horseback inspecting the city's defences. From Schouten, *Oost-Indische Voyagie*.

The recall of Khanahzad Khan was followed by a quick succession of governors which served to further destabilize Bengal. The Dutch governor-general Coen reported that every month new governors arrived 'who all tried in vain to clean up the mess'.[16] The death of Jahangir in October 1627 had again a negative impact on the Mughal's capability to rule effectively in Bengal.[17] The sack of Dhaka initiated the collapse of Mughal authority in south-eastern Bengal. The fact that a steady flow of slaves kept the VOC coming back to Arakan suggests that Bengal continued to pay tribute to the Arakanese crown following the sack of Dhaka. In 1628 the Dutch governor-general Pieter De Carpentier (1623-1627) in his final report to the directors in the Netherlands described Sirisudhammaraja as 'the most warlike king on the coast'. The Arakanese king he explained was the only local ruler who defied Mughal rule and was in fact continually at war with the imperialists. He suggested that the Arakanese kept an army of 500 frigates and approximately 80,000 men ready for their wars in south-eastern Bengal.[18] These observations are confirmed by Manrique who describes how between 1622 and 1629 no Augustinian monks had traveled from Hugli to Dianga because of the incessant warfare in south-eastern Bengal.[19]

In 1629 for example an Arakanese fleet sailed up the river Meghna. The fleet under the command of the Portuguese captain Diogo de Sá plundered villages only a few miles from Dhaka. Manrique described how the crews of the *jelias*:

> reaped a rich and plentiful booty. Among this they captured a lovely Mogol lady of rank who was escaping with her daughter and mother-in-law in a covered cart, accompanied by a few men on horseback and some servants. [20]

The invaders managed to leave the vicinity of Dhaka without ever being challenged by the Mughal fleet, which had its base at Dhaka. The Mughal lady captured by the Portuguese later explained to Manrique she had been married to a *Mirza* who held the rank of a commander of two thousand horses. After having been raped by the man who captured her she was forcefully converted and finally married to one of the young Portuguese captains in Dianga. This affair, according to Manrique, sufficiently enraged Shah Jahan to order the destruction of Hugli as the Portuguese from Hugli had strong connections with Portuguese communities in

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[16] Letter from Coen dated 9 November 1629. '*Alle maenden comender schier nieuwe gouverneurs, die niets trachten als te schrobben en te scheeren*'. Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, p. 5:29.

[17] Letter from Marten IJsbrantsz to Coen, dated Pulicat 30 July 1628. '*In Bengalen is voor ons niets te doen aangesien dit lant nogh geheel en al in oorlogh staat*'. Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, p. 7:1350-1352.

[18] NA Secrete Casse der Oostindische Compagnie, Archief der Staten Generaal 12581.13 volgnummer in inventaris 1254 '*Rapport van den gewesenen gouverneur Carpentier van de gelentheijt der saecken in d'Oost Indien ten tijde van sijn affscheijt aen haer hoog mogenden overgelevert den 29 september 1628'* n.f. headings Arakan and Bengalen.

[19] Manrique, *Itinerario*, p. 1:84 quoted in Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, p. 251.

[20] Manrique, *Itinerario*, pp. 2:316-312.

Arakan and Chittagong.[21] Although, as will be explained below, there were much more motives behind the removal of the Portuguese from Hugli in 1632, this event aptly illustrates how ineffective Mughal control over south-eastern Bengal was at the beginning of Shah Jahan's reign. The Arakanese more or less controlled eastern Bengal and could claim it as their domain. As a result the Mughals withdrew their capital from Dhaka to Rajmahal in the late 1630s. In Rajmahal they were safe from Arakanese attacks. It is also significant that in 1665 the Portuguese operating under the control of the Arakanese in Chittagong, after they went over to the Mughal side, were able to show complete records of taxes collected from Bengal dating back to c. 1625. These records Talish explained were a comprehensive overview of the division of the income of Bengal, specified on a village by village basis.[22] The existence of these records proves that the Arakanese had been able to control large parts of south-eastern Bengal following the wars of Sirisudhammaraja. Talish interestingly describes the Portuguese as having regarded south-eastern Bengal, or 'the tract from Dhaka to Chittagong', as their *jagir*.[23] It has of course to be remembered that these Portuguese formed part of the Mrauk U kingdom and were in fact employed by the Arakanese kings. The Arakanese were thus able to systematically levy taxes and extract land revenue from their Bengal domains from the middle of the 1620s. This strongly contradicts conventional views of Mughal rule in Bengal that regard the initial establishment of the Mughal capital of Bengal at Dhaka as the start of Mughal control over all of Bengal. Eaton's claim that 'soon after Islam Khan's arrival in Bengal, the Mughals succeeded in annihilating or winning over all major chiefs entrenched in the countryside since the time of the sultans' should therefore be revised.[24] Further on in this Chapter more evidence will be presented to substantiate the idea that Sirisudhammaraja had been able to considerably extent Arakanese control over south-eastern Bengal. But first Arakan's relations with Burma will be discussed.

5.2 War with Burma

On the Burmese front it appears that the Arakanese, in a loose alliance with the king of Siam,[25] were at war with the Burmese king Anaukpetlun from c. 1610.[26] In January 1616 Man Khamaung had repulsed a Burmese invasion force which had reached as far as Cheduba or Sandoway. In 1617 VOC reports suggested war with Burma was again imminent.[27] In

[21] Manrique, *Itinerario*, pp. 2:316-312. See also Van Veen, *Decay or defeat?*, p.215.
[22] Talish, *Fatiyyah-i-ibriyyah* , fol. 152a-152b. See also J. N. Sarkar, 'The Feringi pirates of Chatgaon, 1665 AD', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 3.6 (1907), p. 425.
[23] Talish, *Fatiyyah-i-ibriyyah* , fol. 107b-108a, 123b, 139a-139b.
[24] See for such a view Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, pp. 157 and also pp. 137-138, 149.
[25] Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, p. 2:236.
[26] As was discussed in the previous Chapter. See also Letters of Hans de Haze to Coen dated 5 June 1617 and 1 September 1617. Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, pp. 2:236; 2:267.
[27] Letter from Hans de Haze to Coen, dated Masulipatnam 1 September 1617. Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden*

1621 the *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi* claims an attack from the Burmese side necessitated Man Khamaung to withdraw his expeditionary force from the Meghna. Other than this little is known of the Arakanese-Burmese relations during the two decades of the seventeenth century following the loss of Syriam and the death of Filipe de Brito. The 1626 sack of Dhaka and the following breakdown of Mughal authority in Bengal meant the Arakanese could now once more turn their attention to Burma.

The Arakanese historiographer Sandamalalinkaya describes how in December 1626 Sirisudhammaraja ordered the invasion of Thanlyn and Pegu (Hamsawati). The king stayed at Sandoway while his minister the *chan ke kri* Nanda Kyo Than proceeded to Lower Burma. Both Syriam and Pegu were ravaged and looted. U Kala's chronicle is silent about this invasion.[28] The invasion of 1626 marks the start of the revival of Arakanese ambitions in Lower Burma. In 1628 Anaukpetlun was murdered by his son Minreidippa. Minreidippa had had a liaison with one of his father's wives, which had brought the two into conflict. Minreidippa was crowned king, but the parricide was immediately threatened by his uncles who where at the time in Upper Burma. Minreidippa asked Sirisudhammaraja for assistance and eventually for shelter. The request for intervention came at a not so opportune moment.

In 1628 one of the most important noblemen in Arakan, the *Laungkrak ca*, revolted against the king. Laungkrak was a former royal capital and situated close to Mrauk U. A Dutch trading mission arriving in Arakan on 24 July 1628 reported that shortly before their arrival the *Laungkrak ca* had tried to overthrow the king and had attempted to crown himself king.[29] Following the attempted coup d'état a civil war ensued in which a large number of noblemen were killed. It was estimated that of the *Laungkrak ca*'s people three to four thousand had died. The merchants Martinus Lowijsen en Roelof Kan described that also during their stay in Arakan people belonging to the rebellious faction were killed. The king apparently still felt that his position was not secure. The *Laungkrak ca* had escaped the killings and operated in a region outside the control of Sirisudhammaraja. The arrival of the VOC mission aroused suspicion as relations between the VOC and the *Laungkrak ca* had always been extremely friendly. The arrival of Dirk Haps, with four free merchants, with the VOC ship *De Kameel* on 26 August 1628, and the yacht *Haring* on 30 August 1628 lead to more misgivings about Dutch presence in Mrauk U. The VOC servants were not allowed to send messages to the factories on the Coromandel coast for fear they would alert the Mughals

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omtrent zijn bedrijf, p. 7:267. Afraid that this war would not end in 20 years it was decided to discontinue the VOC factory in Arakan. The prediction of the long duration of this war would prove to be not far from the truth.

[28] Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, p. 260.

[29] NA VOC 1096 Letter from Martinus Lowijsen and Roeloff Cornelisz. Kan to the governor Marten IJsbrantsz, dated Arakan 21 October 1628, fol. 136-137.

to the state of affairs in Arakan.[30] The revolt of the *Laungkrak ca* thus temporarily prevented Sirisudhammaraja to execute any plans he might have had towards territorial expansion in Lower Burma. Just at the moment the Burmese monarchy was in turmoil, Arakan itself briefly descended into a civil war.

After Sirisudhammaraja reclaimed authority in Arakan, in March 1629 he sent a stern warning to the new Burmese king Thalun (1629-1648). In a letter conveyed by two of his ambassadors Sirisudhammaraja threatened that although he recognized the new king's authority, he would not hesitate to invade Lower Burma again: '*Vous êtes bien intelligent, mon cher; (mais) s'il faut que je marche en personne, je marcherai*'.[31] This letter of Sirisudhammaraja clearly points to his ambition to follow in his grandfather's footsteps and to conquer Lower Burma. VOC sources in fact report already in February 1629 that one of their yachts, the *Jager* which had arrived in Arakan on 21 October 1628, was at that moment being used in an Arakanese campaign against Lower Burma.[32] Thalun reacted, perhaps surprisingly, with great humility to the Arakanese threats. U Kala attributes this meek attitude to the fact that Thalun was not officially crowned when he received the emissaries of the Arakanese king. It seems more likely however that the Arakanese ambassadors formed part of a larger expeditionary force already in Lower Burma, of which the yacht the *Jager* also formed a part. The fact that the Burmese kingdom had just gone through a period of unrest could of course equally have been an important reason to try not to tempt Sirisudhammaraja into invading. Thalun in his letter to Sirisudhammaraja clearly recognized the fact that the Arakanese king was a direct descendant of Man Raja-kri who had in 1599 ravaged Pegu.[33]

The conciliatory attitude of Thalun could however not prevent Sirisudhammaraja from attacking Lower Burma again in 1630. The governor-general of the VOC Jacques Specx reported in his letter to directors in Holland that the attack of the Arakanese king on Pegu had ruined several merchants on the Coromandel coast.[34] It is not without significance that during this attack, or perhaps the earlier invasion in 1626, Sirisudhammaraja took from Pegu a large bronze bell cast by Anaukpetlun. The bell was particularly significant in two ways. It firstly described both in the Burmese and Mon languages, the history of Toungoo rule in Pegu. Anaukpetlun had the bell inscribed with a history starting with the conquests of Bayinnaung

[30] NA VOC 1096, fol. 136-137; Letter from Frans Bruys from Puilicat to Coen, dated 5 December 1628. Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, pp. 7:1520-1522.
[31] Translation Jacques Leider in Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, p. 261.
[32] Letter from Frans Bruys from Pulicat to Coen, dated 5 December 1628. Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, pp. 7:1520-1522 and Letter from Marten IJsbrantsz to Coen, dated Pulicat 5 February 1629. Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, pp. 7:1536-1537. IJsbrantsz. hastened to explain to Coen that he had not given permission to assist the Arakanese king in his war against Pegu, but that he on the contrary had ordered the *Jager* to return by December 1628 to the coast of Coromandel.
[33] Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, p. 261.
[34] Probably because their ships or cargoes had been taken by the Arakanese. *Generale Missive* dated 7 March 1631. Coolhaas, *Generale missiven*, p. 1:290.

and ending of course with his own achievements. Secondly the bell was set under a *mandap*, or double roof, for the people to strike whenever they wanted to have their wrongs addressed by the king.[35] The symbolism of the capture of this bell can hardly be underestimated. A powerful symbol of kingship, of the king as protector of his people, and lastly of Toungoo rule in Lower Burma was removed from its shrine and taken to Arakan. The removal of the bronze bell is therefore another indication that Sirisudhammaraja was planning to subdue Lower Burma.

U Kala reports that in August 1630 the Arakanese again sent an embassy to Pegu, which was followed by an embassy from Thalun in October 1630. Apart from the salaries paid to the boatmen carrying Thalun's ambassadors, nothing is known about the discussions carried on between the two kings. The objectives and results of the 1630 invasion of Pegu by Sirisudhammaraja therefore remain unclear.[36] Two years later, in July 1632 another Arakanese embassy arrived at the court of Thalun, who at that time was establishing his authority in Chieng Mai. Thalun in return sent an embassy to Mrauk U in October 1632. Again nothing is known about the purpose of these embassies. Finally early in 1634 a revolt started in Pegu, which lead to large groups of Mon refugees arriving in Arakan and Siam. In September 1634 another Arakanese embassy left for the plains of the Irrawaddy, duly followed by a Burmese embassy to Arakan. Leider has described these embassies in detail, but he feels that from the available Burmese texts it is not possible to deduct the political motives behind these diplomatic exchanges.[37] Although the two invasions of Lower Burma in 1626 and 1630 point to a renewed interest of the Arakanese in Lower Burma, the reasons behind the failure to follow up on these successes remains unclear. Perhaps the unstable political situation in Arakan itself prevented Sirisudhammaraja from carrying out his intentions in Lower Burma.

In 1634 Thalun decided to change his residence from Pegu to Ava. The removal of the Restored Toungoo dynasty's capital from the coast to the interior has been subject to intense scholarly debate during the last century. Authors such as Htin Aung, Hall and Harvey viewed the move as a watershed in Burmese history, marking a shift from an outward oriented monarchy to an interior, almost xenophobic perspective, with ultimately negative repercussions for Burma's relations with the nineteenth century British Empire. These authors also explained the removal of the capital to Ava as a result of the Mon revolt in 1634.[38]

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[35] Ratna Paula and capt. Wroughton, ' Restoration and translation of the inscription on the large Arracan Bell now at Nadrohíghát, Zillah Alligarh, described by captain Wroughton in the Journal of the Asiatic Society, december 1837' in *Journal of the Asiatic Society* 7 (1838), pp. 287-297.

[36] Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 261-262.

[37] Leider says : *il est impossible d'en déduire une exigence concrète. Si nous ne doutons pas que le destinataire pouvait en tirer à l'époque des conclusions correctes, le lecteur contemporain, en revanche, est mal placé pour apprécier ces échanges d'ambassades et de correspondances.* Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, p. 262.

[38] Jeremias Van Vliet mentions an embassy from Pegu in 1634 asking for the cessation of hostilities between Pegu and Siam and the flight of about 100,000 Mon from Pegu to Siam because of the wars in Lower Burma.

Lieberman has argued that such interpretations are an oversimplification of the motives and rational behind the choice of Ava as the new capital.[39] According to Lieberman Anaukpetlun's and Thalun's commitment to Pegu was always only provisional. Although they remained most of the time in Pegu, they only built temporary palaces there and never constructed a *shwei-nan-daw*, or 'golden palace' in Pegu associated with a Burmese royal city. In diplomatic correspondence and court poetry Ava was always identified as the 'abode of kings'.[40] Apart from the reasons for moving to Ava that perhaps related more to emotional attachments as given above, Lieberman suggests two other motives for the removal of the Burmese capital to Ava. The first reason being the demographic superiority of Upper Burma, and the second the inherent security of a capital further inland. As Lieberman observed, a Burmese force travelling downriver on the Irrawaddy could reach Pegu from Ava two to three times faster than the other way around.[41] As Lieberman argues that the removal of the capital to Ava meant that the central administration of the Restored Toungoo dynasty was settled in a relatively stable environment. The depopulation of Lower Burma and the administrative reforms of Thalun allowed for an easier control of Lower Burma and Burma's overseas commerce.[42]

It is however clear that Lieberman mostly neglected the impact of Arakanese military pressure on Lower Burma. Apart from emotional attachments to Ava, Thalun had himself first crowned at Pegu in an elaborate formal coronation, be it not in a 'golden palace'. The fact that both Anaukpetlun and Thalun, as suggested by Lieberman, never constructed more than a temporary palace in Lower Burma should furthermore be associated with the continual threat of rebellion by the local Mon population and the very real possibility of an Arakanese invasion. The Arakanese invasions of 1626 and 1630 destroyed the city of Pegu twice with the Arakanese removing important symbols of kingship. Pegu always remained vulnerable to attack from the powerful Arakanese fleet, to which the Burmese kings had no real answer. To protect the district Thalun had to create special companies of artillery, musketeers and cavalry and set up a fleet of 51 war boats because Pegu was seen as 'the place most vulnerable to invasion'.[43]

Lieberman's idea about the strategic advantage of Upper Burma in fact aptly supports the thesis that the threat of Arakanese invasion contributed in no small means to the decision to move the Burmese capital from Pegu to Ava. The demographic superiority of Upper

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Chris Baker et.al., *Van Vliet's Siam* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2005), p.125.

[39] Lieberman, *Burmese administrative cycles*, pp. 58-60; Lieberman, 'The transfer of the Burmese capital from Pegu to Ava', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 1 (1980), pp. 64-83.

[40] Lieberman, *Burmese administrative cycles*, p. 58.

[41] Ibidem, p. 59.

[42] Wil O. Dijk, *Seventeenth century Burma and the Dutch East India Company, 1634-1680* 2 vols. (PhD thesis: Leiden University, 2004), pp. 1:xiv, 11-15.

[43] 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

Burma as an argument for the move to Ava is not wholly convincing, as massive deportations from Lower Burma by Anaukpetlun and Thalun to the North contributed much to the demographic superiority of the Upper Burma. Lieberman indeed described Thalun's resettlement programme as the largest population transfer of the Restored Toungoo period.[44] A king willing to settle in Lower Burma could perhaps with the same policy have affected a reversal in this respect, with the opposite result: demographic superiority of the South. All of this is of course not to say that as Harvey claimed, the move to Ava was the result of the policy of a short-sighted king who did not appreciate the benefits of overseas commerce. The move to Ava therefore seems to have been the result of a fairly complex process in which Arakanese military pressure on Lower Burma will certainly have played a significant role. The move to Ava at least allowed the Restored Toungoo dynasty to develop out of reach of Arakanese armies.

In this paragraph we have seen how the new found self-confidence of the Arakanese king was reflected in diplomatic contacts between Ava and Arakan. These diplomatic missions were part of a larger project of the Sirisudhammaraja to establish relations with rulers around the Bay of Bengal. Embassies were sent between the Dutch in Batavia (Jakarta), the court of Siam at Ayutthaya, the Portuguese in Goa, and the Sultanate of Aceh. This flurry of diplomatic activities coincided with the start of royal trading missions emanating from the Arakanese court to the ports in the Bay of Bengal. In the following paragraphs Arakan's relations with the VOC and Siam will be highlighted.

5.3 Sirisudhammaraja and the VOC

On the first of September 1627 an Arakanese embassy arrived in Batavia. The leader of the embassy, a certain Ugga[45], presented the governor-general Jan Pietersz Coen with some gifts, and a letter from king Sirisudhammaraja. The Arakanese king offered the Dutch his friendship and promised them the possibility to trade in a peaceful environment in Arakan.[46] The king requested rigging for a frigate and some sword blades as a present.[47] It is not difficult to see the similarities between the policy of the Arakanese king Sirisudhammaraja and the Dutch governor-general Coen. Both the VOC and the Arakanese tried to entice

[44] Lieberman, 'The transfer of the Burmese capital', p. 59.
[45] His name, written in the sources as *Ouga*, was first mentioned in a Letter from Marten IJsbrantsz. to Coen, dated Pulicat 24 January 1628, Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, p. 7:1221, which is confirmed in aLetter from Martinus Lowijsen and Roeloff Cornelisz. Kan to the governor Marten IJsbrantsz., dated Arakan 21 October 1628, NA VOC 1096,, fol. 136-137.
[46] Letter from Coen to Marten IJsbrantsz., dated Batavia 9 November 1627. Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, p. 5:30.
[47] Letter from Marten IJsbrantsz. to Coen, dated Pulicat 24 January 1628, Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, p 7:1221; Letter from Coen to Marten IJsbrantsz., dated Batavia 14 June 1628, Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, p. 5:295.

foreign traders to come and trade in their dominions, so as to increase their own wealth. In June 1628 the ambassadors left with the ship *Edam* for Arakan.[48] The ambassador Ugga sent some of his men onboard the VOC ship *Kameel* destined for Coromandel.[49] In Batavia the Arakanese had noticed that the Dutch settlement was almost stricken by a great famine after rice imports from Mataram had been stopped in the wake of the siege Mataram had laid to the city.[50] The Dutch entertained mixed feelings about the Arakanese presence in Batavia. On the one hand the diplomatic exchanges would provide the much needed rice to feed the city's population; on the other hand the presence of the ambassadors would impress on the Arakanese the crucial role of Arakanese rice for the survival of Batavia. Coen therefore decided that from now on ambassadors from Asian rulers were not welcome any more in Batavia. Friendly relations, he thought, could as well be kept by corresponding with local rulers. Ambassadors were not only costly to entertain; they also impaired one of the VOC's main advantages in Asia, namely the overview over the markets and the maintenance of a knowledge gap between the smaller individual traders and the company as a true multinational. In his letter to the Arakanese king, Coen congratulated him with his recent victories, and asked permission to buy rice and slaves. A special request was made to send two Arakanese *jelias* with their crew, to be used in the wars against Banten.[51]

In 1629 Sirisudhammaraja wrote to the Dutch governor in Pulicat, Marten IJsbrantsz. reminding the VOC's director in Coromandel that during the reigns of his predecessors there had always been a factory with employees in his kingdom as a token of the friendship between Arakan and the VOC. He asked IJsbrantsz. to establish a permanent factory as had been the custom earlier. The king was moreover annoyed that the Dutch merchants Martinus Lowijsen and Roelof Cornelisz. Kan had not allowed him to send his ambassadors and letters of friendship on board the *Edam* back to Jakarta (Batavia).[52] The following years the VOC however stuck by its decision to withdraw its personnel from Arakan. The VOC directors

[48] Letter from Coen to Marten IJsbrantsz., dated Batavia 14 June 1628, Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, pp. 5:295-296; *Dagh-register*, p. 2:355, entry for 16 June 1628.
[49] Where it incidentally never arrived, it foundered instead on the Arakanese coast after having suffered a severe battering during the monsoon. Letter from Frans Bruys to Coen, dated Pulicat 5 December 1628, Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, pp. 7:1520-1522. In his letter Bruys described the unhappy voyage of the *Kameel.*
[50] Letter from Coen to Marten IJsbrantsz., dated Batavia 14 June 1628, Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, pp. 5:295-296; Instruction from Coen for Martinus Lowijszen and council with the *fluijt* Edam destined for Arakan, dated Batavia 15 June 1628, Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, pp. 5:306-309. Mataram besieged Batavia in 1628 and 1629. Coen died during the siege as a result of disease. H.E. Niemeijer, *Batavia. Een koloniale samenleving in de 17de eeuw* (Amersfoort: Balans, 2005), pp.. 24-25; R. Raben, *Batavia and Colombo : the ethnic and spatial order of two colonial cities 1600-1800* (PhD thesis: Leiden University, 1996), p. 12.
[51] At exactly which victories this points is not clear. Coen probably refers to the Bengal campaigns. Letter from Coen to Sirisudhammaraja, dated Batavia 15 June 1628, Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, p. 5:309.
[52] NA VOC 1098, fol. 494 Letter from the king of Arakan to Maarten IJsbrantsz in Pulicat, dated Arakan 19 April 1629. The Arakanese king interestingly still identified Batavia as Jakarta.

noted that the primary reason for not keeping a trading mission in Arakan was that for the amounts of rice needed in Batavia it was not necessary to keep staff in Arakan who could keep rice in store. VOC crews arriving in Arakan had in previous years been able to buy rice and slaves on the spot. The extra costs of keeping a factory in Arakan were therefore deemed to be not in accord with the benefits of a permanent factory.[53] The following years trade between Arakan and Batavia would be conducted on an irregular basis.[54] Free merchants operating from Batavia would be allowed to trade to Arakan even after the strict protocol laid down by the VOC's directors in 1631 came into force, indicating that at this time the VOC did not take a strong interest in the Arakanese trade.[55] On 28 June 1631 the free merchants Gerrit van Alenburgh and Wijbout Albertsen set sail on the yacht *Haring* for Arakan.[56] From Coromandel Cornelis van Houten was sent by the VOC to trade in Arakan in 1631 and 1632. In July 1631 Van Houten had left behind silver for the purchase of rice, some of which arrived in Pulicat on board the ship of a Muslim merchant from Coromandel in 1631.[57] Batavia sent the ship *Beets* to Arakan on 6 August 1631. The *Beets* apparently went out to Arakan not only for the purpose of trade, but also carried 15 soldiers and stores for war.[58] On 6 March 1632 *Beets* returned to Batavia with 270 *last* rice. The ship carried letters from Cornelis van Houten advising Batavia that the presence of the free merchants Neledoe and Van Santen had been disadvantageous to the VOC.[59]

Arakan proved to be a reliable and cheap source for rice and slaves, which the VOC could not do without. In 1631-1632, when Arakan had been hit hard by famine, Sirisudhammaraja was still able to provide Batavia with much needed rice, although when the famine continued in 1633-1634 rice was only available from Arakan's Bengal dominions.[60] On 23 March 1633 free merchants with the ship *Peerl* arrived in Batavia with 120 *last* rice and a letter of Sirisudhammaraja.[61] Although the content of this letter is not known, it in all

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[53] Letter from Marten IJsbrantsz to Coen, dated Masulipatnam 17 September 1628, Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, pp. 7: 1445-1447; Letter from Coen to Marten IJsbrantsz., dated Batavia 12 May 1629, Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, pp. 5:516.

[54] *Dagh-register*, pp. 2:27,32, 65-66, entries for 27and 28 June 1631; 6 August 1631; 6 March 1632

[55] From 1631 free merchants were restricted to settlement in Batavia, Banda and Ambon. From Batavia trade was allowed to Pegu, Arakan, Bengal, Patani, Cambodja, Siam, Cochinchina, Solor and Makassar. The 1631 regulations were a set back for Coen's plans aimed at a thriving Dutch colony in the East. During Coen's time in government free merchants had been given more room to operate on routes profitably exploited by the company. Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, pp. 6:444-445.

[56] *Dagh-register*, p. 2:27, entry for 27 and 28 June 1631. The ship was wrecked near Pegu. In 1633 the company of the *Haring* reported in Batavia that Thalun had recently conquered Chiang Mai after a campaign lasting two years and involving a siege army of 286,00 men. Idem, p. 2:65; 158-159.

[57] *Dagh-register*, p. 2:44, entry for 6 August 1631.

[58] Ibidem.

[59] *Dagh-register*, p. 2:65, entry for 6 March 1632.

[60] *Dagh-register*, p. 2:65, entry for 6 March 1632. Although in 1633-1634 the famine in Arakan had been so severe that the free merchants operating the yacht *Peerl* had to be buy rice in Bengal. *Dagh-register*, p. 2:291 entry for 13 April 1634.

[61] *Dagh-register*, pp. 2:158-159, entry for 23 March 1633. The *Peerl* set sail for Arakan again on 29 May 1633. Idem, p. 2:185.

probability contained a renewed invitation to establish a permanent factory in Arakan. At least in 1634 the Batavia Council decided to 'extend the commerce of Batavia and embrace the trade of Bengal, Pegu and Arakan'. [62]

On 14 August 1634 two ambassadors of Sirisudhammaraja arrived in Batavia with a royal letter and presents for the governor-general. The king asked for a Dutch helmsman to conduct his ship to Batavia.[63] The request was turned down for unknown reasons. Curiously after the ambassadors had returned on 11 September 1634[64] on the ship *Tessel* via Melaka[65], Batavia wrote to Pulicat that it had been a wise decision to allow the passage of the ambassadors to Batavia. This was a marked departure of the earlier policy not to allow Asian diplomats in Batavia. The reason for this change of policy by the VOC remains unclear. The council remarked that the ambassadors had not caused them any problems, but described them as a couple of misers.[66] On 4 April 1635 the ships *Noordwijk* and *Daman* arrived in Batavia. This time the ships brought three ambassadors from Arakan. Sirisudhammaraja now asked Batavia to assist him in an attack on Ava. The Arakanese ambassadors traveled to Batavia with a letter from the king asking for four, five or six ships to take part in this expedition. The council at Batavia refused to participate, explaining to the Arakanese king that the VOC was not at war with Burma, and that moreover they were trading with Burma.[67]

Although the VOC was unwilling to commit itself in a military alliance with Arakan, diplomatic efforts by Sirisudhammaraja resulted in the permanent settlement of a VOC factory in Arakan. The instructions for Adam van der Mandere, the first chief of the factory, clearly show that this time the VOC was coming to stay in Arakan.

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[62] '*Omme voorders haere Ed. maxima nopende d'extensie van commercie te erlangen, ende waer te nemen, alle t'gene de Comp. tegen haer swaere lasten eenich soulaes soude connen toebrengen, hebben wy voorgenomen, den handel van Bengala, Pegu ende Aracan te embrasseeren'. Dagh-register*, pp. 2:352-353, entry for 12 July 1634. See also Om Prakash, *European commercial enterprise in pre-colonial India*, The New Cambridge History of India, G. Johnson, C.A. Bayly and F. Richards ed., vol. 2.5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.132. Of course facilitated by the Mughal destruction of the Portuguese stronghold in Hugli. Van Veen, *Decay or defeat?*, p.215.

[63] *Dagh-register*, p. 2:367, entry for 14 August 1634. They brought 10 cassa de Bengala and a diamond ring of 3 carat.

[64] *Dagh-register*, p. 2:389, entry for 11 September 1634.

[65] In Melaka they were transferred on 28 September 1634 to the ships *Noordwijk* and *Daman*. *Dagh-register*, p. 2:453.

[66] NA VOC 857 Batavia to Pulicat, dated 13 August 1635, fol. 480.

[67] NA VOC 1116 Resolution passed in Batavia, dated 25 July 1635 fol 151v. and NA VOC 857 Batavia to Pulicat dated 13 August 1635, fol. 480. NA VOC 857, fol. 495-496 Instructions for Adam van der Mandere; NA VOC 857, fol. 496-497 Letter from Batavia to Arakan, dated 16 August 1635. Apart from their diplomatic concerns the ambassadors had orders to invest the small sum of 1,000 Tanka in trade goods.

5.4 Arakanese relations with Siam

In the first part of the seventeenth century Arakan and Siam kept close diplomatic relations. The Dutch VOC merchant Jeremias van Vliet, writing in 1638, described how during the reign of king Songtham of Siam (r. 1610-1628) there had been annual embassies from both kings to their respective courts.[68] Van Vliet remarked these embassies served a dual purpose. Both parties expected these annual events to contribute to the safeguarding of the political relations between the two kingdoms, as well as to promote the commerce between Arakan and Siam. This alliance broke down after the death of king Songtham. Van Vliet writes that after the coronation of the new king Prasat Thong (r. 1629-1656) a Siamese embassy was sent to Mrauk U. Although Van Vliet gives us no definite date for this embassy of Prasat Thong to Mrauk U, it is safe to assume the event took place somewhere in 1634 or 1635.[69] Van Vliet noted that the king of Arakan had not sent a representative to the coronation of the Siamese king. The king of Arakan did not receive the legation, saying that he could not recognize an illegal usurper as king of Siam, and he therefore refused to give audience to the ambassadors or pay any honour to them. The king did not even allow the Siamese to return to Ayutthaya.

There are several reasons that might explain the sudden change in Arakan's relations with Siam after 1629. One fact that could explain this *renversement* is that Prasat Thong, before he came to power, had only been a leading official (*khunnang*) with the title of Okya Kalahom, and that although he was related to the royal clan, he was not part of the main dynastic line. The fact that Prasat Thong had come to power after a violent and protracted court conflict and that he had overthrown the previous dynasty thus might explain the cold reception his ambassadors got at the Arakanese court. It has to be remembered that only a year before Prasat Thong's coup, Sirisudhammaraja had almost lost his own crown to a leading minister and local lord, the *Laungkrak ca*. Although this might be one of the reasons for this sudden change in Arakan's relations with Siam, the events following the rude reception of the Siamese ambassadors could also point to a very different motive.

Probably somewhere in 1635 the Arakanese sent a fleet to Tenasserim to trade. In retribution for the treatment his own ambassadors had received at the Mrauk U court, Prasat

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[68] Jeremias van Vliet, *Beschyving van het Koninkryk Siam. Misgaders het verhaal van den oorsprong, onderscheyd, politijke regering, d'ecclesiastique, en costumelijke Huyshoudinge van d'Edelen en Borgerlijke Lieden: als mede den loop der Negotie, en andere remarquable saaken des Koningrijks Siam* (Leiden: Frederik Haring, 1692). For a good translation see Chris Baker et.al., *Van Vliet's Siam* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2005) 132-133. See also NA VOC, fol. 94-100 Letter from Andreas Crieck to Wemmer van Berchem, dated Arakan 11 December 1614.

[69] Baker, *Van Vliet's Siam* , pp. 26-27,133. As the report was probably written in Batavia in 1638, and Van Vliet mentions that in November last year (ie. 1637) hostilities broke out, before which an Arakanese trading mission was kept in prison in Ayutthaya for more than two years, and this was the mission following Prasat Thongs first legation to Mrauk U a date in 1634-1635 seems probable. The *Historical account of King Prasat Thong* by the same author written in 1640 seems to contradict this. In the *Historical account* Van Vliet puts the embassy to Arakan shortly after the coming to power of Prasat Thong in 1629 and connects it closely with his conflict with the Queen of Patani. Baker, *Van Vliet's Siam* , p. 313.

Thong threw the Arakanese traders in prison in Ayutthaya. Two years followed in which neither party seemed to be intent on solving the conflict. The Siamese had started renovating their old forts in Mergui and Tenasserim as a precaution.[70]

In November 1637 an Arakanese fleet appeared before Tenasserim and Mergui. The Siamese succeeded in capturing some Arakanese and brought them to the court in Ayutthaya. There they confessed that Sirisudhammaraja was bent on conquering Tenasserim and Mergui, but that he lacked the military means to execute this plan. Sirisudhammaraja had asked the Dutch and Portuguese for assistance, the Dutch had refused, but the Portuguese had offered him their assistance. Although the conquest of the two Siamese ports was deemed unfeasible, the Arakanese had sent a fleet to the Mergui archipelago to prevent Muslim traders from the coast of Coromandel to do business in Siam. Prasat Thong's reaction was to send the Arakanese prisoners back to Arakan with a letter reminding the Arakanese of the longstanding friendly relations between the two kingdoms, and threatening to sent his army to Arakan if the Arakanese king kept on harassing trade in the archipelago.[71] The fact that a Dutch trading mission from Arakan to Tenasserim in 1639 did not encounter any problems seems to indicate that after the death of Sirisudhammaraja relations between Arakan and Siam had considerably improved.[72]

The blockading of the Tenasserim coast and the harassment of Muslim shipping interestingly provides us with another motive Sirisudhammaraja might have had for going to war with Siam. From the middle of the 1630s it seems that the Arakanese king himself and also the rest of his court, became increasingly interested in trade. As the Dutch factors on the Coromandel coast remarked it seemed 'that this king is soon becoming a merchant as well'. The intensifying of diplomatic relations, the blockades of rivers and coastal waters in the northern Bay of Bengal all seem to point to a mercantilist policy being gradually pursued by Sirisudhammaraja. This policy could have well been modelled on Coen's vision of Batavia as the entrepôt of the East or on Melaka's role a century earlier.

5.5 Bengal: the Mughals and the Portuguese

In 1632 Qasim Khan, the Mughal governor of Bengal attacked and destroyed the Portuguese settlement of Hugli. It seems the close contacts between the Portuguese of Hugli and Chittagong was a major consideration for the Emperor Shah Jahan to instruct Qasim Khan to take possession of Hugli and crush the Portuguese power. The Portuguese of Hugli were accused of assisting the Portuguese of Chittagong in the Arakanese wars against south-eastern

[70] Baker, *Van Vliet's Siam*, p. 109.
[71] Baker, *Van Vliet's Siam*, p. 133.
[72] Arent van der Helm had arrived on 23 March 1639 safe in Tenasserim. NA VOC 863, fol. 479-485. Letter from GG&R to Adam van der Mandere, dated Batavia 6 August 1639.

Bengal. Qasim Khan laid siege to Hugli on 20 June 1632 and captured it on 15 September.[73] The Portuguese in fact deemed Arakanese military power so effective that the *Viso-Rey* in Goa asked the Arakanese king for help in an attempted recovery of Hugli in 1633 and he sent an embassy to Arakan.[74] The 1633 embassy to Arakan was headed by Gaspar Pacheco de Mesquita, who had already proved his worth in diplomatic negotiations with Arakan in the 1620s. Although the peace agreement of 1620 had broken down by 1623[75], Goa now needed Arakanese assistance in the attempt to recover Hugli as a trading base. Gaspar de Mesquita arrived with one galleon and four frigates ready for an expedition into Bengal. The two potential partners could however not agree on the terms of their alliance. According to Manrique the Portuguese ambassador could not resolve to make certain concessions without the consent of Goa.[76] The Portuguese fleet accordingly left Arakan after having stayed there for five months. The combined attack on Bengal was postponed and Gaspar de Mesquita left only with rice for Melaka.[77]

The 1630s proved to be crucial years. In 1634 the VOC embraced trade in Bengal, Arakan and Burma, which meant it would and could not be drawn into military conflicts between these three Asian powers. Arakan could not hope for substantial military assistance from the Dutch either in Bengal or in Burma. In the same year the Burmese, admittedly as a result of the threat of Arakanese invasions moved their capital to Ava, marking the starting point of a newer and stronger Burmese kingship.

5.6 Mrauk U at its Zenith

In 1635, following the great famine of 1631-1634, Arakan's power had reached its zenith.[78] Arakanese fleets operated freely from Bengal to Tenasserim.[79] The same year

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[73] Richard Burn, 'Shah Jahan' chap. 7 in Wolseley Haig and Richard Burn eds., *The Cambridge History of India*. *The Mughal period* reprint (New Delhi: S. Chand & Company, 1987), pp. 189-192. Van Veen, *Decay or defeat?*, p.215.

[74] *Dagh-register*, pp. 2:241-242, entry for 8 February 1634.

[75] In 1623 VOC captains reported Portuguese ships from Goa and Cotchin blockading the Arakanese coast. NA VOC 1083, fol. 188-190.

[76] Although Manrique puts the blame for the failure of the embassy on Gaspar de Mesquita, he also makes clear that the Arakanese king probably held Manrique himself responsible. Manrique, *Itinerario*, pp. 1 :322-323.

[77] Guedes, *Interferência e Integração*, pp. 182-183.

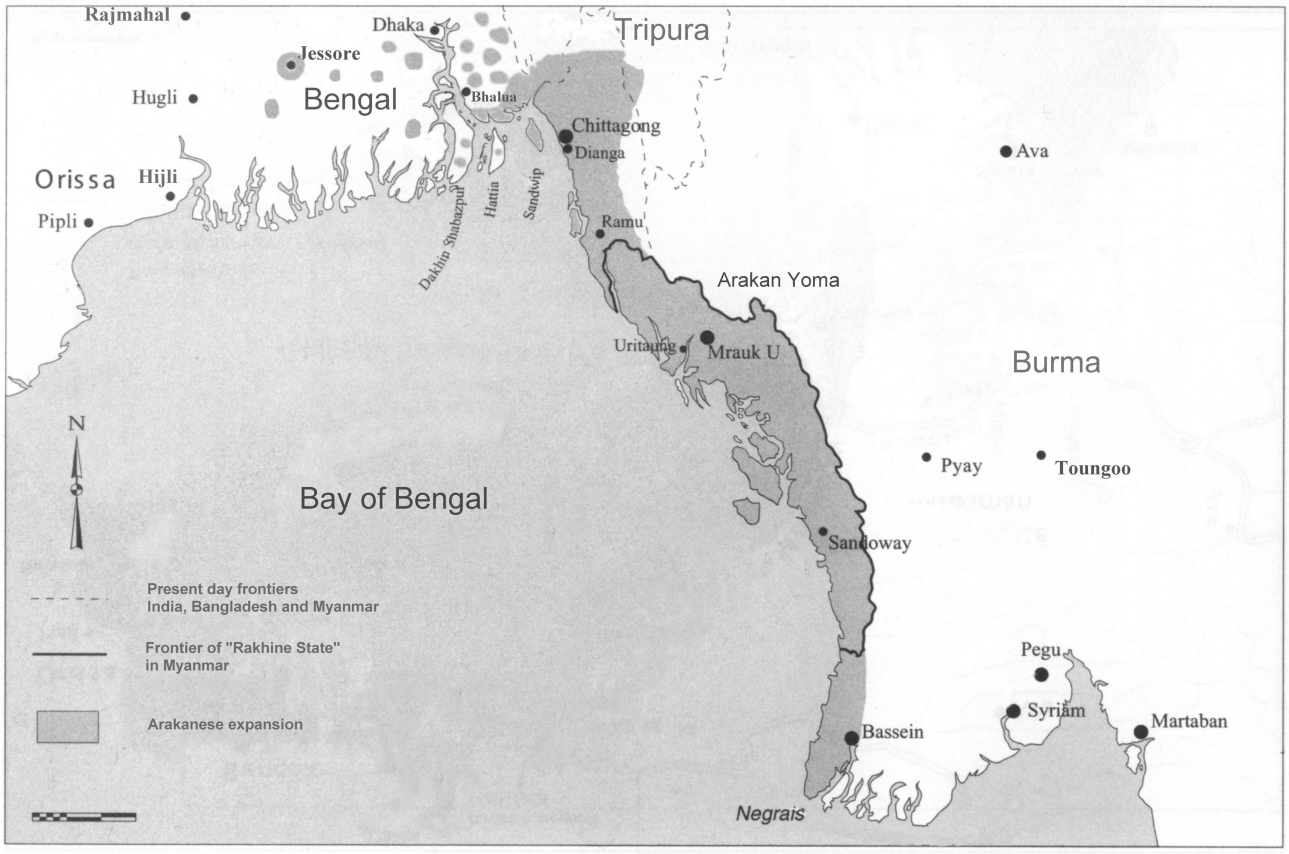
[78] Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, p. 251 *L'apogée de la puissance militaire (1622-1652)*.

[79] In October 1634 representatives of the English East India Company in Masulipatnam requested their Board of Directors: 'to sent two small pinnaces to remain on [the coast of Bengal] , of 80 to 120 tons to draw little water and to carry 12 or 14 guns. The Dutch never [are] without three or four of these vessels, which trade from port to port or are employed as men of war, never idle, and clear all their great charges on this coast. There is no thought of trade into the Bay without them, the greater ships riding so far from the shore, and the King of Arracan's jellines, or small boats of war, ever scouting between them, so as neither goods nor provisions can be brought off without pinnaces of some defence, which may go up the rivers without fear.' W.N. Sainsbury ed., *Calendar of State Papers. Colonial series, East Indies 1513-1634* 5 vols. (London, 1862-1892), pp. 4:583-589.

Sirisudhammaraja's official coronation finally took place. The expansion of Arakanese influence prompted the Burmese and the Mughals to retract their (provincial) capitals further inland. The Mughals felt so insecure in Dhaka that the seat of the Bengal *subah* was moved far inland at Rajmahal. The extent of Arakanese influence in Bengal is further illustrated by the fact that Bahadur Khan *zamindar* of Hijli, at least until 1644, paid a yearly tax to the Arakanese king. In fact Arakanese officials went to Hijli to collect revenue on a regular basis.[80] We should assume that Hijli was under Arakanese control from the early 1620s when Bahadur Khan had revolted against Ibrahim Khan and Man Khamaung established Arakanese control over the area, as was described earlier in this dissertation. Sarkar has suggested that Shah Shuja would later temporarily succeed in bringing Hijli back into the Mughal fold between c. 1655 and 1659.[81] The *faujdar* of Hugli Ahmed Beg in 1656 offered Candasudhammaraja an annual tribute if the king would promise his fleets would stay away from Hugli. The *faujdar* reminded the Arakanese that the payment of this tribute had been an established practice in earlier years.[82]

[80] Diary of Van der Helm 1644 entry for 14 March.
[81] Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, p. 333.
[82] NA VOC 1217, fol. 278-291 Letter from Hendrick de Dieu to Batavia, dated Arakan 20 November 1656, fol. 284v-285. Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the economy of Bengal, 1630-1720* (Princeton: Princeton university Press, 1985), p. 229. Prakash confirms the *faujdar* of Hugli was also an important merchant in Bengal.

Arakanese expansion in the 1630s[83]



The coronation of Sirisudhammaraja as described by Manrique in his *Itinerario* is a clear indication of the new self-confidence of the Arakanese monarchy. Manrique claimed that the coronation was part of Sirisudhammaraja's ambition to '*obtain the vast empires of Delhi, Pegu, and Siam'*.[84] Sirisudhammaraja's military achievements and foreign policy seem to confirm the ambitious goals of this king. Although the conquest of these mighty empires might seem several bridges too far, Sirisudhammaraja by military means did earn the respect of his imperial neighbours.This newly-won self-confidence of the Arakanese can also be gleaned from the coins issued at the coronation. While the first coins Sirisudhammaraja struck when he came to power in 1622 were still firmly rooted in the tradition of his predecessors, his coin of 1635 is a clear statement of Arakanese supremacy in the region. Earlier Mrauk U coins had trilingual texts in Arakanese script, Persian and Bengali. These coins, apart from the Arakanese titles of the king, also provided Muslim titles.[85] The 1635 coin is monolingual, in Arakanese only. The title of the king is given in Pali in Arakanese

[83] Adapted from Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, p. 503.
[84] Manrique, *Itinerario*, p. 1:351. The description of the coronation takes up the chapters 31 to 35.
[85] For instance, Sikandar Shah (Man Phalaung) or Husain Shah (Man Khamaung). Leider, 'These Buddhist kings with Muslim names', pp. 210-211.

script.[86]

The coronation of Sirisudhammaraja is described in detail by Manrique. Although several scholars have pointed out that large parts of Manrique's narrative of the coronation have been adjusted to suit the tastes of his European audience, to defend the Augustinian mission in Arakan and Bengal, and others even doubt whether Manrique was actually there, a critical reading of his text can still provide useful insights for the reconstruction of Sirisudhammaraja's reign.[87] Leider has raised some doubts whether Manrique was actually there at the coronation, or maybe even that the events described did not form part of the coronation of Sirisudhammaraja, but perhaps only of one of the lesser king's, the governor of Urittaung or even the coronation of the Burmese king Thalun.[88] There is however strong circumstantial evidence to suggest Manrique was actually in Arakan in 1635 and that the events he witnessed were in fact the coronation of Sirisudhammaraja and his twelve lesser kings. Manrique's own narrative describes how, on orders of Goa and the father provincial of his order, in 1633 he went to the Arakanese court to assist the Portuguese ambassador Gaspar de Mesquita. After the failure of this embassy he recounts how the Arakanese king would not let him go. Manrique attributed this to the fact that according to him Sirisudhammaraja blamed Manrique for the failure of the proposed Arakanese-Portuguese expedition to Bengal. After Manrique had spent 14 months in the capital he again requested his leave of the king. This time Sirisudhammaraja answered him that he would not let him go just at the time when all the princes and nobles were coming to Arakan for his coronation.[89] In Manrique's narrative the coronation indeed follows almost immediately, only preceded by his journey to the mountains near the Mayu river, which at the most could have taken a few months.[90]

The fact that Sirisudhammaraja had a new coin struck in 1635 is also evidence for his coronation that year. Arakanese coins always bear the year of the coronation. Apart from this, Dutch sources from early 1636 mention that *manjlis*, the representative of all foreign merchants in Arakan, had a role during the coronation of the Arakanese king. This suggests

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[86] M. Robinson and L.A. Shaw, *Coins and Banknotes of Burma* (Manchester: Lancashire and Cheshire Numismatic Society, 1980), pp. 44-65 and esp. pp. 55-56

[87] Leider, 'Friar Sebastião Manrique's labours in Arakan: Tilling the Lord's vineyard and defending Portuguese interests', *Journal of the Siam Society* 90 (2002), pp. 39-58.

[88] Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, p. 275. It is unclear when, if or why Manrique went to Burma. In Manrique, *Breve Relação dos Reinos de Pegu, Arracão, Brama, e dos Impérios Calaminhã, Siammon e Grão Mogol* ed. Maria Ana Marques Guedes (Lisbon: Cotocvia, 1997) a visit to Burma is mentioned, but not his presence at the coronation of Thalun. It is all the more strange that in the *Itinerario*, which describes Manrique's voyages in Asia, there is altogether no mention of a visit to Burma and there also seems to be no room for a voyage to that country in the narrative of the *Itinerario*.

[89] According to Manrique Sirisudhammaraja said to him: 'Come Padre, how is it that you wish to go to Bengal just when all the Princes and Nobles in the kingdom are coming here to attend my coronation?', Manrique, *Itinerario*, pp. 1:324-325.

[90] Manrique, *Itinerario*, chapters 1:29-34. For the identification of the mountains of Maum with the mountains near the Mayu river see pages 114 and 118, where the gulf of Maum is described.

the coronation had recently taken place.[91]

The coronation was as Manrique described attended by all the princes and nobles of the Arakanese realm. On top of this the king also proclaimed Mrauk U a toll free port for the duration of his coronation. This proclamation led to an influx of traders from all over South and Southeast Asia. The description of the coronation itself might at times be fanciful or even improbable[92], there are several elements in the account that have a strong relation with crowning rites of Buddhist kings in general and at the same time provide a specific Arakanese flavor. Manrique relates how Sirisudhammaraja dispatched a boat to Bengal to fetch water from the Ganges for the *abhisheka*, an ablution ceremony, he describes the presence of large numbers of Brahmins, narrates the crowning of the twelve lesser kings before the coronation of the high king himself and also gives a vivid portrayal of the role of the Buddhist monks during the coronation. All these elements point to the fact that he indeed witnessed the crowning of a Buddhist king. The Arakanese element in the narrative being represented by the description of the role of the Muslim nobles, the usage of the jewelry taken from Pegu in 1599, the description of the palace and the tour through the city of Mrauk U. According to Manrique the coronation of Sirisudhammaraja as high king was preceded by the coronation of twelve lesser kings, of which Manrique described the coronation of the king of Urittaung in detail.

[91] *Dagh-register*, pp. 3:35-38, entry for 14 March 1636, containing a transcript of a Letter from Adam van der Mandere to Batavia, dated Arakan 20 January 1636.
[92] See Luard's notes for the chapters 31-35 of Manrique, *Itinerario*, vol. 1.

Royal procession in Mrauk U from Schouten, *Oost-Indische Voyagie*

5.7 The end of the reign of Sirisudhammaraja

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. Arakanese chronicle traditions attribute to the reign of Man Phalaung a prophecy that the dynastic line of the Mrauk U kings would come to an end at the close of the first millennium BE[93] (1638 AD).[94] Similarly the contemporary account of Manrique, mentions that Sirisudhammaraja was apprehensive about prophecies circulating about his death shortly after his coronation.[95] During the following succession struggle Dutch sources finally report rumors about the usage of black magic.[96] 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 is today still perceived by the Arakanese themselves to be a decisive moment in Arakanese history.[97] As I have argued earlier and will substantiate below, the revolution following the death of the king in 1638 should indeed still be seen as a turning point in Arakanese history.[98]

As we have seen popular beliefs and old prophecies were not the only bad omens that threatened Sirisudhammaraja's position. In 1628 Dutch sources report that the *Laungkrak ca*[99], the ruler of Laungkrak, had rebelled against the king and posed a very real threat to his position. This rebellion was suppressed at the time and the king had a large number of the *Laungkrak ca*'s men executed. Far from suffering from this setback, it seems that the *Laungkrak ca* only gained in importance in the years following this rebellion. During the next decade he was one of the king's chief ministers vying for power with Ashraf Khan, the chief eunuch of the king who was at the time also the *lashkar-wazir*, or commander of the army.[100]

A closer analysis of the years following Sirisudhammaraja's coronation could provide

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[93] For the Arakanese era (BE), starting March AD 638, see A.M.B. Irwin, *The Burmese and Arakanese Calendars* (Rangoon: Hanthawaddy Press, 1909) and J.C. Eade, *The calendrical systems of mainland South-East Asia* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995).

[94] Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, p. 269.

[95] Manrique, *Itinerario*, p. 1:352.

[96] Adam van der Mandere writes that he had heard reports claiming the son of Sirisudhammaraja had been bewitched by his father and later on murdered by black magic. '*Men segt dat hij door sijn vader gedurende sijn leven betovert is geweest ende door duijvels consten omgebracht is*.' NA VOC 1126, fol. 293 Letter from Adam van der Mandere to Batavia, dated Arakan November 1638.

[97] Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan (Birmanie). Son histoire politique entre le début du Xve et la fin du XVIIe siècle* 3 vols. (PhD thesis : Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, Paris 1998), pp. 2:189-190.

[98] Van Galen, 'Arakan at the turn of the First Millennium', pp. 151-162.

[99] In the Dutch Sources we find the *Laungkrak ca* as 'Longrasa'.

[100] *Lashkar-wazir* probably an adoption of a Husain Shahi administrative title, *sar-i-lashkar wa wazir*. Subrahmanyam, 'Persianization', 72; Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 272-274; Subrahmanyam, 'Slaves and Tyrants: Dutch tribulations in seventeenth-century Mrauk-U', *Journal of Early Modern History* 1,3 (1997), pp. 201-253, pp. 220-223 Reprinted as 'Dutch tribulations in seventeenth-century Mrauk-U', S. Subrahmanyam ed., *Explorations in Connected History. From the Tagus to the Ganges* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,2005), pp. 200-247; Manrique, *Itinerario*, p.1:152.

valuable clues that could help to explain the end of the first Mrauk U dynasty in 1638. The coronation followed a period of prolonged draughts and famine that had started in 1631 and lasted until 1635. VOC reports indicate that large numbers of people and cattle died.[101] This may have undermined royal authority as the king was also responsible for the feeding of his people during times of famine through food distributions from the royal granaries.[102] Early in October 1635 a daughter of Sirisudhammaraja died, possibly as a result of the diseases usually associated with famines.[103]

Sirisudhammaraja's policy of continual warfare against the Mughals and the Burmese could also have been a reason for conflicts within the Arakanese ruling elite. In the years preceding the death of Sirisudhammaraja both neighbours sent ambassadors to Mrauk U to negotiate peace. In Bengal the attacks of the Arakanese so unsettled the Mughal governor Islam Khan Mashhadi (1635-1638) that in 1637 he sent an ambassador to Mrauk U with orders to negotiate a treaty.[104] The Dutch factor Adam van der Mandere reported that the ambassador brought a gift, six horses and robes of honour for the king. In his letter to the Arakanese king the Mughal governor Islam Khan urged Sirisudhammaraja to stop his attacks on Bengal. In his letter to the Arakanese king the Mughal governor wrote:[105]

> In the meanwhile it has been reported that you, of apparent sincerity, have held out temptations and summoned all the Ferangis [Portuguese] from their abodes and having provided them with boats and sailors encouraged them to practice piracy and commit depredations on the masses. This is an extremely improper behavior and is most unexpected and astonishing. … You should repent of and express remorse for your deeds and desist in future of such actions.

To which Sirisudhammaraja replied:

> Who can think of the crown and throne by challenging the forces of Telang [Mon] and Ferang [Portuguese]? Even a Rustam, with all his strength, would become cooked food for dogs, and Sam and Nariman, with all their store of their strength and bravery, would fall as morsels to the crocodiles. Besides on the land route, five hundred huge

[101] Vide infra and *Dagh-register*, pp. 2:65; 291, entries for 6 March 1632 and 13 April 1634.
[102] *Dagh-register*, pp. 3:23-25, entry for 11 February 1636 containing a transcript of a letter from Adam van der Mandere to Batavia, dated Arakan 5 January 1635.
[103] The court was in mourning from her death on 6 October until 18 October. Ibidem.
[104] The *Dagh-register* of Batavia records for 13 February 1637 a letter dated 31 January 1637 from Adam van der Mandere. Colenbrander, *Dagh-Register* vol. 3.
[105] Correspondence between Islam Khan and Sirisudhammaraja (1637). Ghulam Sharafuddin Qadiri Rashidi, ed, *Ashraf al-Musauwadat* translated in Syed Hasan Askari, 'The Mughal-Mahg relations down to the time of Islam Khan Mashhadi', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, 29th session (Gauhati 1959)* (Bombay, 1960), pp. 201-213, 209-210 and 211-213.

> war-elephants like black clouds are ever kept ready. They are clad in iron from trunk to tail and equipped with bells, big and small, sounding high and low notes. If, as is the saying, from one end to the other the lands are full ducks, all their strength will disappear on the very sight of the flying auspicious falcon.

Sirisudhammaraja also pungently referred to earlier failed Mughal attempts to invade Arakan and the recent sack of Dhaka when, 'Hakim Haidar and other imperial officers were mortally afraid of their lives, called for quarter and concealed themselves in every street corner and marketplace'.[106] The Arakanese king closed his letter expressing the hope that they would meet in battle after the rainy season. The arguably rude letters exchanged between the Arakanese and the Mughals show an acute awareness on the Arakanese side of Persian myths that reflect the presence of poets such as Daulat Qazi and later Alaol at the Mrauk U court. From a Mughal perspective the Arakanese however remained exotic barbarians who according to the emperor Jahangir had 'no proper religion' and who 'eat everything there is either on land or in the sea, and nothing is forbidden by their religion'.[107] It shows thus how on the one hand the Arakanese were acutely aware of Mughal idiom, but also how exotic the Arakanese appeared to the Mughals.[108]

On the Burmese side early in 1638 Thalun also tried to forge an alliance with Sirisudhammaraja. Thalun still was unable to control Lower Burma. In 1637 the Pegu *bayin* had revolted[109] and Arakanese raids in Lower Burma presumably were not helpful in his attempts to control the delta. The Burmese king promised to give his sister in marriage to the Arakanese king.[110] This peace offering was also rejected by the Arakanese and instead of marrying the sister of the Burmese king, Sirisudhammaraja sent a fleet to raid Lower Burma. This so enraged Thalun that the Dutch factors in Ava feared a full scale war between Arakan and Burma was imminent.

Could it be that there was a faction at court that did want peace with the Mughal and Burmese empires and that those people liked to see the reign of Sirisudhammaraja come to an end? There is proof of at least two factions at the Mrauk U court vying for power in the years following the coronation. In the Dutch sources we can discern a conflict between two Arakanese courtiers which is confirmed by Arakanese chronicles and Manrique.

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[106] Quoted in Subrahmanyam, 'Persianization', p. 47.
[107] Subrahmanyam, , 'Persianization', p. 77.
[108] Cf. M. Alam and S. Subrahmanyam, 'Southeast Asia as seen from Mughal India: Tahir Muhammad's 'Immaculate Garden' (ca. 1600)', *Archipel* 70 (2005), pp. 209-237, p. 223.
[109] Baker, *Van Vliet's Siam*, p. 126.
[110] NA VOC 1127, fol. 190v-191 Letter from Matthijs Leendertsz to Carel Reyniersen at Pulicat, dated Syriam 10 February 1638.

A short description of the development of the rice trade is needed to illustrate the conflict.[111] In 1636 the substantial Dutch demand for rice probably led to the institution of a royal monopoly on rice exports. Apart from the profits for the Arakanese, a major reason for the institution of such a monopoly could well have been the fact that the VOC had started operating as a rice merchant in Arakan itself. The VOC had observed how the famine conditions of 1635 had driven the price of rice in Arakan during the rainy season to 500% above its original price.[112] In doing so the VOC probably came into direct competition with local Arakanese lords and even with the king himself, who also distributed rice during the monsoon season on condition of repayment next year. The first attempt at monopolizing the rice export was made in 1635 by the *Laungkrak ca*, who also held the position of the king's treasurer and was his chief merchant.[113] The *Laungkrak ca* prohibited rice traders in Arakan to negotiate a price with the VOC and tried to sell rice 20% above market prices. In January 1636 the rice monopoly was however farmed out by the king to the *lashkar-wazir*, also the chief minister of the king. The *lashkar-wazir* was at that time together with the *Laungkrak ca* the most important man in Arakan after the king.[114] The fact that the *lashkar-wazir* was allowed to send his own ambassadors to Batavia, is illustrative of his position at the Arakanese court.[115] The poet Daulat Qazi even says that the reins of the monarchy were entrusted for a period of time to his patron Ashraf Khan:

> The great king Sri Sudharma knowing that his life would come to and end, transferred the rule of the kingdom to the hands of his minister Ashraf Khan.[116]

The Dutch did not hesitate to try to play the two court factions against each other. Adam van der Mandere reported in January 1637 that he had asked the *Laungkrak ca's* support in trying to evade the monopoly. He had brought him gifts and hoped that because the *Laungkrak ca* had recently risen in status that he could find a way to bring the price of rice further down.[117] If the *Laungkrak ca* could be identified, in his role as treasurer and chief merchant of the king, with the faction at court vying for peace, the *lashkar-wazir* on the other hand was

[111] Chapter 8 will deal more extensively with this subject.
[112] *Dagh-register*, pp. 3:23-25, entry for 11 February 1636 containing a transcript of a letter from Adam van der Mandere to Batavia, dated Arakan 5 January 1635.
[113] NA VOC 858, fol. 534-539 Letter from Batavia to Adam van der Mandere, dated Batavia 21 July 1636 identifies a person named *Josea* as the king's chief merchant. NA VOC 1125, fol. 477-485 Letter from Adam van der Mandere to Batavia, dated Arakan 10 January 1637 has *Josea* alternatively known as *Chama* and finally NA VOC 859 797-808 Letter from Batavia to Adam van der Mandere, dated 11 September 1637 identifies *Longrasa* (*Laungkrak ca*) as the same person as *Chama*.
[114] Manrique, *Itinerario*, p. 1:152 and Subrahmanyam, 'Slaves and Tyrants', pp. 222-223.
[115] *Dagh-register*, pp. 3:58-60, entry for 28 February 1637.
[116] Daulat Qazi, *Sati Mayna O-lora* Candrani quoted in Ghosal, 'Missing links', p. 256. Sri Sudharma is a sankritization of the Pali title of the king Sirisudhammaraja.
[117] NA VOC 1125, fol. 477-485 Letter from Adam van der Mandere to Batavia, dated Arakan 10 January 1637. and NA VOC 859, fol. 809 Letter from the GG&R to Sirisudhammaraja, dated Batavia 11 September 1637.

probably personally and commercially involved in the faction in favor of war. He is reported to have owned ships that were active in combat and blockaded the Tenasserim coast.[118]

The tensions at the Arakanese court at the turn of the first millennium of the Arakanese era are vividly described by Manrique in his account of the coronation of Sirisudhammaraja. Manrique describes horrific rumors that went round in Mrauk U describing how Sirisudhammaraja, egged on by his 'Muslim preceptor', resorted to incendiarism, human sacrifices and black magic (*yatra*) to secure his hold on the throne.[119] Subrahmanyam has suggested that the 'Muslim preceptor' of Manrique may be identified with the *lashkar-wazir*.[120] The rumors reported by Manrique were accompanied by reports of an impending revolt. According to Manrique:

> The Christians heard of this, and after one or two meetings decided *not to take sides with either party*, but to wait in a united body until they could see what the actual result of the present rumors would be.[121]

In Arakanese chronicle traditions the idea that two competing factions were warring for the Arakanese throne is confirmed. In the chronicles the end of Sirisudhammaraja's reign is put in the context of a war between two powerful magicians, one of them being the *Laungkrak ca*, identified as Nga Khuthala, the other as Nga Latrone, adviser to the king.[122] In this version of events Nga Khuthala seduced Nat-Shin-May the queen of Sirisudhammaraja and wrote a poetical composition known as Nga Tswe, which he had little boys sing for him in the streets at night. This way he hoped to destroy the power and the glory of the king. Seven months after Nga Latrone warned the king about the imminent danger the latter died. According to this tradition contemporaries generally believed that this was accomplished by the power of the *yatra* employed by Nga Khuthala

Leider has closely analyzed the Arakanese chronicles and compared their stories with those of Manrique. On the basis of this comparison he concludes that Sirisudhammaraja probably died as the result of a conflict between the two factions at court, and he suggests that the king might have been poisoned.[123] This conclusion is confirmed by VOC sources quoted earlier.

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[118] NA VOC 1125, fol. 477-485 Letter from Adam van der Mandere to Batavia, dated Arakan 10 January 1637.
[119] Manrique, *Itinerario*, p. 1:352 and cf. Charney, *Jambudipa*, p. 192.
[120] Subrahmanyam, 'Slaves and Tyrants', p. 223. n. 41.
[121] Manrique, *Itinerario*, p. 1:359. Emphasis mine.
[122] 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, p. 60.
[123] Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, p. 265-275.

The poisoning of the king is however not confirmed by the Dutch.

In a letter to the governor-general at Batavia dated November 1638, the Dutch chief of the Arakan factory, Adam van der Mandere reported the following:

> On the last day of May the king died and his son [Man Cane] was crowned the following month, on the sixteenth of June. We went to congratulate him on the twenty-fifth of that month. The new king presented us with a ruby ring of thirty or thirty-five Tanka and three coarse pieces of cloth. This new king died on the twenty-sixth of June. People say that his father cast a spell on him and that he [Man Cane] was killed by black magic.
>
> On the third of July Longerasa [the *Laungkrak ca*] was proclaimed king. He was crowned together with the widow [Nat Shin May] of the deceased king [Sirisudhammaraja].[124]

According to Arakanese chronicles cited by San Shwe Bu, the crown prince Man Cane, so called because he was born on a Saturday, ascended the throne with the name of Satui Man Hla (1638), twenty-eight[125] days after the coronation he fell victim to small pox, and it was widely accepted that his untimely end was hastened by his own mother who administered drugs calculated to enhance the virulence of the disease.[126]

The result of the power struggle at the Arakanese court was therefore that the *Laungkrak ca* ascended the throne after the mysterious deaths of Sirisudhammaraja and Man Cane.[127] This successful coup d'état of the *Laungkrak ca* led to his coronation on the third of July 1638 as King Narapati-kri.[128] It is interesting to note that also in this Dutch report rumors appear in which the use of black magic is connected to the succession struggle.[129] Only this time the

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[124] NA VOC 1126, fol. 291-297 Letter from Adam van der Mandere to Batavia, dated Arakan November 1638.
[125] Here Arakanese and Dutch sources show a slight difference of 1 or 2 days.
[126] San Shwe Bu, 'Report of the honorary archaeological officer, Arakan, for the year ending 31st March 1922', p. 60.
[127] San Shwe Bu and M.S. Collis, 'The strange murder of king Thirithudhamma', *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 13 (1923), pp. 236-243.
[128] Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan* (1998), pp. 290-99; San Shwe Bu, 'Strange murder'. San Shwe Bu relates how Nat Shin May gathered all the nobles and princes of the kingdom in a palace and kept them as prisoners until they had elected a new king, they were thus forced to choose the lover of the queen, Nga Khuthala who took the royal name of Narapati-kri. According to San Shwe Bu, 'the new king would have nothing to do with the guilty queen as soon as he was on the throne and so he built a special palace for here where she stayed the rest of her life.' San Shwe Bu, 'Report of the honorary archaeological officer, Arakan, for the year ending 31st March 1922', p. 60.
[129] Adam van der Mandere writes that he had heard reports claiming the son of Sirisudhammaraja had been bewitched by his father and later on murdered by black magic. '*Men segt dat hy door syn vader gedurende syn*

blame is laid with Sirisudhammaraja. As we saw in Arakanese chronicle traditions the death of the crown prince is attributed to a spell cast on him by the queen Nat Shin May. For a proper understanding of the Dutch report it has to be remembered that the Dutch entertained extremely good relations with the usurper Narapati when he was still the *Laungkrak ca*. Any stories they heard about the death of Man Cane and Sirisudhammaraja therefore probably would have emanated from the faction at court supporting the *Laungkrak ca*.

Conclusion

The reigns of Man Khamaung and Sirisudhammaraja had resulted in the extension of Arakanese control over large areas of south-eastern Bengal. Mughal authority had been successfully challenged. Continuous warfare in Bengal also drove the Mughals and European trading companies away from south-eastern Bengal. The Mughals had moved their capital to Rajmahal and European trading companies were forced to abandon earlier plans to settle in Chittagong and instead set up their trading posts on the river Hugli, further away from economic centres such as Dhaka and Sripur, but safe from the Mughal-Arakanese conflict. On Arakan's eastern border, relations with Burma developed on a comparable vein. Unable to counter Arakanese military power in Lower Burma, the Burmese removed their capital city to Ava where they would also be safe from Arakanese attack. Instability at home however prevented Sirisudhammaraja to extend Arakanese control even further. At the death of Sirisudhammaraja in the year 1000 of the Arakanese era, Arakanese power in the Bay of Bengal was at is highest point. The reigns following this last king of Man Pa's royal line would see the gradual decline of Arakanese control over south-eastern Bengal and the collapse of the kingdom.

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leven betovert is geweest en door duyvels consten omgebracht is.' NA VOC 1126, fol. 293 Letter from Adam van der Mandere to Batavia, dated Arakan November 1638.