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

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE END OF A GOLDEN AGE (1652-1692)

Candasudhammaraja (1652-1684) 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 1684. It is during his reign that the gradual loss of control over Chittagong that had been initiated by the disastrous policies of Narapati-kri would lead to the conquest of the city by the Mughals. The loss of Chittagong eventually even resulted in the collapse of the Mrauk U state 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.¹ In the following paragraphs 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. At the same time the Mughals advanced further East during the time the Mughal prince Shah Shuja was *subahdar* in Bengal.

7.1 The VOC returns to Arakan

Candasudhammaraja at the start of his reign proclaimed a temporary cessation of taxation for the duration of three years. This measure was deemed necessary because his father had increased taxes to such an extent that the country had been considerably impoverished.² Alaol aptly describes the situation:

All those who had gone away to different countries in fear of the former king and had suffered from sorrow and grief, now returned, hearing the greatness of the king Candra Sudharma, and forgot the sorrows of this place which had gone wrong.³

¹ Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp., 287-288 and passim. Wouter Schouten, *Oost-Indische Voyagie; Vervattende veel voornamen voorvallen en ongemeene vreemde geschiedenissen, bloedige zee- en landt-gevechten tegen de Portugeesen en de Makassaren; Belegering, bestorming en verovering van veel voornamen steden en kasteelen. Mitsgaders een curieuse beschrijving der voornaemste landen, eylanden en koninkrijcken en steden in Oost-Indien; haer wetten, zeden, godtsdiensten, costumen, drachten, dieren, vruchten en planten. Als oock sijn seer gevaerlijcke wederom-reyse naer 't vaderlandt, daer in een bysondere harde ontmoetinge met d'Engelsche oorloghs-vloot, soo in Bergen Noorwegen als in de Noord-Zee* (Amsterdam: Jacob Meurs en Johannes van Someren, 1676).

² Heijden en Kunst, *Vervarelyke schipbreuk*, pp. 82-89.

³ Alaol, *Sayaphul Muluk Badiojjamal* quoted in Ghoshal, 'Missing links', p. 263. The Bengali poet sanskritized the name of Candasudhammaraja to Candra Sudharma.

The young age at which Candasudhammaraja became king meant that during the early years of his reign the country was governed in his name by a group of *Sit-kes*.⁴ Dutch sources indicate that all these men were now largely *homines novi*, an indication that the reign of Satuidhammaraja had not come to a peaceful end.⁵ In his introduction to the *Padmavati* Alaol also says that when Candasudhammaraja succeeded to the throne in 'his prime youth', the rule of the kingdom was vested in his patron Magana Thakur, adding that the young king was married to his sister.⁶ In 1656 it was reported that the king was still not interested in the affairs of state and that he was very much depended on the advice of 'his monk'. This monk was in May 1656 accused of treason and after lengthy discussions in the palace thrown into the jungle.⁷ This incident was followed by rumours that the brother of the king had attempted to take the crown, the details of which are not clear.⁸

After an invitation to return to Arakan by Candasudhammaraja, the Dutch company returned in 1653 to Arakan because the supply of rice to Batavia was endangered by a war with Mataram.⁹ The VOC again needed Arakan to feed its cosmopolitan centres like Melaka and Batavia and Ambon and Banda, slaves were only a secondary concern.¹⁰ The governor-general of the VOC in Batavia Carel Reniers sent Johan Goessens as his ambassador to Arakan to negotiate a peace with the Arakanese king. Goessens arrived with a list of 17 points the VOC wanted to incorporate in a treaty with Arakan.¹¹ This time both parties seemed willing to compromise. The Dutch were received by the king on 16 February on which occasion he showed he was favourably inclined to the reestablishment of a VOC factory in Arakan. Negotiation on the exact wording of the treaty now started and Goessens made frequent visits to several *Sit-kes* to discuss the terms of peace. On 6 March a *firman*, in Arakanese, Portuguese and Dutch, was received allowing the company a free and unmolested trade in Bengal, which was sent immediately to the VOC commissioner in Pipli Johan

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ NA VOC 1200, fol. 235-252 Report for the governor-general Carel Reniers and the council of India concerning the embassy [of Johan Goessens] to the king of Arakan, dated Melaka 12 June 1653., fol. 245v.

⁶ Alaol, *Padmavati*, quoted in Ghosal, 'Missing links', pp. 259, 264. It is not clear who this Magana Thakur actually was. He probably died in 1658. On the reception of the *Padmavati* see Thomas de Bruijn, *The ruby hidden in the dust. A study of the poetics of Malik Muhammad Jayasi's Padmavati* (Leiden, 1996).

⁷ NA VOC 1214, fol. 201-206 Letter from Hendrick de Dieu to Batavia, dated Arakan 8 January 1656 and NA VOC 1217, fol. 278-291 Letter from Hendrick de Dieu to Batavia, dated Arakan 20 November 1656.

⁸ NA VOC 1217, fol. 286v.

⁹ *Dagh-register*, vol. 1653, pp. 112-113 entry for 26 July 1653 containing the translation of a Letter from Candasudhammaraja to the governor-general in Batavai n.d.

¹⁰ Rice is the primary motive to return to Arakan, slaves for the Spice islands are of secondary concern. NA VOC 876, fol. 704-708 Instructions for the council of the yachts *Johan Baptista* and *Kat*, and the *fluit Os* destined for Arakan, dated 7 October 1652 and NA VOC 876, fol. 709-727 Instructions for Johan Goessens, dated Batavia 7 October 1653., fol. 709.

¹¹ J.E. Heeres and F.W. Stapel eds., *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlandico Indicum. Verzameling van politieke contracten en verdere verdragen door de Nederlanders in het Oosten gesloten*, Bijdragen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 57, 87, 91, 93 en 66 (The Hague, 1907-1955), vol. 2 pp. 54-61. This is the text originally proposed by Reniers and not the actual treaty.

Verpoortere.¹² The king also sent out orders to the Portuguese in Dianga to bring their slaves to market in Arakan. After the Dutch had left Arakan in 1647 the Portuguese had stopped bringing their slaves to the Arakanese markets, but instead started selling them in Dianga or Pipli. On 12 March a free trade in rice and slaves was promised by the king, but not yet officially proclaimed in the country by men with gongs. After Johan Goessens had threatened to go to Coromandel to buy rice, and had sent the ships down to Urittaung to prove he was serious, the peace treaty was finally officially pronounced in public and made over to the Dutch. The treaty finally consisted of 16 articles:

1. First, all previous events between the two sides will never again be spoken of, forgotten and banished from memory, as if they had never happened.
2. Of the seven Dutchmen captured on the Ganges near Hugli, and subsequently sent to Arakan, and now restored to the VOC, three will remain in the VOC factory in Arakan until his majesty will have received the rest of his people captured by the VOC.
3. The king of Arakan will issue strict orders that his majesty's armada will not molest or attack VOC ships or sloops at anchor near Pipli or anywhere on the river Ganges. Offenders will be severely punished, and their punishment will be promptly executed.¹³
4. VOC ships arriving in Arakan will promptly receive experienced pilots and *jelias* to bring them up into the *bandel*.
5. That VOC letters to his majesty will be handed over to his majesty immediately, without having to wait three or four weeks, as if they were not important, or offensive to his majesty.
6. When the VOC captain wishes to speak his majesty, he will always be received in audience, if the king is not available in a public audience he will be allowed to seek an audience in the private audience chamber of the king.
7. That the VOC will be allowed to trade freely in his majesty's domains in Arakan and Bengal, nowhere excepted, as well on water as on land in commodities such as slaves, rice, wax etcetera that are allowed to the VOC, without having to accept guards or spies in and around our factory.
8. That the VOC will be allowed to trade, negotiate and correspond with whom they see fit, be they of low or high standing. That the VOC will not be forced to buy goods at inflated prices from people they do not want to trade with, like it happened in the time

¹² NA VOC 1200, fol. 241.

¹³ The king sent a *firman* to the Portuguese *capitão-mor* in Dianga not to attack Dutch shipping in Bengal. This royal order was not always adhered to. In 1655 the Portuguese from Arakan had taken goods from the VOC in Bengal, which were returned later on the basis of the Arakanese-Dutch treaty. NA VOC 1212, fol. 138-168. A similar thing happened in 1664 when a group of 10 to 12 *jelias* plundered the Ganges. *Dagh-register* 1664 594 entry for 30 December 1664.

of the *lashkar-wazir* and later, but that the company shall be allowed to buy goods at the market conditions.

9. Not only shall the company be allowed to trade freely in all goods they see fit, but also shall they be exempt from all taxes, tolls, *raderijen*¹⁴, or *tsieonkans*, or by whatever name these taxes may be known. This will apply to all goods the company brings in to the kingdom and all goods bought and transported here in Arakan and Bengal, or any other places that are under the king's jurisdiction.
10. That VOC officials will be allowed to embark and disembark goods in their ships without having to contend with guards or inspectors, like was the practice before 1638. Only when the company embarks slaves, the people of the *kotwal*, *rwa-ca*, and *sangma* will be allowed to check that the VOC is not exporting *man kywan*, or persons speaking Arakanese and those who are more than seven years in Arakan. If they find these people they will take them back and present the VOC immediately with substitutes.
11. That the VOC will be allowed to change money at going rates against Arakanese currency or such goods as they may see fit, without losing money in the process.
12. That the company shall be given a spacious and suitable spot of land to build a factory, safe from fires from neighboring houses.
13. That when company officials have an audience with the king, they will be allowed to have their own translator nearby.¹⁵
14. That when they have an audience with the king they will show him respect according to their own customs and shall not be forced by the *kotwal* or someone else to be thrown on the ground in front of the king, to be laughed at by all and sundry
15. That the king will present the VOC with the *firman*s confirming the free trade in Arakan and Bengal as agreed to above. That these *firman*s will be immediately announced and proclaimed by the gong throughout the country
16. That the king will restore to the VOC the children procreated by Dutch subjects with indigenous women, namely: the child of Adriaan van der Stel, the child of Bastiaan Jacobsz., two daughters of Jan den Engelsman, of which one is married, and one daughter of Claes Harmsz. Bischoep.

Signed in the palace of the king of Arakan, dated 22 March 1653.

¹⁴ From the Persian *rahdar* for toll-collector.

¹⁵ The VOC brought two translators to Arakan in 1653, one named Manuel de Mense – in Arakan known as Pamiara - who spoke Arakanese and Bengali, the other named Joost de Roover who spoke Bengali. De Roover, whose name translates as “robber” was appropriately named as he had been out several times with the Portuguese fleet to raid Bengal for slaves during the time of Van der Helm. Pamiara or Manuel de Mense had also been part of the mission of Hensbroeck and the expedition of Cocqu. NA VOC 1200, fol. 249v. and *Dagh-register*, vol. 1653, pp. 114-115.

The treaty is an important document as it testifies the extent to which the Arakanese were willing to compromise to get the Dutch company to settle in Arakan again. Dutch claims to old debts and references to alleged malpractice by the Arakanese in previous years did not make it in the final treaty. But, all in all the treaty was almost a copy of the articles proposed by the VOC at the start of the negotiations. The VOC now enjoyed a tax and toll free trade throughout Arakan van Chittagong. The return of the VOC fitted in a policy of the new king to try to attract trade back to Arakanese ports and to reinvigorate the Arakanese economy.

The king had at the start of his reign not only promised his subjects freedom of taxes, but he had also released all the Portuguese who had been jailed by his father. These Portuguese had resettled in Dianga and had restarted their slave raiding in Bengal in 1653. The departure of the VOC had meant the end of the slave trade in Arakan. Slaves were not brought to markets in Arakan anymore, but were instead sold in Dianga or Pipli.¹⁶ This was reflected in the fact that slave prices are from 1653 reported in Rupees and not in Tankas.¹⁷ The Arakanese market for slaves had disappeared, not only because of the departure of the VOC, but also because indigenous demand had collapsed, possibly because of the gradual drying up of revenues from south-eastern Bengal. The fact that the Portuguese now sold their slaves outside Arakan in Dianga and Pipli meant that the king had to reorganise taxation. The Portuguese now had to hand over to the king 25% of the slaves captured in Bengal, instead of paying a percentage per slave sold on the Arakanese market as had been the practice earlier.¹⁸ The slave trade also seemed to have become more and more a Portuguese affair. It is significant that the *firman* ordering the Arakanese fleet not to attack Dutch shipping in Bengal was addressed to the Portuguese *capitão-mor* in Chittagong and not to the Arakanese governor, suggesting that now it were primarily Portuguese captains that went slave raiding and plundering in Bengal. It also confirms the idea that Arakanese control over Chittagong had significantly declined since the end of Sirisudhammaraja's reign.¹⁹

In 1655 the king issued a *firman* that his Portuguese subjects should start bringing their captives to Arakanese markets again. The Arakanese seemed to be afraid that the Bengali community in Chittagong because of the slave trade would become increasingly powerful and that they would soon become a threat to Arakanese authority. A heavy tax was levied on the

¹⁶ See Schouten, *Oost-Indische Voyagie*, pp. 3:7-16;58.

¹⁷ The silver Tanka weighing about 10.6 gm. had been the standard coin of Bengal before the introduction of the heavier silver Rupee of 11.6 gm. By Humayun or Sher Shah between 1538-1545. Arakan adopted Tanka standard coins, but the Arakanese kings never minted to the Rupee standard. Michael Mitchiner, *The land of water. Coinage and History of Bangladesh and later Arakan, circa 300 BC to the present day* (London: Hawkins, 2000), p. 113.

¹⁸ NA VOC 1212, fol. 138-168 Letter from Hendrick de Dieu and Gerrit van Voorburg to Batavia, dated Arakan 3 November 1655., fol. 146.

¹⁹ *Dagh-register*, vol. 1653, pp. 112-113. Letter from the king of Arakan.

Bengalis in Chittagong in order to reduce their spending power.²⁰ The Arakanese governor in Dianga, or *Bo Man*, collected the best slaves as tribute and tax for the king. The hold of the Arakanese king over the Portuguese community in Bengal appeared to have considerably decreased since the troubles following the 1638 dethronement of the old royal family. In the late 1650s Candasudhammaraja several times sent letters to Batavia with excuses regarding his inability to force the Portuguese to bring their slaves to markets in Arakan.²¹ VOC servants in Arakan also complained to Batavia that their colleagues in Bengal were not helping to improve matters as these were buying slaves from the Portuguese in Pipli.²²

The return of the Portuguese to Arakanese controlled Bengal and the restart of slave raiding prompted Mughal authorities in Bengal to send ambassadors to Mrauk U. The *faujdar* of Hugli Ahmed Beg offered Candasudhammaraja 2,000 Rupees annually if the king would promise that his fleets would stay away from Hugli. The ambassador recalled that the payment of this annual tribute had been an established practice in earlier years. It is interesting to note that the same Ahmed Beg also came to trade in elephants in Arakan on account of his Mughal lord.²³

The 1650s witnessed high inflation in Arakan. Gold prices soared and the king prohibited the export of gold. The scarcity of gold was part of the general rise of the prices of almost all commodities in Arakan.²⁴ The price of cowries²⁵ had also risen since the VOC arrived in Arakan in 1652 from 1 Rupee for 80 pounds to 1 Rupee for 50 pound. The sharp increase in the price of cowries in 1659 seemed to have been caused by a large fire that destroyed a warehouse full of cowries. In February 1659 a ship of the *rwa-ca* of the *bandel* departed for the Maldives to buy new cowries.²⁶ The shortage of cowries was aptly described by Schouten:

When people in Arakan go to the local markets, they pay with cowries. These cowries

²⁰ The king in fact revoked the earlier tax exemption that he had issued for three years at the start of his reign and now claimed arrears for these three years. NA VOC 1214, fol. 190-200v Letter from Hendrick de Dieu to Batavia, dated Arakan 24 December 1655., fol. 190v-191.

²¹ *Dagh-register*, vol. 1656-1657, pp. 168-169 entry for 10 January 1657, containing the translation of a Letter from Candasudhammaraja to the governor-general in Batavia, n.d. and *Dagh-register*, vol. 1657, pp. 158-160 entry for 16 May 1657, containing the translation of a Letter from Candasudhammaraja to the governor-general in Batavia, n.d.

²² NA VOC 1212, fol. 138-168 Letter from Hendrick de Dieu and Gerrit van Voorburg to Batavia, dated Arakan 3 November 1655.

²³ 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*, p. 229. Prakash confirms the *faujdar* of Hugli was also an important merchant in Bengal.

²⁴ NA VOC 1221, fol.469-491 Letter from Hendrick de Dieu and Gerrit van Voorburg to Batavia, dated Arakan 22 February 1657, fol. 473v-474 and 475-477.

²⁵ Shells from the Maldives used as currency in Arakan.

²⁶ NA VOC 1233, fol. 565-576 Letter from Gerrit van Voorburg to Batavia, dated Arakan 24 march 1660., fol. 572v-573.

are small shells, of which you get 80 for one blank²⁷ If one wishes to buy a fish or two, a lot of these little shells are needed. The smallest Arakanese coin is the Tang [Tanka] or Moorish Roepie [Rupee], which is worth about 25 Dutch stivers.²⁸ If one exchanges one Tang, one gets in return about 2,660 shells. To carry all this you then need a large sack and someone to carry your money on his back.²⁹

7.2 *The Mughal advance in south-eastern Bengal*

In December 1656 news reached Mrauk U that the Mughal governor of Bengal Shah Shuja had assembled an army to invade Arakan.³⁰ The Arakanese feared that he would bring with him a legitimate heir to the Arakanese crown. Rumour had it that it was a relative of Sirisudhammaraja who led the invading army. The army was said to consist of thousands of foot soldiers, cavalry and elephants, all heading to Chittagong. Unconfirmed reports told the Arakanese that the ruler of Sandwip had joined the Mughals in their advance on Arakan. The Arakanese immediately mobilized everything they had. The fleet had not been used for a long time and lay dismantled on shore. Frantic efforts were made to reassemble the boats and in the meantime a provisional army, of a few thousand Mon soldiers was sent over land to Dianga. The fleet was ready to be launched on 21 December 1656, a week after news of the impending invasion had reached Mrauk U. This fleet consisted of *ghurabs* and *jelias*, manned with about 7,000 men and led by the *ko-ran-kri*. After this fleet had left, repairs to the rest of the fleet continued and a formidable land force was assembled. On a daily basis small groups of 500 to 600 men departed in the direction of Dianga. People were pressed into service until well into January 1657, at the end of which month finally a veritable armada of about 60,000 men departed for Bengal. The army now totalled an estimated 100,000 people, both on land as on water.³¹ The Arakanese busied themselves in repairing the forts in Chittagong and on the route between Bengal and Arakan proper. Mughal prisoners however reported that Shah Shuja had changed his plans and now aimed for Tripura. The statements of the Mughal prisoners were confirmed when the king of Tripura requested Arakanese assistance. The

²⁷ A blank was a small Dutch silver coin of about 0.75 stivers or 0.0375 *guilders*.

²⁸ 1.25 *guilders*. As there was a considerable weight difference between the Tanka and the Rupee it is confusing that Schouten seems to treat the two coins as of the same value. In the 1650s the VOC estimated the Arakanese Tanka at 24 stivers and the Rupee in Arakan at 28 stivers. NA Collectie Radermacher 467 *Specie-boek van alle maten, gewigten, en gelden so in India ter plaetse alwaer de E: Compagnie negotieert werden gereekent* (c. 1650). The silver Tanka weighed about 10.6 gm. the heavier silver Rupee of 11.6 gm. The Arakanese never minted to the Rupee standard. Mitchiner, *The land of water*, p. 113.

²⁹ Schouten, *Oost-Indische Voyagie*, p. 156.

³⁰ NA VOC 1221, fol. 469-484 Letter from Hendrick de Dieu and Gerrit van Voorburg to Batavia, dated Arakan 22 February 1657, fol. 470v-472v.

³¹ The large number of this army is realistic as the Dutch factors in Arakan subsequently described the capital city and the lands around it as almost desolate. Wouter Schouten described the city in 1660 as having a population slightly larger than Amsterdam, which had by the middle of the seventeenth century about 200,000 inhabitants. Schouten, *Oost-Indische Voyagie*, p. 151.

Arakanese readily complied. Tripura was not only a strategic buffer between Arakan and the Mughal empire, it also provided Arakan with cotton and other strategic goods. Although Tripura was now the main objective of the campaign, Mughal troops were seen only six miles from Chittagong.³² The campaigns of Shah Shuja in south-eastern Bengal are not well known. A possible relic is the Shah Shuja mosque in Comilla, which is said to have been built to commemorate his victory over Tripura.³³ It is a distinct possibility that one of the major results of Shah Shuja's campaign was that the Arakanese now irretrievably lost control over areas such as the Hijli *zamindari*, Jessore and parts of the Meghna delta. Shah Shuja's campaign of 1656/7 should be earmarked as the first step towards complete Mughal control in south-eastern Bengal. From Dutch reports it is clear that before 1656 Hijli and Dhaka were for example outside direct Mughal control. In 1657 Batavia expressed its pleasure at the decision of Pieter Sterthemius, the Bengal director of the VOC, not to assist Shah Shuja in his campaign against Dhaka and the Arakanese.³⁴ In March 1657 the Arakanese army returned from Chittagong, with the approach of the monsoon fears of Mughal invasion had ebbed away. The *ko-ran-kri* and *sangerij*³⁵ did not return as they had died in Chittagong.³⁶ A major, if temporary, result of Shah Shuja's campaign in south-eastern Bengal was the submission of the last of the *Bhara Bhuiyas*, the *zamindar* of Hijli, Bahadur Khan, known as the *Masnad-i-Ala*.³⁷ It should be recalled that in Chapter 5 it was shown that Arakanese officials went regularly to places like Hijli to collect tax from the early 1620s to at least 1644.³⁸ The hypothesis that it is only after Shah Shuja's campaigns that the Mughals gained control over south-eastern Bengal is further substantiated by the fact that Shah Shuja made a fresh assessment of the revenue of Bengal in 1658. This settlement was the first complete overview of Mughal incomes from Bengal since Abul Fazl.

³² NA VOC 1221, fol. 469-4484 Letter from Hendrick de Dieu and Gerrit van Voorburg to Batavia, dated Arakan 22 February 1657, fol. 482v.

³³ Vide in voice Shah Shuja in *Banglapedia*.

³⁴ NA VOC 881, fol. 305-316 Letter from Batavia to Pieter Sterthemius, dated Batavia 19 July 1657, fol. 311. '*De versochte adsistentie inden optocht van den prins na Decca, tegens d'arracanders, is wel gerefuseert.*' Shah Shuja tried to force the VOC to cooperate threatening to prohibit company trade in the Mughal domains if they refused to assist him in his wars in eastern Bengal. Sterthemius blatantly refused saying that the Mughals would think twice before they destroyed the substantial source of revenue the VOC was. NA VOC 1220, fol. 109v-110 Letter from Batavia to Holland, dated Batavia 17 December 1657; NA VOC 1221, fol. 760-761 Letter from Pieter Sterthemius to Holland, dated Hugli 4 December 1657.

³⁵ An Arakanese title as yet untraced.

³⁶ Reportedly as a result of poisoning. NA VOC 1221, fol. 484-491 Letter from Hendrick de Dieu to Batavia, dated Arakan 10 March 1657.

³⁷ Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, p. 333.

³⁸ Diary of Van der Helm 1644 entry for 14 March.

7.3 *The flight of Shah Shuja to Arakan*

In March 1660 Gerrit van Voorburg reported that on several occasions Mughal ambassadors had arrived in Arakan in a short space of time. The ambassadors had been sent by Zain al-din, one of Shah Shuja's sons.³⁹ It was a much debated issue whether these men had come to seek Arakanese assistance or to ask asylum for Shah Shuja, one of the sons of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan.⁴⁰

Shah Shuja had been the Mughal *subahdar* of Bengal since April 1639. His reign is perceived to have been peaceful and rather quiet. This is mainly because there seems to be an acute shortage of sources to build anything like a historical narrative on.⁴¹ Shah Shuja had withdrawn the Mughal capital of Bengal from Dhaka to Rajmahal. In the preceding pages it has been suggested this move was partly motivated by continued Arakanese aggression in this part of Bengal. We have also noted that there are indications that during a certain period Shah Shuja or his governors were prepared to pay the Arakanese an annual tribute or *peshkash* in return for peace. Shuja seems to have concentrated on strengthening Mughal control over West Bengal, although his campaign against Tripura in 1656-1657 testifies that he also tried to gain more control over the south-eastern parts of the *subah*. Shah Shuja had installed as his *diwan* the great *zamindar* of the Dhaka area Munawwar Khan,⁴² the grandson of Isa Khan of Bhati and son of Musa Khan. Munawwar Khan acted as the chief of the Bengal *zamindars* and admiral of the Bengal flotilla. All this suggests south-eastern Bengal was only nominally under Mughal control during most of Shah Shuja's reign.⁴³ The old ruling families, once the leaders of the *Bhara Bhuiyas*, still held a firm grip on this part of Bengal. The suggestion that they just as the *zamindar* of Hijli would have paid taxes to the Arakanese annually is therefore also not at all strange. The Bengal *zamindars* could not expect much support in any potential conflict with Arakan from their *subahdar*, who lived comfortably in far away Rajmahal.

In 1657 the emperor Shah Jahan fell seriously ill and he named his son Dara Shukoh as his successor. Dara Shukoh proclaimed himself the new emperor and a succession struggle between the sons of Shah Jahan quickly followed. Shuja also crowned himself emperor in Rajmahal. Shuja's attempts to take the Mughal crown were ultimately unsuccessful and his armies were several times defeated by his brothers. The decisive blow to Shuja's ambitions was dealt by his brother Aurangzeb and his general Mir Jumla in December 1658 when he

³⁹ M. Siddiq Khan, 'The tragedy of Mrauk U (1660-1661)', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan* 11,2 (1966), pp.195-254, 198 quoting the *Alamgirnamah*.

⁴⁰ NA VOC 1233, fol. 565-576 Letter from Gerrit van Voorburg to Batavia, dated Arakan 24 march 1660., fol. 573.

⁴¹ Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, p. 333.

⁴² The great landowner and admiral of the Bengal flotilla 'Monoirchan' in the VOC sources. *Dagh-register* vol. 1664, p. 554.

⁴³ Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, p. 372. Siddiq Khan, 'Tragedy', pp. 197-198.

defeated Shuja at Khajwa near Allahabad.⁴⁴ It took Mir Jumla more than a year to dislodge Shuja from his last stand at Tanda on the other side of the Ganges. The Bengal rivers presented Shuja with a temporary defence as Aurangzeb's general did not possess a fleet, which Shuja as *subahdar* of Bengal did have at his disposal. In April 1660 Shuja was finally forced to flee to Dhaka, which he left also on 6 May.⁴⁵

Shuja's flight to Arakan after he had left Dhaka has inspired a host of scholarly articles, romantic stories, poems, and even a play by Tagore.⁴⁶ The best attempt to reconcile the various accounts of Shah Shuja's flight to Arakan and the subsequent death of the prince and his family is the article 'The tragedy of Mrauk U (1660-1661)' by M. Siddiq Khan. In following paragraphs the study of Siddiq Khan will be analyzed in the light of the letters of the chief of the Dutch factory on Arakan, Gerrit van Voorburg and the *Oost-Indische Voyagie* of Wouter Schouten. Siddiq Khan did not have access to the original letters of Gerrit van Voorburg; he could only use the extracts published in the *Dagh-register* of Batavia, and also had to make do with the translation from 1707 of the *Oost-Indische Voyagie* into French as the *Voiage de Gautier Schouten aux Indes orientales*.⁴⁷

It is generally accepted that Shah Shuja's initial intention was to seek out a safe place from where he could find a ship willing to take him to Mocha, and from there to Mecca and eventually Persia or Turkey. At the time of his flight access to harbours on the Hugli river had already been blocked by Mir Jumla and with the onset of the monsoon in May Shuja needed a safe haven to await his passage across the Indian Ocean. To ask asylum from the king of Arakan was now the only option for the Mughal prince. From 6 May Shah Shuja slowly proceeded from Dhaka to Dianga, where he arrived only on 3 June.⁴⁸ Shuja had presumably waited in Dhaka for the Arakanese fleet to arrive since early April, but after having been waiting for nearly a month and with Mir Jumla's army drawing closer every day, he had decided to start moving by early May.⁴⁹ Siddiq Khan has signalled that Mughal and European sources have slightly divergent accounts of the route taken by the prince. There is one group of sources that say Shuja and his party were taken by boat from Dhaka or Sripur directly to Arakan, the other tradition has it that Shah Shuja travelled over land to Tripura, and from there reached Dianga. Considering that the journey from Dhaka to Dianga took almost a

⁴⁴ Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, pp. 335-338.

⁴⁵ Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, pp. 339-342.

⁴⁶ Schouten, *Oost-Indische Voyagie*, pp. 126-147; A. Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies* 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1727), pp. 2:26-35; Harvey, 'The Fate of Shah Shuja 1661', *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 12 (1922), pp. 107-115; Siddiq Khan, 'Tragedy', pp. 195-254; Rabindranath Tagore, 'Dalia', *Rabindra Racanabali* vol. 5 (Calcutta: Government of West Bengal, 1984), pp. 52-57, adapted and translated by George Calderon, *The Maharani of Arakan. A romantic comedy in one act founded on the story of Sir Rabindranath Tagore*. (London: Francis Griffiths, 1915).

⁴⁷ Gautier Schouten, *Voiage de Gautier Schouten aux Indes Orientales, commence l'an 1658 & fini l'an 1665 traduit du Hollandais* (Amsterdam, 1707).

⁴⁸ NA VOC 1236, fol. 127-134 Letter from Gerrit van Voorburg to Batavia, dated Arakan 21 January 1661.

⁴⁹ Siddiq Khan 'Tragedy', p. 208.

month, it is likely that the prince moved over land most of the time. Arakanese *jelias* would normally cover the distance between these two places in less than two weeks. The debate over which route was taken is perhaps superfluous when we consider the fact that Shuja at several stages of his voyage would have needed boats to cross the large Bengal rivers. It could therefore well be that although he travelled over land, his passage across major rivers was made possible with the help of Arakanese and Portuguese ships.

From Dianga Shah Shuja took again almost two months to reach Mrauk U, where he arrived on 26 August.⁵⁰ En route from Bengal to Arakan the Portuguese who were sent to ferry the Mughal prince to Arakan robbed him of a considerable part of his treasure. Gerrit van Voorburg claims the Portuguese took jewellery, gold, and cash worth about 23 ton in gold.⁵¹ Niccolao Manucci, a Venetian gunner in the service of Shuja's brother Dara Shukoh, says it was Manuel Coelho, the Portuguese captain in charge of one of the prince's ships laden with treasure, wrecked the ship on purpose on the Arakanese coast and later retrieved the valuables.⁵²

In Arakan the arrival of Shah Shuja provided sufficient reason to reinforce the Chittagong frontier. The Arakanese expected that Mir Jumla might try to enter Arakan and take the Mughal prince to Aurangzeb per force.⁵³ The *ko-ran-kri* was sent with a large part of the fleet to Chittagong to protect the frontier. Arakanese chronicles quoted by Siddiq Khan identify the *Leiwei-mran* as the head of the fleet sent to Bengal. Interestingly the Arakanese sources say that the fleet went to Bengal to lay claim to 'the twelve towns of Bengal'⁵⁴, which had been promised by Shah Shuja in return for his asylum in Arakan. The fleet was according to these chronicles defeated in a night attack by Mir Jumla. The Dutch sources on the other hand indicate that there had been no formal engagement between the troops of Mir Jumla and the Arakanese.⁵⁵

After the monsoon season had passed, it became apparent that the Arakanese king was unwilling to let the Mughal prince leave his country. Schouten reports that Shah Shuja became more and more uneasy with his forced stay in Arakan and that he had asked the king for leave to spent time outside Mrauk U. The Mughal prince, according to Schouten, feared the Arakanese king would have him killed to get hold of the large treasure he had with him. He therefore used the opportunity to leave Mrauk U and he hid himself and his family in the countryside.⁵⁶ After a few weeks it seemed the prince, his family and his treasure had disappeared. According to Schouten they were hidden by Arakanese or Muslim inhabitants of

⁵⁰ NA VOC 1236, fol. 127-134 Letter from Gerrit van Voorburg to Batavia, dated Arakan 21 January 1661.

⁵¹ NA VOC 1236, fol. 127-134 Letter from Gerrit van Voorburg to Batavia, dated Arakan 21 January 1661.

⁵² Harvey, 'The fate of Shah Shuja', p. 113 quoting Manucci.

⁵³ NA VOC 1236, fol. 127-134 Letter from Gerrit van Voorburg to Batavia, dated Arakan 21 January 1661.

⁵⁴ An expression often used in Arakanese chronicles to describe south-eastern Bengal.

⁵⁵ Siddiq Khan, 'Tragedy', pp. 221-222.

⁵⁶ Schouten, *Oost-Indische Voyagie*, pp. 143-144.

Arakan. In January 1661 some 70 to 80 well armed Bengali followers of Shah Shuja assembled in Mrauk U in search of the prince.⁵⁷ Their purpose was to escort Shah Shuja to Pegu, hoping that he could continue his journey from there. The Arakanese guards who detected the armed followers of the prince in Mrauk U would not allow them to leave the city with their arms and armor and asked them to disarm. After having refused to disarm Shuja's soldiers battled it out with the Arakanese soldiers, seeing they were hopelessly outnumbered, they set fire to the city. The fire spread rapidly.⁵⁸ Schouten reported that thousands of houses, and some pagodas and temples were burned down during the blaze, which was intensified by a strong northeasterly wind. The Dutch in fact made their ships ready to depart, as the fire had spread some miles down river and their ships lay dangerously close to shore.⁵⁹

The Arakanese king was so enraged by the destruction caused by the Bengali followers of Shah Shuja that he gave orders to seek out and kill the Mughal prince, but he had disappeared.⁶⁰ The battle in Mrauk U between Shuja's followers and the Arakanese palace guards had also caused a great panic amongst ordinary Arakanese. Schouten reported that many people thought the Mughals were about to invade. The Dutch surgeon described how on the rivers near the city he saw a steady stream of refugees flocking to the protection of Mrauk U's walls.

On 7 February 1661 the prince's whereabouts were discovered. Shah Shuja had to take flight again. Gerrit van Voorburg wrote to his superiors in Batavia that the prince fled with about 300 followers. He said that Shah Shuja and his son Zain al-din⁶¹ tried to make their way to Tripura, and that his sons Buland Akhtar⁶² and Zain al-Abedin⁶³ were captured on 15 February.⁶⁴ The Dutch and Muslim merchants were immediately ordered to let their ships float downriver. Neither Arakanese, nor Muslims were allowed to come near the ships for fear the prince would escape from Arakan with his treasure.⁶⁵ At the end of March Gerrit van Voorburg again wrote to Batavia and mentioned that the sons of Shah Shuja and most of his retinue had been found and captured. The prince himself however had not been found, and had probably been killed. The sons of Shuja had been released, his wives incorporated in the harem, and his soldiers distributed amongst the Arakanese nobility.⁶⁶ Van Voorburg goes on

⁵⁷ Schouten has Bengalis; Gerrit van Voorburg speaks of Muslims.

⁵⁸ January is in the midst of the dry season.

⁵⁹ Schouten, *Oost-Indische Voyagie*, p. 144.

⁶⁰ NA VOC 1236, fol. 127-134 Letter from Gerrit van Voorburg to Batavia, dated Arakan 21 January 1661, fol. 133. Reportedly Candasudhammarja's mother asked him to reconsider the order, as she pointed out that it was unwise to teach one's soldiers how to kill a king.

⁶¹ Saan Sultan according to the Dutch chief.

⁶² Bou Sultan according to the same author.

⁶³ Calle Sultan says Gerrit van voorburg.

⁶⁴ NA VOC 1236, fol. 219-221 Letter from Gerrit van Voorburg to Batavia, dated Arakan 22 February 1661.

⁶⁵ Schouten, *Oost-Indische Voyagie*, p. 146.

⁶⁶ NA VOC 1236, fol. 887-892 Letter from Gerrit van Voorburg to Batavia, dated Arakan 26 March 1661., fol. 887-888.

to say the Arakanese claimed Shah Shuja had planned a coup d'état. In earlier letters the same Van Voorburg had noted in connection with Shuja's disappearance, that there were large numbers of Muslims and Bengalis in Arakan, who could be of assistance to Shah Shuja.⁶⁷ It has to be stressed in this context that 'Muslim' and 'Bengali' are two separate but overlapping categories. There were at this time non-Bengali Muslims in Arakan, for example traders from Coromandel and Aceh, but also non-Muslim Bengalis who could be identified as either Hindu or Buddhist.⁶⁸

Shah Shuja had of course been *subahdar* of Bengal since 1639 and many Bengalis in Arakan would have been taken away as slaves from areas that were considered part of the Mughal empire. A large number of these Bengalis were also Muslims like Shah Shuja. Taking into account that their former *subahdar* also brought with him a considerable sum of money, it is not hard to imagine that Shah Shuja could well have thought he was capable of winning the hearts and minds of the large Bengali population in Arakan. It is also not hard to imagine this idea might have frightened Candasudhammaraja, a king who was part of a dynasty that had not long ago itself overthrown the ruling Arakanese royal family. It should not be forgotten that Candasudhammaraja had a few years before in 1656 been very much afraid that the old royal family would come back from exile in Bengal and retake the throne. The conflict between Shah Shuja and Candasudhammaraja could therefore have turned into a conflict over the loyalties of Arakan's sizeable Bengali population.

A closer analysis of the Dutch narrative of the events in fact clearly suggests that it actually was a conflict which had developed along the lines of ethnic identities. Since the resettlement program of Narapati-kri large numbers of Bengalis had been settled in the plains of the Kaladan around the capital city Mrauk U. These Bengalis had arrived naked as slaves with nothing to eat and no work. As a result of the large influx of people, prices had risen extremely fast and as described in the two preceding Chapters recent years had witnessed high inflation. The Bengalis had moreover been settled in their own villages, headed by Bengali *talukdars*. Arakanese villages were administered by Arakanese *rwa-cas*.⁶⁹ The

⁶⁷ NA VOC 1236, fol. 219-221 Letter from Gerrit van Voorburg to Batavia, dated Arakan 22 February 1661..

⁶⁸ Whilst referring to Shah Shuja, Schouten claimed Candasudhammaraja had a 'natural aversion for Bengalis'. Charney has denounced Schouten as a reliable source on the basis of this statement. Charney has however wrongfully connected the ethnic identity 'Bengali' with the religious identity 'Muslim'. Schouten speaks of the king's aversion against Bengalis which is improbable according to Charney because of the introduction of 'Muslim Bengalis in the royal bodyguard'. Apart from the fact that Mughal soldiers from the retinue of Shah Shuja were clearly no Bengalis, they were also not incorporated in the royal bodyguard, but distributed amongst the Arakanese nobility. The presence of Muslim ministers at the Arakanese court is cited as another reason why it is improbable that the king was not well disposed towards the Bengali population. Again Bengalis and Muslims are treated as one category by Charney, which they were not at this time. Schouten, *Oost-Indische Voyagie*, p. 144; Charney, *Jambudipa*, pp. 201-202.

⁶⁹ For a description of the related Burmese system of village administration see Lieberman, *Burmese administrative cycles*, pp. 92-94. In Dutch sources '*Rosa, Rosi, or Roos*'.

resettlement of the Bengalis in Arakan had therefore created a socio-economic divide between Arakanese and Bengalis, which served to emphasize ethnic identities.

In other words, the resettlement of the Bengali population of Chittagong in the central Dhanyawati area, was instrumental in forging Arakanese and Bengali identities. These identities closely followed socio-economic differences between the two groups. The Bengalis were brought to Arakan as slaves, and were resettled in Arakan as royal service groups, or *man-kywan*. The largest part of the Arakanese population of Danyawati consisted however of common people who were mostly small farmers and fishermen.⁷⁰ These people would have been hit most by the sudden influx of large numbers of Bengalis, which caused sharp increases in the prices of almost everything.⁷¹

The idea that the conflict between the two rulers had evolved from a dispute over a wife or daughter of Shah Shuja should be discarded.⁷² Schouten unequivocally states that the prince was allowed to keep his wives and children with him after he was given asylum in Arakan. It is only after his death that his wives were taken into the king's harem.⁷³ It is also not correct to say that Dutch sources present the conflict essentially as a 'Muslim and anti-Muslim' conflict.⁷⁴

The death of Shah Shuja was followed by the arrival from Bengal of Mirza Ali Beg, a Mughal ambassador, in Mrauk U on 19 September 1661. The Mirza had been sent to negotiate the release of Shah Shuja's children. The Dutch company had been forced by Mir Jumla, who had been appointed *subahdar* of Bengal (June 1660–died March 1663), to send a ship from Bengal to convey the ambassador to Arakan. The ambassador brought with him 12,000 Rupees which he was planning to spend to buy the freedom of the children.⁷⁵ To the relief of the Dutch factors in Arakan the ambassador left empty handed on 3 December 1661. They had been very much afraid to be implicated in the conflict that now loomed between the

⁷⁰ For a description of the situation in Burma .M. Aung Thwin, 'Athi, Kyun.Taw, Hpayà-Kyun: Varieties of commendation and dependence in pre-colonial Burma', A. Reid ed., *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), pp. 64-89 and Lieberman, *Burmese administrative cycles*, pp. 97-109.

⁷¹ NA VOC 1236, fol. 892-901 Letter from Gerrit van Voorburg to Batavia, dated Arakan 22 December 1661., fol. 899-900.

⁷² Charney, *Jambudipa*, pp. 197-199; Siddiq Khan, 'Tragedy', pp. 228-233 and Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 303-304.

⁷³ Vide infra.

⁷⁴ Charney, *Jambudipa*, pp. 197-203. Charney does so on the basis of the faulty English rendering of the French translation of Schoutens *Oost-Indische Voyagie*, p. 146 used by Siddiq Khan, 'Tragedy', p. 223. Where the Dutch text for example has *Muslim or Bengali* the text used by Siddiq Khan has only *Maure*. The fact that Schouten notes that during the fire that followed the 20 January 1661 fight between Shah Shuja's followers and the Arakanese guards some pagodas and temples were *accidentally* burned down does not mean he reports the conflict in terms of a religious conflict.

⁷⁵ NA VOC 1236, fol. 892-901 Letter from Gerrit van Voorburg to Batavia, dated Arakan 20 November 1661, fol. 893-895.

Mughals and the Arakanese.⁷⁶ The Dutch had also felt very much threatened by mobs that had surrounded their factory after the arrival of the ambassador on one of their ships. The ships and the factory buildings had almost been set fire to by angry crowds of Arakanese that had gathered in front of the factory. The fact that Mir Jumla had claimed in his letter to the Arakanese king that the Dutch, English, Danes, and Portuguese were all his subjects, had not improved their situation.⁷⁷

After the death of Shah Shuja, his children had been spared their lives and were actually released from captivity not long after the country had recovered from the unrest following the killing of the Mughal prince. The great treasure Shah Shuja had brought with him had largely eluded the king. Candasudhammaraja had been able to recover some of the Mughal prince's wealth from some of his high officials or *sit-kes* whom he had accused of colluding with Shah Shuja in his bid to take over the country. The largest part of the treasure however seemed to have been distributed by the prince amongst a great number of Arakanese subjects. This more or less confirms the idea Shah Shuja had been willing to spend his money to buy the loyalty of Arakan's Bengali population. The distribution of the treasure amongst ordinary Arakanese had created a profitable market for jewellery and gold in Arakan. The VOC merchants in Arakan asked their superiors in Batavia for large sums in cash⁷⁸ if they wished to buy parts of Shah Shuja's treasure⁷⁹ against lucrative prices.⁸⁰ As news of the lucrative gold and jewellery trade spread throughout the Bay of Bengal other merchants, who had not before traded to Arakan, arrived with the sole purpose of buying parts of the treasure.⁸¹ In October 1663 captain Winter, an English East India Company servant acting as a private trader from Madras, arrived with a ship laden with amongst other goods 50,000 pound of iron, 2,000 pounds of tin, 400 packs of tobacco, sulphur, pepper, cloth and about 18,000 Reals of eight. Although the Englishman pretended he wanted to buy rice and slaves, which were at that moment readily available, he seems to have spent his money on gold and jewellery. The king in reaction closed the mint until the Englishman had left again for Coromandel, trying to prevent him from buying Shuja's gold and jewels.⁸²

⁷⁶ NA VOC 1240, fol. 216-224 Letter from Gerrit van Voorburg and Jacob van der Plancken to Batavia, dated Arakan 31 January 1662, fol. 218. NA VOC 1232, fol. 411v. Letter from Mattheus van den Broucke to Holland, dated 19 September 1660 and NA VOC 1232, fol. 669 Letter from Mattheus van den Broucke to Holland, dated Hugli 9 December 1660.

⁷⁷ NA VOC 1236, fol. 892-901 Letter from Gerrit van Voorburg to Batavia, dated Arakan 20 November 1661, fol. 894-896.

⁷⁸ Gerrit van Voorburg suggested sending to Arakan from Batavia for this purpose alone about 25,000 Reals of eight.

⁷⁹ In this case golden Rupees and gold.

⁸⁰ NA VOC 1236, fol. 892-901 Letter from Gerrit van Voorburg to Batavia, dated Arakan 20 November 1661, fol. 898.

⁸¹ Schouten, *Oost-Indische Voyagie*, pp. 146-147.

⁸² NA VOC 1242, fol. 739-754 Letter from Daniel Six, Nicholaes Boukes and Jacob van der Plancken to Batavia, dated Arakan 17 December 1663., fol. 740; *Dagh-register* vol. 1664, pp. 113-116 entry for 6 April 1664, containing the transcript of a letter from Daniel Six to Batavia, dated Arakan 8 February 1664.

7.4 *The decapitation of the children of Shah Shuja*

In 1663 tensions between Arakanese and Bengalis erupted again. It seemed the three sons of Shah Shuja and their surviving retinue were at the centre of the conflict. The Dutch chief in Arakan at the time, Daniel Six, sent the *dagh-register* of the riots which was kept by VOC servants to Batavia.⁸³ The riots lasted from Wednesday 25 July 1663 to Friday 27 July 1663. Below is a summary translation of the diary:

At 10.00 o'clock in the morning our translator Louis came running into our factory with news that the king's palace was on fire. He told us that up in the city near the palace people were fighting and that he had seen many persons lying dead on the streets. He did not know what was happening, but we assumed at first that the king, who was sick, had died, and that the Arakanese nobility were fighting for the throne. The Arakanese monks and soldiers that lived near our factory on hearing the news all started running to the city. At their arrival it transpired the riots were caused by 10 to 12 Mughals from the retinue of Shah Shuja, who had set fire to the palace. They had taken the weapons of the servants of the *sit-kes* and attacked them with their own weapons. A large number of *sit-kes* had already been killed when the monks and the soldiers arrived.⁸⁴ The Mughals were killed by the Arakanese monks, who clubbed them to death. Large numbers of Muslims and Bengalis who lived near the palace were also killed by the monks, or at least injured and plundered. The three princes have now been thrown in prison and the *kotwal* and *rwa-ca* of the *bandel* have also been imprisoned because they are Muslims.

26 July

Today many people in boats, from settlements downstream of the *bandel*, passed our factory plundering along the way. We had to double the watch around our factory. We heard that the king's powder magazine had exploded. From a *sit-ke* we received three *ko-rans* to protect our factory. Rumours spread that tonight the Muslim *bandel* would be set on fire.

27 July

Today the plundering and looting continued. Houses of Muslims and Bengalis were targeted by mobs of Arakanese. The princes had been decapitated. The king ordered a stop to the plundering of the Muslim merchants in the *bandel*, for fear this would

⁸³ Six arrived in Arakan 26 October 1663, the diary was thus kept either by Jacob van der Plancken or Nicholaes Boukes, both of whom spoke Arakanese and had been in Arakan for a prolonged period of time. NA VOC 1246, fol. 361-388 Letter from Daniel and council to Batavia, dated Arakan 8 February 1664. In this letter Six asked Batavia to send some young company servants to Arakan who should learn Arakanese to assist Van der Plancken and Boukes and act as interpreters when they were in Dianga or elsewhere in Arakan.

⁸⁴ According to Arakanese chronicles quoted by Harvey the Arakanese governor of Mrauk U Manaw-thiri died during the fighting in the palace. Harvey, 'The fate of Shah Shuja', p.109.

dissuade merchants from coming to Arakan. The *kotwal* and *rwa-ca* were released from prison.

28 July

The king announced that trade should continue in the *bandel*. The daughters of Shah Shuja had been jailed and were said to be starved to death, as according to Arakanese law they were not allowed to kill women.⁸⁵

29 July

Soldiers were seen returning to their homes from the city.

30 July

We went to visit the king with presents to compensate him for his losses.

31 July

The golden palace of the king has totally burned down. The bodies of the dead Mughals are floating in the moat. The king has decided to kill every person who has arrived in Arakan in the retinue of Shah Shuja, whether they had anything to do with the fire or not.⁸⁶ It is estimated that it will take more than 10 years to rebuild the splendid golden palace.

The diary of the riots following the attempted coup d'état by Mughal soldiers from Shah Shuja's retinue confirms tensions between on the one hand Arakanese and on the other hand Muslims and Bengalis had increased to reach boiling point. The implication of Buddhist monks in these riots could indicate that these tensions also spanned the religious divide between Muslim Bengalis and Buddhist Arakanese. The mobs that were seen coming down the river targeted Muslim and Bengali settlements. The Dutch factory was not attacked during these riots, which seems to confirm the riots were not aimed at foreigners in general.

7.5 The Mughal campaign against Chittagong

The killing of the sons of Shah Shuja provided Aurangzeb with a *casus belli*. The Mughal emperor sent two ambassadors to Arakan to demand the children and the treasure of his brother. The first ambassador was imprisoned and sent to the jungle as a royal slave. The second was received by the king, but as the children were dead and the treasure dispersed

⁸⁵ The killing of the wives and daughters of Shah Shuja is confirmed by Arakanese chronicles quoted by Harvey. Harvey, 'The fate of Shah Shuja', p.109.

⁸⁶ This is also confirmed by the same chronicles. Ibidem and Siddiq Khan, 'Tragedy', pp. 248-251. This should also mean that the myth of the *kamans*, or Mughal archers, who supposedly were descendants from Shah Shuja's soldiers and formed a distinct royal service group during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, should be discarded. For a description of this myth see San Baw U, 'My rambles among the ruins of the golden city of Myauk u' in *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 23 (1933), p. 19 and San Tha Aung, *Arakanese coins* trans. and ed. Aye Set 2nd ed. (Sale 1986; Distributed by M. Robinson), pp. 42-43.

throughout Arakan, or indeed already sold abroad, the demands of the emperor could not possibly be met. The Arakanese now feared war was imminent. The Dutch chief Six asked Batavia for ships to evacuate the Arakan factory. Six feared the Mughals would attack during the dry season of 1664.⁸⁷ The Arakanese also prepared for war. Candasudhammaraja asked Batavia to send him 42,000 pounds of sulphur. As the king's magazine had exploded he needed to produce gunpowder for his army. The amount asked for would serve to produce about 420,000 pounds of gunpowder, which would be the equivalent of what a European army of c. 40,000 to 60,000 men would use in one season.⁸⁸ The VOC sensed an opportunity to sell Bengal saltpetre; another component needed to produce gunpowder, but was not allowed to bring ships from Bengal into Arakanese harbours by the Arakanese king.⁸⁹

In Bengal Mir Jumla had embarked on a campaign against Kuch Bihar and Assam at the end of 1661. This campaign ensured that the chances of a war between Arakan and the Mughals slowly diminished from 1661, because the Mughal army was now occupied elsewhere. Mir Jumla did however move the capital of the Bengal *subah* back to Dhaka. The move to Dhaka signalled the Mughals' intention to tighten their control over south-eastern Bengal.⁹⁰ The wars with Kuch Bihar and Assam ended with the rout of the Mughal army in Assam. The Bengal fleet (*nawwara*) also suffered severe losses during this campaign. The great losses the Mughal army had suffered in Assam and the death of Mir Jumla in March 1663 threw the Bengal government in great turmoil.⁹¹ According to Sarkar, the Bengal administration broke down. As an illustration of the extent to which central government disappeared Sarkar cites Shihab ud-Din Talish who describes how three Mughal officials all held their own ceremonies to celebrate the end of Ramadan, each offering prayers in the emperor's name. Taxes were raised, but the imperial revenue diminished. Talish has described the interregnum after the death of Mir Jumla therefore as 'the festival of breaking the Ramadan fast' or a free for all for the Mughal officials and Bengal *zamindars*.⁹²

Shaista Khan (1663–1688) was appointed as the next *subahdar*. He arrived in Rajmahal in March 1664. The news of his appointment fuelled fears in Arakan of an approaching Mughal attack.⁹³ Shaista Khan had been ordered to attack Arakan but the first

⁸⁷ NA VOC 1246, fol. 361-388 Letter from Daniel and council to Batavia, dated Arakan 8 February 1664.

⁸⁸ Robert Norton, *The gunner: Shewing the whole practise of artillerie: With all the appertenances thereunto belonging, together with the making of extraordinary artificiall fireworks* (London, 1628) and B.S. Hall, *Weapons and warfare in renaissance Europe* (Baltimore 1997) 43,67,72,79,88. M.A.G. de Jong, *Staat van oorlog. Wapenbedrijf en militaire hervorming in de Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden 1585-1621* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2005).

⁸⁹ *Dagh-register* vol. 1664, pp. 353, 368.

⁹⁰ Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, pp. 342-343.

⁹¹ Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, pp. 343-350.

⁹² Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, p. 372.

⁹³ Sarkar has 8 March 1664 as the start of Shaista Khan's rule as *subahdar* in Bengal. Shaista Khan indeed entered Rajmahal at that date, but must have been nominated earlier as in Arakan his name was already

year of his reign he stayed put in Rajmahal. The Arakanese in 1664 thought the Mughals had only been bragging about their intentions to attack the country.⁹⁴ Candasudhammaraja in response ordered a full scale attack on Sandwip to bring the island back under Arakanese control. The Arakanese had lost control over Sandwip at the end of the 1640s and had never again succeeded in bringing its ruler back into the Arakanese fold.

In November 1664 the Arakanese assembled a fleet of about 30,000 men. A great storm on 18 November however prevented the departure of the fleet, and the attack had to be postponed. The storm wrecked a large number of ships at anchor near Urittaung and cost many lives. Earlier in 1664 Candasudhammaraja had also commissioned the Portuguese community in Chittagong to attack Bengal. The *Dagh-register* of Batavia reports that at the end of 1664 60 to 70 *jelias* of the Arakanese and Portuguese entered the river of Dhaka and destroyed 160 of 260 ships of the Bengal *nawwara* under the command of the great zamindar of the Dhaka area Munawwar Khan, the admiral of the Bengal flotilla. The news of this disaster apparently so angered Aurangzeb that he withdrew the allowances of Shaista Khan and his son. Aurangzeb at once ordered Shaista Khan to proceed from Rajmahal to Dhaka and to begin his attack on Arakan.⁹⁵ The situation became even worse when news from Dhaka reached Rajmahal that the Arakanese had attacked the area around Bhushna and taken away 2,700 or 2,800 people from there. On the river Hugli the situation also seemed to get out of hand for the Mughals, when the Arakanese started to attack European shipping. The Hugli was now infested by 10 to 12 *jelias* plundering everything they could get hold of. To the surprise of the Dutch, the Mughal officers in Bengal seemed to do nothing at all to counter the Arakanese raids. The fact that the Portuguese mercenaries also attacked Dutch shipping, disregarding the Arakanese-Dutch treaty of 1653, shows how little control the Arakanese king had over his Portuguese subjects in Chittagong. VOC officials in Bengal who tried to retrieve company property in Bengal were laughed at by the Portuguese. This was an embarrassment for Candasudhammaraja who afterwards restored the stolen goods and made promises to punish the culprits.⁹⁶

The 1664 conflict was perhaps as Leider has suggested an attempt of Candasudhammaraja to take the initiative in what the Arakanese perceived to be an

circulating in December 1663. NA VOC 1242, fol. 739-754 Letter from Daniel Six, Nicholaes Boukes and Jacob van der Plancken to Batavia, dated Arakan 17 December 1663, fol. 746 and v. And *Dagh-register* 1664 552 entry for 17 December 1664 for a report of the meeting of VOC officials and Shaista Khan in Rajmahal in April 1664.

⁹⁴ Six writes from Arakan that '*Den coninck van Arracan, siende datter op het swetsen van de Mooren geen gevolg quam, had een groote armade geliassen met 30000 man gereet gemaekt om het eylant Sundive, staende onder het gebiet van Bengale, te vermeesteren*'. *Dagh-register* vol. 1665, p. 99 entry for 5 May 1665 containing the transcript of a letter from Daniel Six to Batavia, dated. Arakan 12 January 1665.

⁹⁵ *Dagh-register* vol. 1664, p. 554 entry for 17 December 1664.

⁹⁶ NA VOC 1252, fol. 401-416 Letter from Daniel Six to Batavia, dated Arakan 30 January 1665, fol. 410; *Dagh-register* vol. 1664, pp. 593-594 entry for 30 December 1664.

unavoidable war with the Mughals.⁹⁷ It was not merely a looting expedition of a group of Portuguese mercenaries that the Arakanese scarcely could control anymore. Starting with the reign of Narapati-kri, the Arakanese had gradually lost control over the Portuguese communities in Chittagong.

After the 1664 attack on Bengal by the Portuguese from Chittagong Shaista Khan was ordered by Aurangzeb to attack that city. Adding insult to injury Candasudhammaraja after first killing the Mughal Emperor's brother, later his nephews, had commissioned the Portuguese to attack Bengal. The 1664 attack must have been a terrible affront for Aurangzeb and more importantly threatened to destabilize the Bengal economy and consequently endangered Mughal revenues. The resolution to conquer Chittagong and to remove Arakanese competition in Bengal had however more ancient roots than the 1664 conflict. After the 'conquest' of Bengal in 1574 by Akbar, the Mughals had considered Chittagong as an integral part of that province. Of course the same was true for the Arakanese kings who, at least from Man Pa's conquest of Chittagong in the 1540s, claimed to be the rightful rulers of Bengal.⁹⁸ The Mughal claims to authority over Chittagong can be aptly illustrated by the fact that from the sixteenth century onwards the (estimated) revenue of Chittagong was included in surveys of the Empire. From Abul Fazl's *A-in-i Akbari* of 1595 to the 1659 *Dastur al-amal-i Alamgiri* Chittagonian revenue figures always featured as if the area was already part of the Mughal Empire.⁹⁹ Before 1666 Bengal officials who had fallen from grace would receive rights to a part of 'the revenue of Chittagong' says Talish in the *Fatiyyah-i-ibriyyah*.¹⁰⁰

Shaista Khan began his preparations for the take-over of Chittagong after his arrival in Dhaka on 13 December 1664.¹⁰¹ The *nawab* took with him an experienced team which had proved its worth in the Assam campaign under Mir Jumla. Shaista Khan appointed Muhammed Hussain as the new head of the shipbuilding factory and Muhammed Muqim was left in charge as *mushrif*, or overseer, of the new *nawwara*. Muqim had already experience with these duties during the Assam campaign.¹⁰² After the defeats at the hands of the Ahoms, the Mughals had to rebuild their fleet. Talish also blames Shah Shuja for the neglect of the Bengal flotilla. The description of the Chittagong campaign in the *Fatiyyah-i-ibriyyah* shows the enormous importance of logistics in jungle warfare. Troops fighting far away from their

⁹⁷ Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 306-307.

⁹⁸ Leider, 'On Arakanese territorial expansion', pp. 131, 142-147.

⁹⁹ Eaton, *The rise of Islam*, pp. 198-202.

¹⁰⁰ Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, p. 308.

¹⁰¹ Talish, *Fatiyyah-i-ibriyyah*, fol. 137b.

¹⁰² Talish, *Fatiyyah-i-ibriyyah*, fol. 138b.

initial bases were heavily dependent on long and vulnerable supply lines. If a commander lost sight of the imperative of dependable supplies a whole campaign could easily collapse. The *Fatiyyah-i-ibriyyah* provides several examples of earlier attempts at conquering Chittagong that failed just because of this lack of attention for logistics.¹⁰³

Logistics and the rebuilding of the fleet were not the only aspects of Shaista Khan's battle plan. Diplomacy was perhaps the most important aspect of this campaign. Warfare at sea had never been the strongest point of the Mughal army. As the success of any operation in or against Arakan and Chittagong heavily depended on waterborne supply lines, Shaista Khan had to ensure Mughal supremacy in the waters of the Bay of Bengal. To achieve this Shaista Khan forced the Dutch to withdraw their factory from Arakan, threatening to prohibit the VOC from trading in the whole Mughal Empire if they did not cooperate.¹⁰⁴ In this way the Bengal *nawab* assured the Arakanese king would not be able to press VOC ships or gunners into his service, for the purpose of defending Chittagong. On top of this he asked the Dutch to provide him with ships to assist his army in their attack on Arakan. In Batavia the governor-general decided to postpone the decision on whether to support the Mughal by asking for an official request for help from Aurangzeb and handing over the matter to the board of the VOC in the Netherlands. The governor-general in this way tried to delay any formal intervention in the conflict until after the actual battle would have been fought. To pacify Shaista Khan they did accede to his demand to withdraw their factory from Arakan.¹⁰⁵

At the end of January 1665 the Arakanese were still unaware of the Mughal threat that now loomed large on the borders near Chittagong. The Arakanese king still planned to attack Sandwip, but no measures had yet been taken to strengthen the frontier with Mughal Bengal. The plan to attack Sandwip was born out of the idea that the Mughals would be too weak to resist and it was not conceived as a pre-emptive strike to counter Mughal plans for invasion.¹⁰⁶ In November 1665 the departure of the VOC reminded Candasudhammaraja of the fact that perhaps this time the Mughals' plans to invade Arakan were serious. Daniel Six left Arakan with as much of the company's property he could take on 15 November 1665. The Arakanese had already suspected the Dutch had plans to withdraw, as they had received news of the arrival of a Mughal ambassador in Batavia. The Arakanese however did not stop the Dutch from leaving Arakan. The Arakanese king provided Six with a letter for Batavia expressing his surprise at the stealthy departure of the Dutch:

¹⁰³ Vide infra Chapter 4 for two failed Mughal invasions of Arakan.

¹⁰⁴ Talish, *Fatiyyah-i-ibriyyah*, fols. 116a-116b, quoted by Sarkar, 'The conquest of Chatgaon, 1666 AD', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 3.6 (1907), p. 406.

¹⁰⁵ *Dagh-register* vol. 1665, pp. 191-192.

¹⁰⁶ NA VOC 1252, fol. 401-416 Letter from Daniel Six to Batavia, dated Arakan 30 January 1665, fol. 414.

I have understood that Noromsit¹⁰⁷ [ie. the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb] has sent an ambassador to Batavia to ask for your assistance... saying that he the Patsia Moro¹⁰⁸ [the Mughal Emperor] is a bigger lord than I am, and that he can easily conquer the country of Arakan. I have heard he has threatened to banish you from his land and that you have therefore decided to leave Arakan. I had always thought that the Dutch were their own masters, but now they have become so afraid that even after the visit of a single ambassador of Noromsit they have run away from my country...Although Patsia Noromsit claims he can conquer my country I will remind you that from the time of the first Patsia they have tried to invade and they have always been repulsed by my predecessors. I assure you that the tower of Babel will fall more easily than that Patsia Noromsit will be able to conquer Arakan.¹⁰⁹

The departure of the VOC from Arakan was very well received at the Mughal court. Aurangzeb and Shaista Khan expressed their pleasure at the willingness of the company to cooperate with them. An imperial *firman* was sent to Batavia which asked for ten to twenty ships. The Mughals promised to reimburse the costs incurred in the operation, the grant of a quarter of the territory that might be conquered (or a cash payment in lieu thereof), and an exemption in perpetuity from the payment of customs duties throughout the Mughal empire. Even if it is assumed that not all these promises would have been kept, the extravagant terms that were offered to the Dutch underscore the importance that was attached to the conquest of Chittagong and the low trust placed in the capabilities of the Mughal fleet. The council in Batavia in the end sent two vessels, the *Landsmeer* and the *Purmerland*. The vessels commanded by Johan van Leenen only arrived at Chittagong early in October 1666, long after the actual conquest of that port.¹¹⁰ The Dutch tactics of delay had worked and the Mughals had meanwhile been able to secure naval supremacy in another way.

Shaista Khan had not only depended on VOC ships to ensure his domination of the sea. From the start of the operation he had actively sought to tempt the Portuguese *chatins* in Chittagong to betray their allegiance to Arakan and to come over to the Mughal side. The *nawab* had earlier sent Shaikh Zia al-Din Yusuf to the port of Ladhikol near Dhaka to ask the Portuguese salt traders living there to write to their compatriots in Chittagong, offering favours and money if they would take the Mughal side. The Portuguese *capitão-mor* of Hugli and the

¹⁰⁷ Nha ron ci is a term used in Arakanese chronicles to refer to the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 302-303.

¹⁰⁸ Patsia a corruption of *pasha*, Moro for Muslim.

¹⁰⁹ *Dagh-register* vol. 1665, pp. 406-409 entry for 13 December 1665 containing the report of Daniel Six about the withdrawal of the VOC factory in Arakan and two letters of Candasudhammaraja to the governor-general.

¹¹⁰ Prakash, *European commercial enterprise in pre-colonial India*, p. 144. The Mughals still expressed their pleasure in a letter Shaista Khan sent to Batavia. *Dagh-register* vol. 1666-1667, p. 5858 entry for 16 October 1667.

capitão-mor of Tamluk were also asked to write letters to Chittagong tempting the Portuguese of that port to join the Mughal army. These attempts were successful and between 42 and 50 *jelias* with the largest part of the Portuguese community of Chittagong arrived in Noakhali (Bhalua), ready to serve the Mughals. The Portuguese advised the Mughals that with their departure there was also almost no one left to defend Chittagong. They advised Shaista Khan to act quickly to prevent the Arakanese to reinforce the city. Shaista Khan decided to start the invasion immediately. The treason of the Portuguese had given him the much longed for naval security, and thus the operation started in earnest. At the end of December 1665 Shaista Khan send his son Buzurg Ummid Khan with a relatively small force of 4,000 to 6,000 men to attack Chittagong.¹¹¹ The fleet only totalled 288 boats. A small army indeed if compared to the armies that had fought the epic battles of the 1620s and 1630s. According to the *Alamgirnāmah* the army was also accompanied by a son of Sirisudhammaraja, who would have been crowned king if the army had reached Mrauk U.¹¹²

Chittagong was taken after two naval engagements ended in the rout of the Arakanese fleet. The Arakanese governor of Chittagong decided to hand over the fort to the Mughals without even trying to withstand a siege. It seems the Arakanese army, which had not fought a major battle since the reign of Sirisudhammaraja, was easily surprised and overcome by the relatively small Mughal force sent to conquer Chittagong. The assertion of the Portuguese who had joined Shaista Khan that the Arakanese king had depended solely on them for the defence of his borders with the Mughal Empire therefore seems correct. The loss of Chittagong was perhaps only waiting to happen after the disastrous policy of depopulation and destruction of the area set in by Narapati-kri. The Mughals pushed on as far as Ramu, but decided Arakan was a bridge too far. Chittagong was renamed Islamabad and remained in Mughal hands until its cession to the English East India Company in 1760.

Leider has pointed to the fact that Arakanese chronicles pay little attention to the final loss of control over Chittagong in 1666.¹¹³ Surprising as this may seem, the lack of prominence in these sources of this last fatal blow to Arakanese control over Bengal may well be explained by the fact that also in Arakanese historiography the real cause of the 1666 disaster was perceived to have been the fatal policies of Narapati-kri. Leider has suggested Arakanese chronicles are also remarkably silent as to the *histoire événementielle* of the last years of Candasudhammaraja's reign.

¹¹¹ Talish, *Fatiyyah-i-ibriyyah*, fols. 122a, 150b-159a quoted by Sarkar, 'The conquest of Chittagong', pp. 406-412. For a biography of Buzurg Ummid Khan see H. Beveridge and B. Prashad eds. and trans., *The Maathir-ul-Umara being biographies of the Muhammadan and Hindu officers of the Timurid sovereigns of India from 1500 to about 1780 A.D. by Nawab Samsam-ud-Daula Shah Nawaz Khan and his son Abdul Hayy* (Delhi: R.B. Singh, 1979).

¹¹² Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, p. 311. a similar arrangement had been feared by the Candasudhammaraja in 1656 when Shah Shuja threatened to invade.

¹¹³ Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, p. 314.

7.6 The end of the reign of Candasudhammaraja

The VOC returned to Arakan in September 1677. Ten years earlier Candasudhammaraja had already invited the company to return.¹¹⁴ Trade had almost come to a standstill in Arakan in 1677. The most important merchants had either died or left and the population had become much poorer. In fact there remained only four larger merchants in Arakan. These merchants traded in cloth from Coromandel and had made contracts with the king with fixed prices for their goods, in return for which they could only buy elephants from the king.¹¹⁵ The VOC was allowed to return on the same conditions as negotiated by Goessens in 1653. The economic breakdown also manifested itself in a debasement of the Tanka. In previous years the Tanka had been valued at 24 stivers, now its total weight had come down considerably, so that it was valued by the VOC at only 18 stivers. This was reflected in the coinage minted at Mrauk U in which the debased and lighter coins were clearly set apart from earlier Tanka with a horizontal bar in the middle of the coin.¹¹⁶



On the left two examples of early Candasudhammaraja Tankas (obv. and rev.) and on the right the lighter and debased Tankas coined after 1666 with the horizontal bar in the middle (obv. and rev.)¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ *Daghregister* vol. 1667, p. 540, entry for 12 September 1667.

¹¹⁵ 'Het schijnt oft de negotie van oude tijden verstorven is, de principaelste coopluijden sijn overleeden en oock van hier vertrocken, de gemeene man verarmt; de beste en aensienlijksten coopluijden die noch in lefen sijn bestaan in 4 personen als den coopman Camsogerij, Assenbeek, Cameronbeeck en den vrijman Thomas Hendrik Keertekoe, welcke koopluijden Jaerlijcx haer cargasoenen van Chormandelhier krijgen bestaende meest in fijn Caleceries aen bijde sijden geschildert vande breeste sorteeringe gemeene ditos grovve geschilderde en gedrukte Chitsen bethillen van allerlij slagh en grove lijwaten diese altesaem aen den coninck en de grooten voor een vaste prijs (daer van sij contract hebben gemaect) weten te leveren doch sij sijn gehouden haer betaelingen in eliphanten 't ontfangen, tot wat prijsen sij haer goederen als geseijt leveren hebben, wat divoiren daer toe aengewent sijn, noch niet connen vernemen'. NA VOC 1339, fol. 918-924 Letter from Jacob van der Plancken to Batavia, dated Arakan 13 January 1678, fol. 920-921v.

¹¹⁶ Mitchiner, *Land of water*, p. 142. First issues of Candasudhammaraja that are found today weigh in at between 10 to 10.3 gm, later coinage weigh between 7 and 8 gm.

¹¹⁷ Photos from Mitchiner, *Land of water*, p. 142. Inscriptions read: *Lord of the Golden Palace, Candasudhammaraja*. All coins are dated 1014 B.E [A.D. 1652], the start of the king's reign. These dates in

As a result of the 1640s campaigns by Narapati-kri the importance of Chittagong as a centre for industry and commerce had been destroyed. Inflation had gripped the Arakanese economy, ultimately leading to the debasement of its coinage after 1666. Plans to resettle the weavers and other craftsmen in Arakan had not had the desired effect. In fact Arakan and Chittagong became importers of coarse cotton cloth from Coromandel. The flow of substantial royal revenues from Chittagong to Mrauk U had gradually diminished from 1645 on and came to a complete halt in 1666. The whole redistributive network that had been built upon the distribution by the Arakanese kings of these revenues slowly fell apart, beginning with the reign of Narapati-kri. Seen from this point of view the eventual fall of Chittagong in 1666 was no more than the final blow to the Arakanese state.

The years from 1670 until the death of Candasudhammaraja in 1684 already showed signs of the upheavals that would grip the Arakanese kingdom at the end of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. In 1670 a son of Candasudhammaraja, who was curiously appointed governor of Chittagong, rebelled against his father. At the same time another son, Ugga Balla, who was to become *ein-shei-min* in 1672 and would later succeed Candasudhammaraja, became a monk. The retreat of this prince into a monastery could well be associated with the unstable political situation. The revolt was unsuccessful and the king's son died as a result. According to Leider all this points to a growing factional strife at the court.¹¹⁸ On 27 February 1678 a large fire in Mrauk U destroyed the Golden Palace and about 3,000 to 4,000 houses. The fire killed 4,000 to 5,000 people including the 14 year old daughter of the king, who himself narrowly escaped death. On 2 May 1678 the palace of the mother of the king burned down, 20 May the palace of the daughter of the king, and on 5 June the cloth market was set on fire.¹¹⁹ It seems that these fires, that appear to have been targeted at the royal palace and the other houses of the royal family, can well be seen as foreshadowing the civil war that would soon rage throughout the country.

Candasudhammaraja's health also deteriorated during these years. The VOC chief in Arakan Dirk Vonck feared that the kingdom would be torn apart by a civil war after the king's death. He said that although the king had nominated his son Ugga Balla as *ein-shei-min*, it seemed the *Sit-kes* were in favour of the king's brother.¹²⁰

general do not correspond with the date of minting as Arakanese coins were generally stamped with the date the king ascended the throne. For the exceptions of coinage of Sirisudhammaraja and Satuidhammaraja vide infra.

¹¹⁸ Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 316-317.

¹¹⁹ NA VOC 1339, fol. 940-941 Letter from Balthazar Hinlopen and Jan Heijnen to Batavia, dated Arakan 4 March 1678 and NA VOC 1339, fol. 941v-944v. Letter from Balthazar Hinlopen and Jan Heijnen to Batavia, dated Arakan 15 December 1678.

¹²⁰ *Den Arrakansen coning was doorgaans onpasselyck en somwylen buyten hoop van reconvalisatie, hebben synen soone, alhoewel nog een kint, tot synen successeur voorgesteld, wesende van een seer wreeden en gierige nature. Ondertusschen speelden de grooten lustig hare personagie en wierd vermeent dat by overlyden des Conings wel een verwarring in't ryck mocht komen te ontstaan aangesien veel dese Conings broeder*

The VOC decided to remove the factory from Arakan on 14 September 1682.¹²¹ The main reason was that trade had come to a virtual standstill in Arakan. The only thing that could be bought in Arakan was rice or elephants, both could only be obtained with cash. Goods could not be sold due to the absence of larger merchants. The VOC decided it could just as well send only one or two ships each year with silver money to buy rice if needed. The Arakanese population had become very poor by 1682 and trading goods from Coromandel or other parts of Asia was not an option anymore.¹²² In 1683 Candasudhammaraja set fire to his own palace, he died in 1684. He was succeeded by Ugga Balla who ruled only eleven months from 1684 to 1685.

7.7 Ugga Balla and Waradhammaraja

Ugga Balla (1684-1685) was still very young when he ascended the throne. He left Mrauk U to build a new palace on the site of an old Arakanese capital of the Lemro era¹²³ at Khrip. As Candasudhammaraja had set fire to the palace in 1683, he needed to build a new palace anyway, but it is unclear why he decided to move away from Mrauk U

The fears Vonck entertained about an impending civil war after the death of Candasudhammaraja would soon become reality. Ugga Balla was soon challenged by his uncle, the governor of Sandoway. In October 1684 the uncle sailed up the Kaladan to confront Ugga Balla. It is unclear what the result of this expedition was, but in some chronicles the same uncle is still an important figure during the reign of Waradhammaraja (1685-1692), who succeeded Ugga Balla after his death in April 1685. The death of Ugga Balla was followed by a bloody revolt of the palace guards. The guards invaded the palace at Khrip, killed the princesses, concubines and ministers. They also plundered the royal treasures and took many people as their slaves.¹²⁴ The rebellion of the palace guards marks the start of a state of civil war that would grip Arakan for more than twenty years. The expedition the English East India Company sent out in search of a new place for their Bengal factory in 1689 found the country in chaos.¹²⁵ The loss of Chittagong and its revenues had

toegedaan waaren. *Dagh-register* vol. 1682 entry for 4 June 1682, pp. 704-705 containing summary transcripts of several letters of Dirk Vonck to Batavia, dated 29 December 1681, 4 April, 3 and 15 May and 13 August 1682.

¹²¹ *Dagh-register*, vol. 1682 entry for 14 September 1682, pp. 1113.

¹²² According to Arasaratanm because of the competition of Muslim merchants from Coromandel see *Generale missiven*, pp 4:388, 559 and Arasaratanm, *Merchants, companies and commerce on the Coromandel Coast 1650-1740* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 144.

¹²³ Arakanese capitals were situated in the Lemro valley between the 11th century and 1430 AD.

¹²⁴ Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 317-319

¹²⁵ *A Copie of a Journall of our voyage from Bengal to Madras commencing on 8 November 1688, concluding on 3 march 1689 with letters received from and concerning Captain William Heath's transactions in ye. Right Honourable Companies affaires.* BL Mss. Egerton 283; BL OIOC Original Correspondence E/3/47, fol. 231-233; *Records of Fort St. George. Diary and Consultation book 1689* (Madras 1910) 19, 24.

deprived Mrauk U and its ruler of their role as distributors of a considerable source of wealth. It is not surprising that as a result Arakan rapidly disintegrated when the last king that had nominally controlled Chittagong died. Waradhammaraja soon became a puppet in the hands of the palace guards. The country was constantly being rocked by bloody internal struggles. Waradhammaraja tried in vain to re-establish his authority with the help of a force of Buddhist monks recruited from Mrauk U itself. When this attempt failed the palace guards started persecuting the monks throughout the country. Seeing the state the economy was in this is not surprising as the royal family from the reign of Narapati-kri had donated extremely large amounts of money to the *sasana*. Waradhammaraja was dethroned by the palace guards in 1692, without having ever exercised any real authority in Arakan. He was succeeded by a succession of six kings, who all remained puppets in the hands of the palace guards. The kingdom meanwhile disintegrated. Central authority collapsed and it seems that the regions comprising the Arakanese kingdom slowly regained their autonomy.¹²⁶ The Mrauk U kingdom finally collapsed after the reign of Waradhammaraja (1685-1692). When the VOC visited Arakan again at the end of the seventeenth century the governor-general and council in Batavia reported to their superiors in the Dutch Republic in 1699:

The situation in the Arakanese kingdom is terrible because of civil war and high prices. The rivers and roads are clogged by corpses of people having died from famine. In three years the Arakanese have had four kings, three of whom have been killed by the commoners.¹²⁷

Conclusion

At the start of the reign of Candasudhammaraja the Arakanese grip on local communities in Chittagong had already been weakened. The Mrauk U kingdom still controlled parts of south-eastern Bengal in the 1650s, but the campaigns of the Mughal prince Shah Shuja would put an end to Arakanese influence in this part of Bengal. In 1656 and 1657 Shah Shuja moved

¹²⁶ Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 320-321.

¹²⁷ 'De saacken in het Arracanse ryck door oorlog en duuren tyd in seer erbermylycke staat ende rievier en weeghen nauwelyks bruyckbaer door de meenighte van lycken door hongersnoot omgekoomen synde. Men heeft daar in drie jaeren vier koningen gehad waarvan de gemeente drie verstooten en om't leeven hadde gebracht.' Generale Missive, dated 10 February 1699. *Generale Missiven*, p. 6:58. The kings being: Candasuriyadhammaraja (1694-1696), Noratha (child king reigned only a few days in 1696), Maruppiya (1696-1697), Kalagandhat (1697-1698), and Naradhipati (1698-1700). The Dutch had come back to Arakan to transport monks from Arakan to Sri Lanka as requested by the king of Kandy. *Generale Missiven*, pp. 5:642, 769, 852; 6:8, 442. See also D.B Jayatilaka., 'Sinhalese embassies to Arakan' *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 35 (1940), pp. 1-6. Jinadasa Liyanaradne, 'Notices sur une lettre royale Singhalese de 18e siècle, conservée au musée de l'homme a Paris', *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* 73 (1984), pp. 273-284 and L.J. Wagenaar, 'Looking for monks from Arakan, a chapter of the Kandyan-Dutch relations in the 18th century', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka* 47 (2003), pp. 91-110.

against south-eastern Bengal and re-established Mughal control over Dhaka. The flight of Shah Shuja to Arakan following the war of succession in the Mughal empire eventually led to the Mughal invasion of Chittagong in 1666. The substantial revenues from south-eastern Bengal and Chittagong now ceased to flow into Arakanese coffers. In the period that followed the Arakanese kingdom derived its income mainly from the rice trade. The departure of the VOC meant that the king again lost a large part of his income and redistributive powers, as with the VOC also other large merchants left, and the connection with Coromandel was also largely severed. From the reign of Ugga Balla the kingdom descended into anarchy from which it was only to recover briefly in the mid eighteenth century. At the end of the eighteenth century the country lost its independence and was incorporated in the Burmese empire.¹²⁸

In just under a hundred years the Mughals succeeded in bringing Bengal under their authority. The impact of this war on the Bengal economy was significant. The centre of gravity of the Bengal economy shifted from the southeast to the northwest. Incessant warfare between Arakan and Mughal India destroyed the economic centre of Bengal around and south of Dhaka. It also 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 the Bengal interior to places such as Hugli and Calcutta away from the main zones of combat.

In the next Chapter the economic backgrounds of the Mrauk U kingdom will be analyzed. The incomes derived from trade will be compared with tax incomes resulting from the control over south-eastern Bengal.

¹²⁸ See for an admittedly British imperial perspective on Arakan's decline at the end of the eighteenth century Major R.E. Roberts, 'An account of Arakan written at Islaàmabad (Chittagong) in June 1777', *The Asiatic Annual Register or a view of the history of Hindustan and of the politics, commerce and literature of Asia for the year 1799* (London, 1800), ed. and repr. J. Leider, 'Présentation et commentaire', *Aséanie* 3 (1999), pp. 125-149. A slightly different version is [Roberts, Major R.E.], 'History of the Mugs, people of Arracan, June 1777'. BL Mss. Add. 29,210 (2), fol. 51 – 69.