

On Arakanese Territorial Expansion: Origins, Context, Means and Practice

Most Southeast-Asianists would probably not think of Arakan as having been one of the expansionist kingdoms in Southeast Asia. But in its heyday, the kingdom of Arakan was about twice the size of the modern Rakhaing state in the Union of Myanmar and without its territorial expansion, historians might have paid even less attention to the place of Arakan in the civilizations around the Bay of Bengal. As it is, it seems very much as if the multi-faceted cultural and economic aspects which were part and parcel of the expansion of Arakan in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries are what have stimulated the recent interest in the history of Arakan.

Therefore the subject of this paper is the territorial expansion of the kingdom of Arakan during the early modern period of history. Insofar as there is a recognizable pattern in the expansion of Arakan over an extended period of time, it seems legitimate to speak of an Arakanese expansionism. Since the middle of the fifteenth century, the kings of Arakan had progressively consolidated not only their hold over the Arakanese coast and the major islands of Ramree (Rambrè/Rammawati) and Cheduba (Man Aung/Meghawati), they also turned towards the land and strove to extend their territorial control to the northwest. At the end of the sixteenth century, propitious circumstances led King Man Raja-kri to launch an invasion of Lower Burma. Therefore in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Arakan assumed the role of a regional power that for various reasons represented a challenge to its two bigger neighbours, Burma in the east and Bengal in the west.

A description of the expansion of Arakan inevitably leads to questions relating to its causes and the ways in which political and military goals were achieved, as well as the legitimizing of the wars. But interest in studying the territorial expansion of Arakan is not confined to the political and military domains. As we try to understand the means by which Arakan expanded, we also learn about the integration of Arakan into the regional networks of commerce and about cultural interaction.

As the Arakanese kings and officials are still shadowy figures who appear in marked contrast to their, as it were, much more colourful Indian, Portuguese, or Dutch visitors, subjects, or servants, this paper clearly adopts an Arakanese point of view, ascribes an active part in the events to the Arakanese and tries to emphasize the logic of the Arakanese expansion. By doing so, it should raise greater awareness of the autonomous development of Arakan (cf. Leider 1999).

The Ways of Expansion - An Overview

The rise of an autonomous Arakanese kingdom bent on expansion began with the foundation of the capital of Mrauk U around 1430. The site chosen was indeed excellent. Unlike its counterparts in Burma, the Arakanese capital did not change for over 350 years. Besides its central location and easy communication with the heartland of Arakan, the city, surrounded by hills covered with dense jungle, grew into a fortress as the kings improved its defences over the decades.

The history of the expansion of Arakan covers roughly two centuries from 1430 to approximately 1630. The first century is still but scarcely known. One reason for our limited knowledge of this period is that the Arakanese chronicles provide only little data on which to reconstruct a coherent picture of the political development beyond matters pertaining to the dynastic succession. On the more important reigns of the fifteenth century, the indigenous sources contain information of a mostly legendary character while little is said on the minor kings of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The picture is even more clouded as we still do not have access to a corpus of early Arakanese inscriptions and the numismatic data need a thorough revision. Our problem in understanding this period is exacerbated even more by the fact that the Burmese sources contain only incidental information relating to Arakan and we lack direct evidence from Bengali or other Indian sources. Any writing of the history during this period will consequently depend on inferences from the general political and economic context of the region and a cautious reconstruction of the Arakanese context around the scant evidence provided by the local sources.

In 1406, the Arakanese kingdom (ruled by the Laungkarak dynasty according to the name of its capital) was invaded by Burmese troops sent by the King of Ava and the reigning Arakanese sovereign allegedly fled to Bengal. Mon troops sent from Pegu clashed with the Burmese invaders and it is probable that Arakan remained divided between both Mon and Burmese overlords for the next two decades. According to one Arakanese tradition, Naramittha, the exiled king, came back around 1428, reportedly with the support of Muslim soldiers provided by a sultan of Bengal. An initial attempt to recapture the palace is said to have failed because the Muslim commander suddenly turned against the king and Naramittha was forced to retreat back to Bengal. There is nothing unlikely in the assertion of Muslim military aid, beside the fact that, in terms of literary analysis, the Arakanese tradition clearly bears a legendary character and there is not a shred of Bengali evidence for it. The sultan in question would have been Jalal ud-Din (ca. 1418-1433), a Hindu convert who assiduously cultivated his Muslim identity by minting coins bearing the Muslim confession of faith (Roy 1986, 213-220). It seems that Jalal ud-Din controlled the area of Chittagong and conquered part of Tripura. It is not inconceivable that it was possibly in his own interest to support the return of the exiled Buddhist king to his throne. But, as we do not have any evidence about the relationship between the sultans of Bengal and the Arakanese kings during the fifteenth century, we are left with a number of intriguing questions: Was there indeed any official Muslim support for Naramittha? What might the intentions of the sultan have been? What price did the returning king have to pay? These questions are not merely a matter of speculation, as an arguably later

Arakanese tradition claims that the kings up to the reign of King Man Pa (1531-1553), were in a kind of subordinate position to the sultans of Bengal because of their debt of gratitude. Be that as it may, the bare facts a historian is able to sift out give no indication at all at the dependency of Arakan on Bengal.¹

Three years after the foundation of Mrauk U, Naramittha, who adopted the name of Man Co Mwan on his return from exile, died. During the reigns of his brother and successor Man Khari (alias Ali Khan, 1434-1458), and Man Khari's son, Bha Co Phru (1458-1481), some defining lines of what was to be the foreign policy of Arakan for the two next centuries clearly emerge: an aggressive policy of conquest in the northwest, directed towards Chittagong, and a cautious, compromising policy towards Upper Burma, under the kings of Ava. But before turning to the expansion beyond its ethnic boundaries, some attention has to be paid to the consolidation of royal power inside Arakan itself. Taking into consideration what little we know about the history between the eleventh and the fourteenth centuries AD, in pre-modern times the Arakan littoral had probably never reached the degree of unity that the kings of Mrauk U gave it commencing from the middle of the fifteenth century. An undated anonymous Arakanese manuscript claims that King Man Co Mwan visited Ramree, the largest Arakanese island, and, after winning recognition of his authority from the local *nats* (spirits), founded, or what may be more correct, re-founded villages all over the island.² At the time that Naramittha returned from exile, the southern part of Arakan, with its centre in Sandoway, was still in the hands of the governor of Sum Rwa who had been appointed by the Mon king of Pegu. After he died, his widow reigned in his stead. When one of her two sons killed his brother and forced his way to power, she allegedly offered Sandoway to King Man Khari, who then invaded the southern territory in 1437 and made her his 'middle' queen.³

In 1439, King Man Khari alias Ali Khan led his troops against Cukkara⁴ and Chittagong⁵, pillaged these places and carried off the regalia. On his return, the king is said to have founded Ramu (in Arakanese Panwa⁶), a small city lying north of the Naf river. A. Phayre interpreted this as an extension of Arakanese control 'as far as Ramu' (Phayre 1883, 78) which could very well be the case. It is also probable that

¹ Habibullah (1945) argues that the political situation in Bengal was not favorable to interventions on the outlying Arakan frontier, many sultans being too busy safeguarding their own power: Candamalalankara 1931, 2: 2-20. For an analysis of the traditions relating to Naramittha alias Man Co Mwan, see Leider 1998f.

² Indochinois 20, ff. *ka-kam*, Bibliothèque nationale de Paris, section des manuscrits orientaux.

³ Candamalalankara 1931, 2: 20-31. The last episode is reported in a versified dialogue between the king and the widow of the governor of Sum Rwa. It is important to note that Man Khari was governor of Sandoway at the beginning of the fifteenth century and is presented in the context of his brother's exile and the Burmese invasion of 1406 as somebody who appealed to the Mon kings of Pegu to intervene in Arakan (Candamalalankara 1931, 2: 3).

⁴ Also called Chocoria or Chakaria, this city lies on the Matamuhuri River, north of Ramu. It was known to the sixteenth century Portuguese chroniclers (it appears, for example, on one of Barros' maps (Decada IV, 2: 451).

⁵ Candamalalankara 1931, 2: 24. The chronicler referred to here is Nga Mi, a learned Arakanese who wrote a chronicle of the Arakanese kings for Arthur Phayre around 1840. Nga Mi's chronicle was a major source for Candamalalankara's compilation of Arakanese historiography.

⁶ *Great Chronicle of Arakan* (UCL 9837) f^oni.

there were Arakanese settlements dating from an earlier period in this area which had in fact been invaded by Arakanese kings since at least the thirteenth century. According to the Bangladeshi historian Qanungo, the Arakanese controlled most of the territories south of Chittagong during the restored Ilyas Shahi dynasty (1437-1487). As for the port of Chittagong itself, there is numismatic evidence that sultan Nasir ud-Din Mahmud Shah (1437-1459) had the city under his control (Qanungo 1986, 150; Roy 1986, 226).

Reportedly the most important event of Man Khari's reign was his meeting with King Narapati of Ava (1443-1469) at the Phokaung mountain pass in the Arakan Yoma in 1454. The event was celebrated in similar terms by the Burmese chronicler, U Kala, and the Arakanese *Dhañawati are-to-pum* chronicle.⁷ Both kings fixed the border between the two kingdoms, exchanged presents, and vowed mutual friendship. Seemingly both kings dealt with each other as equals. Although we do not know the exact circumstances of this encounter, good relations between Ava and Mrauk U were an essential prerequisite if trade were to flow between the two regions. The passage of the Italian traveller, Nicolo Conti, through Arakan at this time may possibly be related to the thriving export of rubies to Bengal from Ava over the Arakan Yoma passes (Harvey 1967, 98, 101).

The last years of the reign of King Bha Co Phru (1459-1481) were particularly active at the level of diplomacy and warfare. Like his father, the king met the King of Ava, Sihasura (1469-1481), and they vowed mutual friendship while taking an oath (1480).⁸ Relations with Ava were critical as the succession crisis in 1469 had shown. A rival brother of Sihasura had marched against Arakan at the head of an armed force, but was pushed back into Burma by Arakanese troops. In 1476, the *Sak* revolted. Military action forced some into Burma, some into Bengal. Although the name *Sak* can be understood as applying simply to the ethnic group of the Cak (Thet) in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the recurrent use of the term in the Arakanese sources from the thirteenth to the end of the sixteenth centuries strongly suggests that it has a more general meaning which referred to the hill tribes of northern Arakan and southern Tripura.⁹ The Arakanese king, a renowned archer, successfully attacked Chittagong in 1481, but while the royal troops were pillaging the city, the Indian soldiers regrouped and repulsed the aggressors.¹⁰ The Arakanese then attacked 'Kokkatan', a name which may have been used for the hinterland of Chittagong.

The fifty years which extend from 1480 to 1530, that is from the death of King Bha Co Phru to the accession of Man Pa to the throne of Arakan, are the least known period of the Mrauk U dynasty. Extremely young or relatively old kings predominate

⁷ U Kala, 2: 85; Candamalalankara 1931, 2: 25; for the geographical location, see Harvey 1967, 100; for the historical importance of the passes over the Arakan Yoma, see Leider 1994.

⁸ According to the *Great Chronicle*, Bha Co Phru met the Lord of Prome (Prañ), not the King of Ava.

⁹ Phayre generally identified the Sak king as the ruler of Tripura.

¹⁰ Candamalalankara 1931, 2: 33. Phayre (1883, 79) had suggested 1459 for this attack; but most Arakanese sources agree on the 1481 date. There is no reason to suppose that the Arakanese had any permanent control over Chittagong at that time. The control of Sultan Rukn ud-Din Barbak Shah (1459-1476) over the city is, for example, ascertainable around 1473-1474.

and we do not yet fully know the exact length of the relatively short reigns between 1501 to 1531. These facts could be interpreted as signs of a certain decline in royal authority. On the other hand, no weakening of the strength of the country is apparent, as the military campaigns Arakan waged against southeast Bengal continued unabated and an attack against Chittagong around 1515 may have given the Arakanese temporary control over Chittagong at the time when the first Portuguese arrived in the area. Another noteworthy fact is the obvious interest in conducting trade by the royal court. João de Silveira was invited to Mrauk U in 1517 when he was in Chittagong. A letter sent by an anonymous Arakanese king, probably around 1519, to the King of Portugal, calls for Portuguese traders to visit Arakan. Lastly, we may recall that Tomé Pires mentions the presence of Arakanese traders in Melaka. Unfortunately we know very little about the relations between the Portuguese and the Arakanese until the end of the century when the Portuguese communities living on the margins of the *Estado da India* were poised to play a detrimental role in the history of the expansion of Arakan.

The reign of King Man Pa (1531-1553) is justly considered to be a great period in the history of Mrauk U's by the Arakanese historiographers. The reason this king overshadows his predecessors and some of his successors as well are easy to understand. Man Pa is famous for defending his kingdom during a major Burmese invasion and for leading his troops against East Bengal. Some of the most famous pagodas and temples in Mrauk U were founded by him and the surviving palace walls and defences of Mrauk U can probably be ascribed to him as well. His troops passed a baptism of fire in 1534, when a Portuguese armada is alleged to have sailed up the Kaladan and threatened Mrauk U. It was successfully beaten off by the Arakanese. While Tabinshwethi's campaign against Arakan in 1545/1546 can be critically analysed thanks to both Burmese and Arakanese sources, we lack reliable source material on Man Pa's warfare in Bengal. What the Arakanese sources tell us seems to miss the obvious and claim the unlikely. No source clearly states that Man Pa conquered Chittagong, but some historical traditions report that the king invaded large parts of Bengal and obtained a daughter of the *pasha* of Delhi. If we discard the last claim, we are left with questions relating to the factual evidence of the conquest and the reasons why the Arakanese chronicles do not talk about Chittagong expressly. To find an answer to the first question, we have to turn briefly to the context of contemporary Bengali history. In 1539, the Afghan lord, Sher Shah, triumphed in Bihar and Bengal and a year later, he was master of Delhi, but during the next few years, the political stability of East Bengal began to founder. Sher Shah's envoy in Chittagong – the *nogazil* of our Portuguese sources – joined in the rivalry between two local governors (Amirza Khan and Khuda Baksh) appointed by Sultan Ghiyath ud-Din Mahmud Shah, but was unable to establish his own control (Qanungo 1988, 169-170; 187; Majumdar 1973, 62-66). It was probably in 1539 or 1540 that Man Pa intervened in this political imbroglio and successfully occupied the thriving port of Chittagong. A Buddhist inscription found in Chittagong confirms the Arakanese presence in Chittagong in 1542 (Shore 1790, 383-387). The Arakanese invasion is recorded neither in Bengali nor in Portuguese sources, though it is remarkable that the Portuguese chronicles remain mute about the meddling of the Portuguese in the politics

of Chittagong directly after 1539.¹¹ While the more reliable Arakanese sources also have little to say about Man Pa's warfare in Bengal, the *Dhañawati are-to-pum* and the Wimala chronicle boast that Man Pa established a stronghold in Dhaka and sent one of his sons to Silak (Sylhet) as governor. Our source material is insufficient to allow for a serious discussion on the nature and the extent of Man Pa's conquests. Obviously the Arakanese did not set up an administration of their own and it could be supposed that the port kept its autonomy under a local Muslim governor. How long did the Arakanese hold Chittagong? We can only speculate. A likely hypothesis is that Man Pa's troops confronted the armies of the powerful King of Tripura, Vijayamanikya (reigned ca. 1536-1563) and, by so doing lost the control of Chittagong. This king allegedly conquered Chittagong in 1556 and retained it for about ten years.¹² The Arakanese chronicles do not exactly confirm this, but they make it clear that the kings of Mrauk U continued to meddle in the political affairs of Chittagong during the three decades following Man Pa's death in 1553. It seems the Arakanese were trying to safeguard their interests in the region through changing alliances, but they gained little by it. When the Tripura king attacked Chittagong, the local Muslim governor appealed to King Man Co Lha (1556-1564), who sent troops and they allegedly repelled the Tripura army.¹³

In a rather confusing Arakanese account of events, we read that King Cakrawate (1564-1571) gave crucial support to the King of Tripura who was threatened by a rebellious coalition of Afghans and Tripura men. These rebels may eventually have received some help and encouragement from Chittagong as some time later the Tripura king is said to have slandered the governor of Chittagong at the court of Mrauk U. The governor of Chittagong, the so called 'little Nusrat Khan', had earlier recognized the authority of Arakan by sending tribute, but despite this act of submission, the Arakanese king attacked him. Not only did King Cakrawate lose the battle, his erstwhile ally, the King of Tripura, failed to heed his calls. A Muslim inscription of 1568 and the report of the Italian jeweller, Cesare Fedrici, on his visit in 1569 prove that by that time Chittagong was under the control of the Karrani sultans of Bengal (Fedrici 1904, 438; Pinto 1962, 58; Qanungo 1988, 194-196). Beside this, Fedrici provides yet another example of the Arakanese kings' openness towards the Portuguese traders who were cordially invited to visit the kingdom.¹⁴

It is the hundred years which follow that can be considered as the greatest century of the Arakanese monarchy. They can be divided into a first period, in which our attention is captured by wars of conquest and conflicts with neighbouring powers,

¹¹ Chowdhury (1997) has shown that the Chittagong coin formerly ascribed to Man Pa is more likely a seventeenth century coin of an Arakanese governor of Chittagong.

¹² Qanungo 1988, 194-196. For reasons relating to the inner political development of Arakan, it seems unlikely that the Arakanese controlled Chittagong up to 1556.

¹³ Candamalalankara 1931, 2: 79. In the Arakanese source, the governor of Chittagong is called the 'great Nusrat Khan', his successor a few years later being called the 'little Nusrat Khan'. According to Qanungo (1988, 195-196), the Muslim governor was a certain Mubarak Khan or possibly Mamarak Khan, a general under Muhammad Khan Sur, who had proclaimed the independence of Bengal after killing Sher Khan Sur's son in 1553.

¹⁴ Fedrici quoted by Charney 1993, 56.

and a second period, in which inner political tensions and conflicts took the stage against a background of lasting prosperity and military strength. What were roughly six decades from approximately 1570 to 1630 can be conveniently called the age of the warrior kings. The best known king in Western and Indian sources was Man Raja-kri (which means 'great king-king'), because he took part in the conquest of Pegu and fought against Portuguese rebels and traitors in his realm for a decade. But the credit for laying the foundations of the power and prestige of Arakan should be accorded to his father, Man Phalaung, who reigned from 1571 to 1593. He strengthened royal power, defended the kingdom once more against the Burmese invaders, and brought Chittagong under Arakanese control. The Arakanese sources show that it was under his reign that the incursions of the Sak finally came to an end. In the context of Man Phalaung's reign, the expression 'Sak lords' applies to chiefs of the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Lalmai range who owed allegiance to the kings of Tripura.¹⁵ These are appropriately designated as Mrung, the name of the dominant ethnic group in Tripura (Candamalankara 1931, 2: 84-86). We lack detailed accounts, but it is certain that Tripura rulers formally recognized the superior authority of Arakan during the next two decades and very probably sent tribute to Mrauk U. The elimination of Tripura as a rival was the most important step towards the gaining of control of Chittagong, which was not the result of a single invasion but more likely the gradual outcome of the convergence of political circumstances. With the Mughal victories in 1576, the rule of a central power in Bengal ebbed for many years and the traditional power of the Muslim Afghan lords was seriously undermined (Qanungo 1988, 200). As the power of the Tripura rulers crumbled, the Arakanese became the strongest contestants in the power struggle in southeast Bengal.¹⁶ A plausible initial date for the 'gradual conquest' by Arakan could be 1578,¹⁷ but the history of the governors of Chittagong shows that for some years¹⁸ the Arakanese did not govern Chittagong directly. It was only after the Muslim chiefs, who had been either appointed or simply recognized in their function by Man Phalaung, revolted that the latter appointed one of his sons, Man Co Lha, as the first Arakanese governor of Chittagong to ensure that the Arakanese control over the region was permanent. This ambition called for repeated military efforts. During a major campaign in 1586, Prince Man Co Hla confronted a coalition of Chittagonian Muslims and local Portuguese which had sought the help of Amaramanikya, the King of Tripura (Candamalankara 1931, 2: 90). The rebel coalition was broken up with dispatch, but the Arakanese were soon facing an attack by a Tripura army. The soldiers were driven back and the Arakanese followed on their heels in a punitive campaign which,

¹⁵ The priority of conquering the country of the Sak appears in a speech of Man Phalaung to his ministers: 'The country of the Sak has to be subdued first, as it is like an open door.' (Candamalankara 1931, 2: 84).

¹⁶ The superior strength of the Arakanese King in comparison with the King of Tripura was noted by the Englishman Ralph Fitch (Fitch 1904, 415).

¹⁷ For a Mughal reference to the loss of Chittagong, see Talish's account in Sarkar (1933, 42).

¹⁸ Prince Man Co Lha's major campaign against local rebels is dated 1586 (vide *infra*) while his coin as governor of Chittagong is dated 1591.

according to the Rajamala chronicle, led them to the capital of Tripura, Udaipur, which was pillaged. King Amaramanikya is said to have fled to the jungle and committed suicide (Candamalalankara 1931, 2: 92; Long 1850, 550). In 1588, a local governor rebelled once more with the support of a Portuguese fleet. The Arakanese laid siege to his fortress and soon regained control, but they had to make major concessions to the local Portuguese (Sandwip was turned over to them) and refrained from executing the rebel governor (Fernberger 1999, 113-114).

The importance of Chittagong in the political destiny of Arakan during the next few decades can hardly be underestimated. Because of its trade, it became a source of revenue for the kings and its strategic position in the northeast of the Bay made it a natural base for all Arakanese inroads into Bengal. The first Portuguese to visit Chittagong at the beginning of the sixteenth century conveyed a glimpse of the social climate and heterogeneous population of the port which made the city a place which was no sinecure to rule (Bouchon/ Thomaz 1988). Social and economic conditions called for a large degree of autonomy. This autonomy is reflected in many aspects of the Arakanese rule over Chittagong. Up to 1610, the governors of Chittagong bore the title of 'king of the West' (*anauk-bhuran*), underscoring an expansionist vision that clearly went beyond Chittagong. The Arakanese governors had the remarkable privilege of minting their own coins. While their power seemed slightly diminished after 1612, they kept on adopting Indian titles (alongside their Arakanese titles), long after the Arakanese kings abandoned this custom (Chowdhury 1997).

If the second Burmese invasion of Arakan, which happened in 1580-1581, was directly linked to the Arakanese moves in the northwest is a matter of speculation. Like the first one in 1545-1546, it failed.¹⁹

Under the reign of King Man Raja-kri (1593-1612), the Arakanese kingdom reached the greatest extent of its territorial expansion (Candamalalankara 1931, 2: 143-165). In 1597, the Arakanese king co-operated with the King of Taungngu to lay siege to Pegu, the capital of the crumbling Burmese empire. But when King Nandabayin capitulated in 1598, neither the Arakanese nor the King of Taungngu were able to fill up the political vacuum in Lower Burma effectively. The riches of Pegu attracted King Naresuan of Ayutthaya. Aware of his rapacity, the prince of Taungngu brought the treasures of the capital to Taungngu and fortified the city which was soon besieged by the Siamese. It was the Arakanese who saved their ally by cutting off the Siamese lines of supply (Candamalalankara 1931, 2: 148-149). Who was poised to reign over Lower Burma after the departure of the Siamese? A study of political relations during the period shows that the King of Taungngu lacked sufficient human resources to support his ambitions. Portuguese sources suggest that Man Raja-kri claimed the throne of Pegu, but neither Burmese nor Arakanese sources support such a claim.²⁰ If we believe the contemporary accounts of Jesuits who visited the area, the Mon population of Lower Burma had been considerably affected by the massive

¹⁹ The lack of space prevents a discussion of the reasons for both failures here. Sources are Guedes 1994, 209-211; U Kala, 3: 59-63; Candamalalankara 1931, 3: 88-89.

²⁰ If there had been an express claim to the throne of Pegu, we would possibly be able to see it in the minting of coins. For the Portuguese sources, see Guedes 1994, 100.

recruitment required during Nandabayin's wars. The economic and social life was disrupted. Many men had fled to areas which were under the control of Burmese rival lords. Many had earlier been dragged away from their land to lose their lives during the abortive campaigns against Siam. This may have been one of the reasons why the invading kings abandoned the capital of Pegu quite rapidly. In 1599, the Arakanese king found himself master of a land without a settled population (Guerreiro 1930, 1: 49; Saulière 1919). After the eviction of the Siamese, the treasures of Pegu were looted and a prestigious white elephant was brought to Mrauk U together with some close relatives of the Burmese emperor, the most illustrious being one of his daughters. Unsurprisingly the Arakanese deported an unknown number of Mon families (the Arakanese sources also claim the deportation of Thai families) (Candamalankara 1931, 2: 149-152; Guerreiro 1930, 1: 290-292; Bocarro 1876, 117-130). What was Man Raja-kri planning to do in Lower Burma where he held a dominant position in 1600? At the turn of the century, the Arakanese controlled the coastline down to Negrais and they had, at least temporarily, garrisoned a small fleet at Bassein in the eastern delta. The lord of Prome (Prañ) seems to have come under pressure from the Arakanese, as his manpower was much inferior to theirs. To escape his parlous situation, he naturally looked for allies to preserve his autonomy consequently becoming embroiled in the conflicts of the following years. Man Raja-kri's decision to abandon Pegu makes sense. As the Arakanese were neither ready nor able to reorganize and administer a country much bigger than their own, the king decided to keep only Syriam, the main port of Lower Burma. He left an Arakanese garrison on the spot and entrusted the port to one of his Portuguese captains, Felipe de Brito y Nicote, undoubtedly with the hope that the Portuguese traders could revive a trade that had been hit by a decade of war. This decision was very badly received by the Muslim merchant community of Mrauk U which hailed from Masulipatam and saw its own commercial connections with Burma ruined by a port in Lower Burma dominated solely by Portuguese (Guedes 1994, 216-217). If there ever had been any greater political design in Lower Burma on the part of the Arakanese court, it evaporated at the latest after 1603 when Felipe de Brito built a stone-walled fortress, secured an alliance with the Portuguese authorities in Goa, and built up local alliances with the regional Mon lords of Lower Burma (Leider 1998e, 225-235; Guedes 1994, 126-131). In 1605 and 1607, the Arakanese tried to regain control over Syriam, but despite their strenuous efforts they failed twice. Nonetheless, contacts between the Arakanese court and De Brito were never completely severed. In 1612, the Arakanese hastened to send a support fleet to De Brito when the Burmese laid siege to the fortress. A closer look at the relations between De Brito and the Arakanese court allows the inference that De Brito probably sent some kind of tribute to Mrauk U, at least during the early years, to ensure the good will of Man Raja-kri. De Brito's larger political visions encompassed the littoral of the northeast Bay of Bengal. Unfortunately, the main Luso-Asian settlements in this area lay around Chittagong, inside the kingdom of Arakan and the Portuguese on the whole did not form a single unified body (Leider 1998d). Many Portuguese settling around the Bay of Bengal probably rallied De Brito in Syriam, but others still served the Arakanese king. Many more were to be found among the troops of Manuel de Mattos and somewhat later Sebastião Gonçalves

Tibau who, around 1608, gained control over the salt-producing island of Sandwip and nurtured his own ambitions. Just like De Brito, Tibau could only maintain his position by cultivating local alliances and by appealing to Goa for support (Guedes 1994, 156-159; Bocarro 1876, 431-440). The unrelenting conflict between Arakanese and Portuguese interests in southeast Bengal culminated in the 1615 invasion of Arakan by a fleet sent by Goa (Bocarro 1876, 444-455; Monteiro 1995, 188-193). This invasion failed and put an end to the political challenge of the Portuguese communities in the northeast Bay of Bengal. Shortly afterwards, Sandwip again came under the control of the Arakanese.

Around 1612, the Mughals succeeded in crushing the remaining resistance of local Hindu and Afghan *zamindars* in East Bengal. There were immediate plans to invade Arakan, but early attempts under Qasim Khan (1614-1617) and Ibrahim Khan Fateh Jang (1617-1624) failed.²¹ For over five decades, the little Feni River formed the border between the Arakanese and Mughal territories. Up to 1629 the Arakanese kings led some major raids against southeast Bengal. Invasions by land involved war elephants moving along the coastline and mainly affected the territories to the east of the Meghna, while the fleets attacked Dakhin Shabazpur and Dhaka (Mirza Nathan 1936, 1: 383-387, 404-409; 2: 629-631). All these aggressions brought no further territorial gains for the Arakanese. Unfortunately nothing is known about local Muslim lords in the territories invaded who would occasionally have been forced to recognize Arakanese sovereignty. But the raids exposed the weakness of the Mughal defences, entrenched the Arakanese in their positions east of the Feni River, and they served to consolidate the lasting fame of the terrifying Arakanese fleets. In conjunction with the seasonal slave-raids, they periodically disrupted the social and political life in parts of Bengal and discouraged Mughal attempts to conquer Arakanese territories. In hindsight, the military efforts of the Arakanese between 1613 and 1629 may be looked upon as a continuous struggle to defend their earlier territorial acquisitions. In the same vein, we can interpret the attacks against Lower Burma, which King Sirisudhammaraja (1622-1638) ordered during the first years of his reign as mighty military demonstrations rather than as serious attempts to reconquer parts of Lower Burma (Candamalalankara 1931, 2: 171).

We might summarize this first part as follows. In the fifteenth century, the kings of Mrauk U unified the Arakan littoral under their power and tried to expand their territory to the northwest, embroiling themselves in rivalry with the kings of Tripura and the sultans of Bengal for the control of Chittagong. At the end of the sixteenth century, the political situation in Bengal and Lower Burma offered unique opportunities for expansion. Arakan competed with Bengal *zamindars* and local Portuguese communities on its northwest border and took part in the dismembering of the Burmese empire of Taungngu. But, around 1620 at the latest, the consolidation of Mughal control in Bengal and the renaissance of a Burmese empire in the Irrawaddy valley put a stop to Arakanese aspirations to earn recognition as a regional overlord. Thwarted in any further expansionist ambitions, the Arakanese successfully fought off both Portuguese and Mughal aggression and consolidated their hold over the Arakanese littoral. Into the second part of the seventeenth century, their dominion extended from the Feni River in the north to Cap Negrais in the south.

²¹ The emperor wanted the white elephant seized and brought to Delhi (Mirza Nathan 1936, 1: 308-309).

The Means of Expansion - An Evaluation of the Arakanese Armed Forces

Portuguese missionaries of the early seventeenth century called the Arakanese king the most powerful of the kings in Bengal (Guerreiro 1930, 1: 286). If we take into account that the Bengal 'kings' to whom they referred were mainly local Hindu or Muslim lords and that Portuguese reports on feats of arms involving local foes have a notorious tendency to exaggerate the strength of the enemy, we need not necessarily be impressed by the above statement.²² To produce an adequate approach to the military resources of the Arakanese kings and a correct understanding of what the power of the Arakanese kings was, it is essential not only to possess the figures available relating to men and arms, but also to master the economic and demographic context that ultimately conditioned the management of human resources. Without a large, well-nourished population and a regular flow of revenue into the king's treasury, the expansion of Arakan would not have been possible.

The most regular source of revenue for the kings was derived from the integration of Arakan into the trade network of the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. Besides the transit trade in rubies from Upper Burma and cotton cloth from India, the main items that Arakan itself had to export were rice, slaves and elephants. While appreciating the kings' need of financial resources, we should also take into account the predatory aspects of war which was characterized by looting and pillaging and recall the exceptional booty that the wars in Lower Burma offered the invaders.

The main point that will be addressed in this second part relates to the power of the Arakanese kings in terms of human resources to be deployed for military purposes. At the same time, we shall try to identify the important foreign elements in the Arakanese forces.²³ Needless to say answers to these questions, derived from a comparative and critical examination of sparse sources, are tentative.

To appreciate the strength of the military forces of the country, we need to have some kind of reference to the human potential of Arakan in the seventeenth century. I have suggested the number of 250,000 for the total population for the first part of the seventeenth century.²⁴ From this hypothetical number, for the sake of having an elementary scale of sizes, it would be possible to abstract a theoretical 40,000-50,000 men fit for military duties and royal service.

U Pandi's chronicle presents a list of the troops whom King Man Raja-kri supposedly led into Lower Burma in 1597/1598. The three divisions of the army totalled the obviously inflated number of 280,000 men (A similar figure is found in Wimala's chronicle, which suggests that King Man Pa led three armies consisting of 100,000 men each against Bengal.). Despite this hyperbole, there is nevertheless much to be learnt from U Pandi's list. Among other matters, it suggests the equivalence in proportion of non-Arakanese troops (totalling 100,000) and troops under the king's direct orders (also 100,000). While over one-third was classified as *kuiy to ran* (or *kuiy ran*; read: ko-ran), an equal proportion was formed of Sak, Bengal, and

²² See Subrahmanyam's reflections on this subject in Subrahmanyam 1991.

²³ For reasons of space, subsidiary questions relating to the organisation of the military forces and the tactics of Arakanese warfare have to be omitted here.

²⁴ See my discussion in Leider 1998e, 419. Charney proposes a distinctly lower figure (Charney 1999, appendix v).

Kamyān (originating from south Arakan). Apparently, the king depended for less than one third of his force on troops rallied by local Arakanese lords. U Pandi's list therefore points to two main features of the military establishment of Arakan, first, the importance of troops of foreign origin and, second, the relevance of the *kuiy ran* whose crucial role in the military and political affairs of Arakan is an ineluctable part of the history of this country.

The relationship between the Arakanese king and the local chiefs in Arakan and southeast Bengal who recognized the authority of the Arakanese king is a subject about which we lack sources. Portuguese records are important because of the way that they stress the presence of Muslim troops as well as Portuguese serving in the maritime forces.

Interestingly, in Arakanese sources, Muslims and Portuguese are only mentioned as occasional enemies. Recent studies on the Portuguese presence in the Bay of Bengal and the epic stories of people like Mattos, Tibau, or De Brito give weight to the claim that the well-integrated Luso-Asiatic communities in southeast Bengal played a distinguished role in regional politics. The numerical importance of these Portuguese in terms of soldiery probably went by the hundreds. There is not the least doubt that Portuguese mercenaries played a substantial role in the military forces, but it is difficult to appreciate their significance in the Arakanese army itself at any given time, because the Portuguese sources blur the general picture which was more complex than these sources would have us believe. Portuguese mercenaries fought not only for the rival kings of Arakan, Tripura, Siam, and Burma; Portuguese clans indulged in rivalry with each other, too. The Jesuit accounts of the very early seventeenth century and even Father Manrique's account some three decades later state that the Portuguese were eager to serve the King of Arakan as he rewarded them well for their services. Despite this, the accounts about De Brito and Tibau (especially their own accounts) generally emphasize the clash between the bedevilled King of Arakan and the noble causes of the Portuguese heroes.

At the same time, these accounts (Bocarro or Guerreiro for example) occasionally signal the presence of Muslim troops in the Arakan army without specifying any numbers. Afghan Muslim soldiers (Pathans) fleeing the advance of the Mughals in Bengal had probably taken service with the King of Arakan since the end of the sixteenth century. De Brito says that there were Pathans, Persians, and *Mouros* in the Arakanese army (Brito 1607, 241). Tibau specifically mentions Muslims from the Malabar Coast²⁵ and Guerreiro knows about a ship carrying impressive 1600 mercenaries from Masulipatam, which sank in 1608 before reaching Arakan.²⁶ There are no specific mentions in Western sources of Muslim soldiers originating from areas

²⁵ Tibau 1611, 3. For quotations of Tibau's text, I acknowledge the help of Michael Charney and Stephan van Galen.

²⁶ Guerreiro, 3: 84. Father Manrique who frequently mentions his encounters with Muslims, also refers to the presence of Muslim guards at the palace in Mrauk U (Manrique 1927, 142). The best-known single Muslim warrior group were the remains of Shah Shuja's Mughal guards who, after Shah Shuja's death at the end of 1660, were integrated into the Arakan forces. Varying sources put their number between 200 and 500.

under Arakanese control. What evidence we have suggests that the number of Muslims among the Arakanese troops should be counted by the hundreds rather than by the thousands. The accounts of the political disorders in Arakan at the end of the seventeenth and subsequently during the eighteenth century suggest that most Muslims found their way into the *kuiy to ran*. The term *kuiy to ran* means royal bodyguard, but it might be more aptly translated as palace guard or praetorian guard. The *kuiy ran* were organized as service groups along the same lines as other royal service groups. In reciprocation for service (taken in turns), their families were allocated land for their subsistence. Villages of service groups were located in the river plains of the Kaladan and Lemro.

After the fall of Pegu, the largest group of soldiers of foreign origin were the Mons who had been deported to Arakan and resettled in several villages in the Kaladan valley, the heartland of Arakan. Bocarro provides us with the fantastic figure of an 80,000 men strong Arakanese army that was sent as Tibau's support troops against the lord of Bhalwa (around 1610); 10,000 of them were said to be Mons. Even more revealingly the Mughal chronicler Talish calls the Arakanese soldiers 'Talingas' (=Talaings, i.e. Mons) which underscores in some way the significant value of these men (Bocarro 1876, 440-441; Sarkar 1907, 414). Most likely all the Mon soldiers were *kuiy ran* (Leider 1998a, 76).

We lack any homogeneous description of the weaponry of Arakanese troops and the evidence still extant is of little value. Native descriptions mention swords, long knives, shields, bows and muskets. Canons are mentioned in connection with the ships and probably refer to the swivel guns mounted on the large Arakanese galleys. Canon probably cast in Mrauk U, also formed an important part of the defenceworks in Mrauk U, Chittagong, and other fortresses.

While the Arakanese chroniclers never give much information about their fleets and are even more reticent about the number of ships and galleys that composed a fleet, Portuguese and Mughal sources contain a sizeable number of figures referring to the Arakanese fleets of the seventeenth century. The Arakanese used different types of sailing ships and oared vessels, but little is actually known on the standard composition of the Arakanese fleets. Among the vessels captured by the Mughals in Chittagong (1666), Talish mentions *ghurah* (also *catur* or *kattu*, a two-mast), *khalu*, *kusa* (also *cozza*), *jalba*, *jangi* and *balam* (also *balon*) (Sarkar 1907, 410; 414; Deloche 1980, 158-159; 181; 195). The most frequent type was the *jalia* (or *jalba*), often indicated in Western sources as *jélyasse*, *gelia*, *galeasse*, or *gallivat*. Roughly 70-80 per cent of Arakanese vessels belonged to this category. The *jalia* was a sturdy oared vessel of varying size, which was admirably suited to navigating along the rivers and the coasts. It also had one or two masts on which sails could be set and was manned by sixteen to fifty men. Its armament could consist of five or six swivel guns.

The Burmese chronicler U Kala says that the Arakanese fleet sent to support the lord of Prome against Tabinshwethi in 1542 totalled 700 vessels. Fedrici gives the size of the Arakanese fleet around 1569 as 200. In U Pandi's chronicle, we find the figure of 300 for the fleet sent against Pegu in 1598. Guerreiro gives a total of 1000 vessels sent against Sandwip in 1602, while the fleet the king prepared in 1604 to attack Syriam was composed of 500 sail (*velas*). Bocarro gives the number of the

same fleet as 600 *jalias*, twenty-five *navios*, and ten *galiotas* and gives a rough approximation of 5000 men. For the siege of Syriam two years later, the same author gives the number of the ships as 800. But the number of the 1607 armada is even more inflated in Guerreiro which gives 1200 *velas todas de remo* while in De Brito's own account we find the number of 1000. According to De Brito, the Arakanese soldiers numbered 30,000 in 1607 (a figure also found in Guerreiro); Bocarro's total figure, though, does not exceed 10,000 men. More surprisingly, the Austrian diplomat Fernberger, states that the Arakanese counted 40,000 men (including 10,000 musketeers), 370 war elephants, 4000 canon of varying size and 2000 boats when they laid siege to the fortress of a rebel governor in 1589 (Guerreiro 1940, 3: 78; Brito 1607, 241; Bocarro 1876, 145; Fernberger 1999, 115).

All these numbers pale into insignificance when we look at some of Mirza Nathan's opulent figures. The Mughal general describes the Arakanese king of the early seventeenth century as the lord of one million men, ten thousand war vessels and one thousand five hundred elephants (Mirza Nathan 1936, 2: 710). Twice, Mirza Nathan ascribes a size of 300,000 men to the Arakanese army²⁷ while Mughal forces had far less manpower. Ten thousand men and 200 elephants are said to have formed the invading army of Qasim Khan around 1616, while the forces Ibrahim Khan Fateh Jang sent against Arakan comprised 40,000 men and 1000 elephants (Mirza Nathan 1936, 1: 405; 2: 632). An Arakanese attack against Sripur in early 1612 was composed of 300 war boats, and an attack against Sarhad Khan (probably in 1616) of 700 war boats (with 300 musketeers and 100 elephants). The Arakanese fleet which was rallied to defend Arakan against Fateh Jang's invasion consisted of no less than 700 *ghurabs* and 4000-5000 *jalia* boats (Mirza Nathan 1936, 1: 146; 383-384; 2: 629).

One way to use the figures given for the *jalia* boats is to multiply their number by the possible number of oarsmen needed to propel them. What kind of conclusions can be drawn from these figures, if we discard some of the obviously exaggerated figures? And can we use these figures? One conclusion is that if we put them all together, they do not provide us with a clear, coherent picture and they partially contradict each other. Cogently they all refer to quite different situations and conflicts, which makes it difficult to compare them. Most strikingly, the apparently most reliable authors, the Mughal general Mirza Nathan and the Portuguese captain Felipe de Brito, inspire the least confidence.

The theoretical number of 40,000-50,000 Arakanese men fit for royal service suggested above, admittedly a vast and probably unrealistic figure, does not have much practical value for speculating on the number of the king's soldiers, as a large part of the military forces was not drawn from the general population. But it allows us to draw an upper line and discard any higher figure found in the sources. The bottom line may be drawn around 5000. This would mean that an Arakanese royal army

²⁷ Mirza Nathan 1936, 1: 332 refers to a major raid against Bhallua (probably in 1612 or 1613) and Mirza Nathan, 1: 405-406, refers to the Arakanese defence against the Mughal invasion of 1616 (date uncertain).

would not have counted less than 5000 men, a number which would roughly match the smallest figure (200) of a royal fleet of *jalia* boats. But as the numbers of *jalia* boats as given by the sources is generally much higher, the total number of men in action during the major campaigns in the first and second decades of the seventeenth century points to double or triple this number. Unfortunately the relationship between the number of vessels and the number of men in the sources looks confusing. One example is the 1605 campaign against Syriam. According to Guerreiro, the fleet consisted of 550 *velas* and 15,000 men, while Bocarro gives 600 *jalias*, twenty-five *navios*, ten *galiotas* and other ships, but only 4000 men plus another 1000 men who were sent to Bassein (Guerreiro 1931, 2: 139; Bocarro 1876, 136). In the Arakanese sources, this kind of disproportion is particularly striking. As we mentioned earlier with reference to U Pandi, the invading army sent against Pegu is said to have had 280,000 men, but only 300 vessels. Even if many troops marched over the passes instead of going by sea, the contrast is striking. On the other hand, the number of the boats appears here as a likely figure.

An analysis of successful Arakanese warfare tends to indicate the importance of the fleet rather than the weight of land forces.²⁸ Describing the Pegu campaign, Mirza Nathan's descriptions and not least the Arakanese chronicles themselves suggest that the land forces of Arakan including elephants, artillery, and musketeers formed the overwhelming bulk of the army. By contrast, the fleet generally comes off second best.²⁹ Even so, the success of Arakanese warfare largely depended on the mobility provided by its ships. The 1605 and 1607 sieges of Syriam failed, not because the Arakanese were inferior on the water, but because they proved unable to sustain a protracted siege, thereby subduing De Brito's fortress. Similarly, the Arakanese do not seem to have played a major role in the siege of Pegu in 1598. The chief prowess of the Arakanese was attacking and defending themselves on the rivers. In 1599, they successfully forced the Siamese out of Lower Burma by cutting off their supply lines on the rivers. They fought back the Portuguese invasion on the Kaladan River in 1615 and the occasional Mughal fleets mounting river guard in Eastern Bengal were no match for them. The more noteworthy attacks of 1625 and 1664 against Dhaka and the Mughal fleet laid the foundation for the delusory myth of Arakanese invincibility reflected in Talish's emotive account. Briefly, the decisive factor in the military tactics adopted by Arakan was to gain and sustain a superior position on the waterways. The Mughal campaign against Chittagong in 1665-1666 shows clearly that once the battle on the sea was lost, the garrison in the fort of Chittagong disbanded. Quite obviously this waterborne advantage was not enough to make lasting conquests. The major incursions with land forces into the modern Noakhali district at the end of Man Khamaung's reign and during the 1620s did not lead to any permanent control over the area. The expansion of Arakan is ultimately the story of a very relative success.

²⁸ Vincent Leblanc, a seventeenth century French adventurer, defines Arakan as a '*royaume entre le Bengale et le Pegou, qui est fort puissant, mais plus par mer que par terre*' (Leblanc 1648, 131).

²⁹ One simple reason for this is that the army is dealt with mostly in the classical terms of Indian warfare. In the four traditional parts of the army (men, horses, elephants and chariots), the fleet has no place.

To put it briefly: even if during the heyday of the monarchy, the Arakanese kings could have mustered say, twenty thousand men, their significance did not depend on sheer weight of numbers. The Arakanese excelled in river warfare, in fast strikes and swift manoeuvres on the water, and it was this kind of specialization that ensured them a distinctive advantage in their campaigns. The systematic deportation of people from Bengal and from Pegu (at the turn of the seventeenth century) highlights the fact that the kings constantly wanted to increase the supply of their human resources. The social corollary of the Arakanese expansion was the integration into Arakanese society of Mons, Portuguese, and Indian Muslims, all originally enrolled in the armed forces. As the manpower available to the Burmese kings or the Mughal governors was so much greater, the restricted pool of human resources available put clear limits on expansion and ultimately condemned the kings to a mere defence of their territories, an admittedly aggressive defence that proved quite effective over many decades.³⁰

The Roots of Expansion - A Look at the Historical Background

Between 1430 and 1530 the Mrauk U kingship was the motor of an emergent political centre that consolidated its political hold over the Arakan littoral. During the following century, the ambitious Arakanese kings tried to expand into the realms of their neighbours. In terms of political relationships, the *mandala* of Arakan can be defined as an area covering Bengal, Tripura, the tiny but relevant Luso-Asiatic communities, and Lower Burma. *Mandala* ('circle') is a fashionable concept with many applications; it refers here to the sphere of political activities, the arena in which the Arakanese kings tried to gain acknowledgment as overlords and obtain tributes from less potent chiefs or kings by forming and reforming alliances or cultivating enmities. In terms of expansion, this *mandala* was arguably not a level field offering equivalent options, but, as we have seen, a rough terrain strewn with manifold risks and opportunities. Having examined the course of the expansion of Arakan and its means, we may turn now to an analysis of some major characteristics and its deeper causes and motives.

The most obvious characteristic of Arakanese expansion during the Mrauk U period is that the kings only tried to extend their domination along the littoral into areas which were also accessible to their fleets. This is true of their temporary expansion into Lower Burma and of their expansion to the northwest into Bengal. Concomitantly, we note that urban centres attacked, conquered, occupied, or brought under temporary control by the Arakanese were always port cities with a flourishing trade and connections to the open sea. Dhaka, Chittagong, Bassein, Martaban, and Syriam share these characteristics. The Arakanese could have chosen to occupy Pegu, but they clearly preferred Syriam. Attacks and raids did not necessarily penetrate deep into the countryside, and they were often river-based, deployed in such a

³⁰ When we look beyond the intrinsic value of the king's men, it is obvious that the defence of the core areas of the kingdom, indeed, the sheer existence of the kingdom, owed a great deal to the surrounding natural conditions: the mountains in the east, the jungle in the north and the rough sea in the west.

way that the proximity of the ships ensured supply lines, rapid movements, retreat and the eventual preparation of ambushes.

Another characteristic of the expansion of Arakan in terms of continuity was that its direction was mainly oriented towards Bengal. This naturally enough leads us to ask why. Was it solely because the ports of Bengal offered rich plunder, while the natural barrier of the mountain ranges of the Arakan Yoma dissuaded the planning of raids against Upper Burma? Arakanese sources suggest a more profound reason as they reveal that the claims of Arakan were, it could be said, of a historical nature.

Two chronicle traditions report that before King Man Pa set out on his campaign against Bengal, he sent a letter to the 'King of India' (Candamalalankara 1931, 2: 58; Tha Thwan Aung 1927, 74-75). He stated that his ancestor King Man Co Mwan, out of gratitude for the sultan of Bengal's help in reconquering his throne a century earlier, had given the sultan 'the twelve towns of Bhanga'. This debt of gratitude had now been paid and the twelve towns of Bhanga should return to their legitimate lord, the King of Arakan.³¹ Here we shall not digress into the historicity of the speech, its articulation with actual facts or its place in historiography. Whatever these may be, taken at face value, the claim stands out as a remarkable sign that the Arakanese expansion into southeast Bengal was based on a historical argument. According to the chronicler's logic, a part of Bengal had been under the rule of the Arakanese kings before or up to the reign of King Man Co Mwan.

Man Pa's speech therefore raises two important questions. First, was there a time in the past when Arakanese kings reigned over territories situated in Bengal, and, second, to what geographical area does the expression 'the twelve towns of Bhanga' actually refer (cf. Leider 1998c).

The Arakanese kings of Pyansa, Purin, Khrip, and Laungkrak (eleventh-fourteenth century dynasties) reportedly led invasions against the Sak and northwards up to Chittagong. But as yet we know very little about this so-called Lemro period and in the sources there is no hint at an Arakanese domination over parts of southeast Bengal. When we go even further back in time looking for the roots of the later Arakanese claims, we arrive at the Vesali period during the first millenium, when Arakan belonged to the cultural sphere of Indo-Aryan expansion and, most likely, Hindu chiefs reigned in the Kaladan and Lemro valleys. Chronicles, coins, and inscriptions notably confirm the existence of a dynasty of Candra kings, but the chronologies of the Vesali period largely diverge. The evidence of the coins and of the famous Anandacandra inscription (west face) in Mrauk U is not confirmed by the historiography. The Anandacandra pillar contains, among other kings, a list of Candra kings who may be ascribed to a period extending from the fourth to the early eighth centuries AD. Coins confirm the existence of half of these kings. The chronicle traditions know eight Candra kings whose names do not match those of the above-named kings and whose reigns extend from AD 788 to 957 (The whole dynasty as given by the chronicles extends up to 1018 AD). Art and sculpture prove that the

³¹ I would like to thank U Tin Htway (Heidelberg) for checking translations of the various readings of this statement.

Arakanese Candra dynasty was integrated into the cultural sphere of the Hindu-Buddhist monarchies of North India and Bengal. Connections with the Mahayanist centres of North India are apparent, Arakanese Candra coins were found in East Bengal and Anandacandra's Buddhist affiliations which are shown by his contacts with Nalanda, Mainamati, and Sri Lanka suggest a high degree of cultural unity. This unity was disrupted in later centuries.³² Analysing the remains of the inscriptions on the north face of the Anandacandra *prasasti*, P. Gutman has tried to identify a few kings 'with names beginning with Simgha- and ending with -suracandra' with the later Candra kings of the chronicles. At the same time, the epigraphic evidence for the name of Govindacandra, the last king of the Buddhist Candra dynasty who ruled in East Bengal (Harikela) between approx. AD 900 and 1050 (Hazra 1998, 254-257), suggests a connection between these two Candra dynasties. B.N. Mukherjee has shown that the original territory of Harikela was situated in the Chittagong area. He suggests that the Candra dynasty of southeast Bengal expanded its territories commencing in the reign of Trailokyacandra (between AD 850 and 950). This king was called 'a string of pearls of Vanga' by Ladahacandra, one of his successors who controlled parts of the territories of Samatata, Vanga, and Sylhet (south and east Bengal). Mukherjee also notes that Govindacandra, the last king of the dynasty (mid-eleventh century), was 'referred to as Govindacandra of Vangaladesa in the Tirumalai inscription of Rajendra Cola'. Later Harikela was identified with Vanga (southeast Bengal) (Mukherjee 1975).

Though we do not know exactly how the Candras of Arakan and the Candras of southeast Bengal were linked, it is not presumptuous to assume that there was a connection between them. It is even possible that the Harikela Candras came originally from Arakan. The vastly extended territories of the Harikela Candras of the early eleventh century may thus have been considered as an area to which the later Arakanese kings could lay claim.

The geographical meaning of the term 'Twelve towns of Bhanga' is problematic. The term Bhanga or Vanga in the history of the first millenium AD refers to southeast Bengal. If it is a pre-Mughal or even a pre-Islamic expression, it surely does not refer to the whole of Bengal. There is likely no connection between this expression and the expression of the 'Twelve lords' (*barah bhuyan*) of Bengal.³³

In Arakanese historiographical literature, the 'Twelve towns of Bhanga' is one of three expressions that refer to Bengal or a part of Bengal. The other two are Suratan,

³² A convenient list of the Candra kings and parts of Prof. Johnston's translation of the Anandacandra inscription are found in Robinson/Shaw 1980, 15-18. Analysing the *ye dhamma*-votive inscriptions, Gutman concludes by saying: 'It would appear that a common tradition was shared by Arakan, East Bengal, Assam, Yunnan and the Pyu centres, which points to an interchange of Buddhist clergy, if not to trade relations.' (Gutman 1977, 79).

³³ The Indian historian R.C. Majumdar calls the period between the defeat of Daud Khan Karrani (1576) and the firm establishment of Mughal rule in Bengal under Islam Khan (died 1613), the 'age of the bhara bhuiyas'. During this period, the *zamindars* (landlords) fought against the Mughal government and tried to save their local autonomy while there was no strong central administration. As we have said earlier, this situation also favored the development of the Arakanese expansion, the Arakanese control over Chittagong and Portuguese territorialism.

which has been interpreted as 'sultan' (i.e. sultanate of Bengal) and, more vaguely, chroniclers would sometimes just refer to the country of the west. As the Arakanese territorial claim refers only to the 'Twelve towns of Bhanga' and not to 'Suratan', the contemporary writers probably had a fairly precise idea to what area that expression was referring.

According to the account of Man Pa's Bengal campaign in the *Dhañawati are-to-pum*, Man Pa conquered Dhaka (Daga) and Sylhet (Silak). From Dhaka, he sent a letter to the 'King of India (?)' in which he claimed that since the earliest times the kingdom of Rakkhapura (i.e. Arakan) had extended from the city of Kumbhila in the southwest³⁴ to the city of Mauksuja and the port of Kulikwatta³⁵ on the other side of the Sagira river³⁶ and in the northeast up to the city of Silak west of the Raung Phru river (Candamalalankara 1931, 2: 63; *Dhañawati are to pum* 1970, 43). Mauksuja is most likely Muksudabad, the pre-eighteenth century name of Murshidabad but the location of Sylhet on the western side of a major Bengal river seems curious. The Raung Phru river could be the Brahmaputra, as another chronicler writes that Man Pa claimed the 'Twelve towns of Bhanga' up to the Raung Phru river (Tha Thwan Aung 1927, 74-75). Oddly enough, Raung Phru is also referred to as a city. After his return from Dhaka, Man Pa is said to have left four senior officers of the guard in charge of the towns of Silak, Raung Phru, Kamsa, and Kumbhila. Kamsa, a place occasionally mentioned in Arakanese sources, was reportedly located in southeast Bengal, north of Chittagong. In the same letter mentioned above, Man Pa calls himself king of kings (*rajadhiraja*) of Indriyapura, Ayucchapura, and Rakkhapura. While Ayucchapura is another name for Mrauk U and Rakkhapura refers to Arakan (and apparently, in the royal view, a large part of Bengal as well), the identity of Indriyapura remains a mystery. From all this, we can only conclude that Man Pa's claims to Bengal excluded west Bengal (west of the Bhagirathi River) and north Bengal (north of the Ganges).

In the *Dhañawati are-to-pum*, there is a short narrative that relates the possession of the island of Sandwip by a King of Vesali. It says that at the time of King Siricandra of Vesali³⁷ his son, Singacandra, went to India. The daughters of the Indian *pasha* (*sic!*), Damramajali and Durabhi, asked the King of Vesali to present four thousand men to the protector spirit (*nat*) of Sandwip. The king offered four thousand people who produced salt on the island of Hapatu. When King Man Pa conquered the island, he deported their descendants and donated them to the famous Andaw, Sandaw, and Nandaw pagodas in Sandoway. This narrative presents the King of Vesali as an ancestor of Man Pa and the story connects in a typical and, for the chronicler, a very meaningful way older events with contemporaneous royal activities. In this case, owing to the historical perspective of a former royal donation, the deportation

³⁴ It is possible that this is an error and Kumbhila, being Comilla, should be placed in the southeast.

³⁵ This spelling could be interpreted as Calcutta which would be an anachronism.

³⁶ The Sagira, also referred to as Sagira-Bhagiranadi, is likely the Bhagirathi River. See also Bouchon/Thomaz 1988: map 10.

³⁷ This name is neither found in the earlier Arakanese chronicles nor among the names of the Ananda *prasasti* in Mrauk U.

is legitimized and in a way sanctified as the deportees were destined to become pagoda slaves.

It is noteworthy that the grandiose claims to large parts of Bengal can be attributed only to King Man Pa. If these claims were in fact products of later chroniclers – something we would suggest – they might be a more general reflection of the vast ambitions of the Arakanese kings at the end of the sixteenth century.

One of King Man Phalaung's military campaigns in southeast Bengal is introduced by the chronicler with the formula 'it was a royal wish to see the omniscient Buddha's teaching flourish in Majjhimadesa in the west'. The chronicle tradition stresses this king's profile as a future bodhisatva when it compares his wars with those that the Ceylonese King Dutthagamani fought against Elara. Like Man Pa, he is also compared with his legendary ancestors, Vasudeva and Candrasuriya, the latter the king who cast the image of Lord Buddha when he descended on Mount Selagiri. As we mentioned earlier, the chronicles actually say less about the conquest of Chittagong (the local governor is said to have recognized the Arakanese king as his overlord) than about the campaigns against Tripura. The chronicler makes a rare distinction between the country of the Sak, called Kamboja, and the country of the Mrung, called Uttarac. The term Kamboja can possibly be related to a little known tenth century Buddhist dynasty, the Kamboja-Palas, which came, according to Tibetan sources, from the eastern Lushai Hill region. Scholars disagree on the area where they reigned (Hazra 1998, 250). As the term Uttarac is also used for China,³⁸ and this being the sole instance in the Arakanese chronicles where the name Kamboja is applied to southern Tripura, both terms may have been used here by the chronicler as hyperbole to enhance the narrative of the conquests.

Though the evidence that can be gathered in the Arakanese sources is not overwhelming, especially in terms of continuity, it seriously challenges the rather superficial perception of the expansion of Arakan into southeast Bengal during the early modern period as mere slave raids and sporadic attempts at conquest. Its significance goes beyond the obvious economic and political implications. In a broader cultural perspective, the historical dimension of the continuity of Buddhism in east Bengal should most definitely not be overlooked. Actually the way in which Indian Buddhism survived in the Chittagong area and was later revitalized by the Buddhist tradition inherited by Burma and Arakan is still a neglected field of studies. Unlike other Buddhist kings of Southeast Asia who were keen to stress in one way or the other a prestigious connection with a distant Indian Buddhist past, the Arakanese kings boasted not only of their Buddhist identity, but also an Indian identity which linked their own expansionist policy to the memory of a former dynasty.

Conclusion

It is evident that we have not dealt with many other relevant aspects of the expansion of Arakan. Unfortunately its economic aspects have largely had to be neglected.

³⁸ Uttarac is also mentioned on the Yattara Bell where procedures are detailed to conquer Arakan's neighbouring countries (Forchhammer 1891, 10)

Trade is a difficult subject in a political context that strongly suggests the continuity of hostile relations with the neighbouring areas. A study of the means of expansion would, for example, require some further reflections on the social dynamics of the large military service groups and the general population of mainly rice-producers. More technical aspects of war, the use of elephants, the construction of defensive water-works and the role of artillery have also been disregarded. The question of the origins of Arakanese expansion is linked to an even larger, little prospected field of studies. We would also like to know more about Arakan in terms of historical geography. So much for the shortcomings.

The aim of this paper was to present an outline of the Arakanese expansion in its political and geographical context and to introduce its main actors, a succession of dynamic Arakanese kings able to mobilize a substantial amount of human and material resources. As we saw, the picture that unfolds is impressive. While Arakan, in say, the eighteenth century, was no longer an offensive, threatening neighbour and had been relegated to a mere backwater of commercial activities in the Bay, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had seen an expansive kingdom which surely reached its limits in a relatively short time, but nonetheless kept on reaching out in search of a status of regional importance. That regional status was based materially on its integration into the maritime and trans-Yoma trade networks and its efficient armed forces, and ideologically grounded in a vision of past territorial grandeur.

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