

**Beyond State-centered Histories in Western Burma:  
Missionizing Monks and Intra-regional Migrants in the Arakan Littoral,  
c. 1784-1860**

**Introduction**

Prior to the beginning of 1785, the eastern shores of the Bay of Bengal were home to the powerful early modern kingdom of Arakan. During recent fieldwork in Mrauk U, the royal capital of this kingdom, I was impressed by the size and magnificence of the remains of the royal palace (quite certainly the most impressive I have seen in any of the early modern sites I have visited previously in Southeast Asia). It was not difficult to imagine why seventeenth century foreign travellers like Sebastião Manrique who visited Mrauk U in its heyday were so impressed by the court and, by extension, the emergent Arakanese state. Manrique devoted a major portion of his account to Mrauk U, another significant portion to the Roman Catholic Mission at Dianga where he spent much of his time, and the remainder to a few points in between, such as the harborage for the Arakanese royal *armada* (Manrique 1946). Aside from a brief journey into a frontier area, Manrique spent almost no time in rural Arakan, or at least did not record very much about it. Manrique does hint though, that Roman Catholic priests who tried to enter Arakanese villages were driven off by priest-led villagers (Manrique 1946, 1.254). In short, despite the patronage and protection offered by the royal court, this patronage and protection did not extend very far beyond the royal city and a few locations occupied by royal soldiers. Even though its perspective of Arakan is clearly limited by the boundaries of the early modern Arakanese state, Manrique's account, popularized in the form of Maurice Collis' *The Land of the Great Image* (1946) has been by far the most influential work in Western historiography on Arakan, at least until the early 1990s.

Prevailing studies of nineteenth and twentieth century mainland Southeast Asia are still ordered by registers adopted from Western historiography. One chief orientation of historiography of Southeast Asia has been towards an understanding of history from the perspective of the emergence of the modern state, a key foundation of Western historiography. Most recently, Victor Lieberman (Lieberman 1993, 508-9) and, to a lesser extent, Anthony Reid (Reid 1993, Volume 2) have offered additional state-centered views of general Southeast Asian history. As Takeshi Hamashita has recently argued, however, we need to look at Asia from within Asia if we are going to understand Asian history (Hamashita 1997). This should mean, at least in part, that

what is important to Asians should be the ordering principle for interpretations of Asian history. Instead, Western historiography on some Asian societies, such as that of Arakan, has allowed the state to dominate indigenous history.<sup>1</sup> Part of the problem is that the most available indigenous 'hard sources' are the relics of courts and rulers or else European sources that lend themselves to state-centered histories because the merchants who wrote them were dependent upon these very courts for trade purposes.<sup>2</sup> As demonstrated in recent literature (Leider 1998b; Charney 2000), indigenous chronicles are also filled with many kinds of problems that are significant from the perspective of Western-oriented historiography, but nonetheless yield valuable indigenous perspectives that are either unvalued in some Western historiography, or, as convincingly demonstrated by Sanjay Subrahmanyam, are absent in European source materials (Subrahmanyam 1993, 5; Charney 1999, 323-326).

Arakan has been short-changed in the prevailing literature dealing with the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, because it was conquered at the end of the eighteenth century and, afterwards, was relegated to the periphery of different state-centered narratives. Under Burman rule (1785-1825), its 1825 occupation by the British during the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826), and annexation by the British under the terms of the Treaty of Yandabo (1826), for example, Arakan fell into the periphery of two expanding political centers: the Burmese (1785-1825) and British Bengal (after 1825). Certainly, many developments important to Arakanese society continued to cross the shifting political borders that accompanied the succeeding conquests and annexations of Arakan. As developments occurring in the Burmese- and British-constructed 'periphery' and across political boundaries at that, religious missionizing, conversion, and religious change do not easily find a place in the state-centered histories of Burma or British Bengal during these periods. This does not mean that such developments necessarily remain unrecorded in state-centered documentation. Rather, it means that histories of Burma and British Bengal tend to present a narrowly-focused perspective, often centered on the state, and neglect many developments important to places and people who fall within the state-constructed periphery. The three standard histories of Burma by Phayre (1883), Harvey (1925), and Maung Htin Aung (1967), for example, all center on the Burmans and the Burman state, and the coverage of the 'periphery' in these three works lessens with each successive publication.

In this paper, I will attempt to look at religious missionizing and change in Arakan during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I will first examine Burmese state-directed missionizing in Arakan, which occurred during and after the period of Burman rule. I then turn to the emergence of an Arakanese-based Buddhist purification monastic order during the period of British rule. I seek to demonstrate how

<sup>1</sup> Useful rethinking of historiography and the identification of this problem has recently been offered on China (Duara 1995).

<sup>2</sup> I have been no exception to this problem in some of my earlier work (Charney 1998b). My dissertation, however, was an attempt to redirect attention away from state-ordered perspectives toward more subterranean (in respect to court-centred chronicles, inscriptions, and merchant accounts) developments (Charney 1999).

prevailing historiography on Burma has generally neglected both the state-directed missionizing and the emergence of a home-grown Buddhist purification monastic order in Arakan, largely because both episodes appear to have been considered as unimportant activities in the periphery compared to activities in the Burmese court and the 'core' of the Burman state, the Irrawaddy valley. This is especially true of the latter development: despite its almost complete absence in Western historiography on both Arakan and Burma, for example, this Buddhist purification monastic order played an important role in nineteenth century Arakanese life, and its after-effects still resonate in Arakanese society today. The argument of this paper is that due to a reliance on state-centered narratives, prevailing historiography on Burma, including Arakan and the Irrawaddy-based Burman kingdoms, has unconsciously shut one eye on many developments in Arakan that were not critical from the perspective of the Burmese court in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

### **The Religious, Demographic, and Political Context**

Arakan has a long and complex history that cannot be summed up easily. The literature regarding this history, however, can be dealt with readily enough. Over the last half a decade, or a little more, substantial reworking of Arakanese history<sup>3</sup> prevents us from automatically assuming, as an earlier generation of scholars of Arakanese history did, that Arakan has always been Buddhist or that this Buddhism has always meant the same thing or meant one system of thought at any one time (Charney 1999). The Arakan littoral has been politically and, in some ways, economically divided in two since the mid-seventeenth century. Nonetheless, it constitutes a single region at several levels. First, physical geography and climate help to define a Banga<sup>4</sup>-Arakan continuum (Charney 1999:16-59). Second, linguistically and in terms of local historical memory, it is still home to substantial numbers of Burmese speakers and related groups, many of whom continue to self-identify themselves by their relationship to the early modern Arakanese kingdom that once included the whole littoral. Third, religious interaction has continued across the political borders erected by early Asian and later European colonial regimes, tying north and south together.

Arakan also had substantial connections with the Irrawaddy valley and the Arakan-Irrawaddy valley inter-relationship has intensified more recently, especially in the last two hundred years. I call this intensification '*Irrawaddy-ization*,' (I prefer this to *Burmanization*) although I only use this term as a tentative label until more substantial research has been conducted to determine the full nature of Arakan-Irrawaddy valley cultural exchange. I define *Irrawaddy-ization* for the purposes of this paper as the purposeful efforts of the Burmese court to promote key elements of the Irrawaddy valley-wide cultural synthesis in the Arakan littoral after the extension of Burman

<sup>3</sup> For a survey of the historiography on Arakan for the last decade of the twentieth century, see Charney 2000, 54 [footnote 4].

<sup>4</sup> 'Banga,' here, is the traditional Arakanese term referring to what is today, roughly, southeastern Bangladesh. As no current term, however, is an exact or appropriate equivalent, the term 'Banga' will be used in this paper.

rule there from 1785. *Irrawaddy-ization* hinged itself to the extension of Burman rule into Arakan from 1785. Perhaps expectedly, given the role of Buddhism in sustaining the legitimacy of the Burmese court, the Burman rulers of Arakan attempted to control Buddhism in the newly conquered province. Irrawaddy-Valley Buddhist missionizing in central and southern Arakan, for example, largely took place after the incorporation of these areas into the Burman empire from early 1785. The Burman kingdom had invaded the Arakanese kingdom in late 1784/early 1785 legitimizing such intervention on claims that the (Buddhist) religion in Arakan was ruined.<sup>5</sup> The royal court claimed in a royal order dated 16 October 1784 that bad people had obstructed the (Buddhist) religion and that they had to be captured so that the religion would shine again (Than Tun 1983, 4: 392). At that time, the Burman court sponsored Buddhist religious missions to purify the Arakanese *sangha*. The first of these missions, all composed of Buddhist monks, occurred in 1785, 1787, and 1788.<sup>6</sup> Such missionary monks were sent even after the end of Burman rule in Arakan, as one source records the arrival of such monks in Arakan as late as 1840 (Comstock 1840, 74).

It appears that the local histories of Arakan were supplanted by new histories introduced by these same missionizing monks from the Irrawaddy Valley (Charney 1999, 259-267). What is today considered by Arakanese Buddhists to be the history of their 'nation,' the pro-Buddhist and anti-Muslim *Dhañawati are-to-pum*, was not composed until 1787, and then by the *sasana-pru chara-to-bhura*, a missionary Buddhist monk, Ashin Kawisara, in the town of Thandwe. Although Ashin Kawisara clearly drew from a variety of historical materials, especially those found in the form of the 1770s compilation *Man Raja-kri are-to-ca-tam*, much of the *Dhañawati are-to-pum* demonstrably belongs to the time of Ashin Kawisara, after the Burman conquest. Furthermore, the text of the *Dhañawati are-to-pum* seems to have been even more Buddhicized by later copyists, so far as I can tell from my personal copies of the palm-leaf manuscripts. Other Arakanese histories, such as the *Kyauk-ro thamaing*, underwent extensive scrutiny by *sayadaws* in Upper Burma, on the explicit orders of the Burman royal court. Evidently, some of these manuscripts were not 'retained' in Burman royal libraries afterwards, the royal order being the only record of their existence (Than Tun 1983, 6: 243). It is possible to imagine why such Arakanese histories disappeared after being 'investigated' by Burmese Buddhist monks. The Burman court also tried to have Arakanese monks defrocked and re-ordained within a Burman 'reformed' *sangha*. To do so, new ordination halls were built for the missionary monks from Burma, orders for which were issued to Burman officials in Arakan by the court. Here a new indigenous group of monks was ordained (Charney 1999, 262).

Despite these efforts, the *Irrawaddy-ization* of the Buddhist establishment in Arakan was ineffectual until it was conjoined with the emergence of religious

<sup>5</sup> Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library, London, Anonymous. 'Rakhaing Razawingei,' [palm-leaf manuscript number 3413], n.d. AMS, 4b.

<sup>6</sup> Royal Order, 3 January 1788 in Tun, 1983: 4.332; Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library, London, Nga Mi, 1840. 'Rakhaing Razawin.' [palm-leaf manuscript, number 3465a], 1840, AMS, 252b.

communal identities, a gradual process throughout the nineteenth century after the end of Burman rule. To summarize briefly what I have argued elsewhere, these religious communal identities coagulated in response to the opening of new lands, overpopulation in old ones, and the necessity for collective action to be undertaken for community survival. These factors emerged in a context whereby the traditional forms of effecting collective action and mutual security – patron-client ties between villages and the rural gentry – had been rendered ineffective by the impact of British administrative actions among the rural gentry. The rural gentry were, in short, alienated from the villagers. Deprived of leadership, the villagers turned to religion, the only existing alternative source of extra-local co-operation; many Arakanese thus turned to rural Buddhist monks (Charney 1999, 278-303). It should be stressed that this was not an intended impact of British administrative reform. Thus *Irrawaddy-ization*, only emerged in the Arakan littoral in the long run when it became useful to some groups of Arakanese, and was not the upshot of the Burman state project of the pre-British period.

After the end of Burman rule, *Irrawaddy-ization* continued to influence the lives of villagers in a wide variety of ways. To take the chief examples, Buddhist patronage patterns shifted over the nineteenth century from the rural gentry's patronage to village donations via group subscription (Charney 1999, 296-299). Village festivals were increasingly oriented toward Buddhist monks. Take, for example, such elements of a festival as the *padesa* (wishing tree) during the *kathin* ceremony and the offerings to Buddhist monks after the April Water festival, and the whole 'First festival of lights' (Charney 1999, 294-296). Arakanese Buddhism became subject to the same doctrinal disagreements which characterized the Irrawaddy valley Buddhist *sangha*. Irrawaddy valley Buddhist historical traditions also were accepted as legitimizing myths in the Arakan littoral.

By looking at the *Irrawaddy-ization* of Arakanese Buddhism, I have suggested that some state-prompted religious developments affecting Arakan had an important impact, although it took a considerable period of time and the autonomous activities by the Arakanese after the end of Burman rule to carry these developments to fruition. These developments were certainly state-prompted, as the Burmese court was attempting to tie together an extensive but loose-knit empire through various means, including religious centralization and the homogenization of Buddhist religious practices. As a result, state-centered documentation, such as royal orders, includes much of this information.

For the overall theme of the emergence of the Burman-state based in the Irrawaddy valley, however, these developments, however important to the state at that time, do not appear to have warranted a place in the standard histories of Burma. Arthur Phayre (1883), G.E. Harvey (1925), and Maung Htin Aung (1967), for example, all discuss the actual conquest by the Burmese of Arakan, but fail to discuss those Burmese activities in Arakan afterward that were extremely critical to Arakanese society and to Arakan's history, but amounted to simply one more example of the Burman court's broad approach to rule throughout Burma. This neglect in the prevailing literature will become clearer in the next section of this paper.

## The Rise of the Sangharaja Order

The *Irrawaddy-ization* of Arakanese Buddhism and culture was not the only important religious development occurring in Arakan during this period. Nor was it necessarily the most important religious development in Arakan. A Buddhist reform-oriented order emerged in central and northern Arakan. Although this order was just as or even more important for Arakanese living on both sides of the Bengal-Arakan border during the nineteenth century, it has largely been ignored in the prevailing historiography of both Arakan and Burma covering this period. Apart from a few publications of Heinz Bechert (1970), a specialist on Buddhism in Southeastern Bengal, not one of the major histories of Burma or Arakan discusses the activities of this Arakanese Buddhist order either inside or outside of Arakan or its importance among the Arakanese Buddhists and their 'peripheral' histories.

While *Irrawaddy-ization* was in the process of taking place in the central and southern Arakan littoral, the population base of both the northern and the central-southern littoral was in a state of flux. Primarily, this took the form of continual migrations that were blind to the Burman and the British border at the Naf river (Charney 1999, 265). We might look at this movement as a continuity of activity within a region, that is as normal intra-regional activity oblivious to the existence of claimed political borders. Further migrations occurred in the mid- to late 1820s, when large numbers of Arakanese, including many from villages that had moved in the 1790s, returned to Arakan, which was, by then, British Arakan (Singh 1992).

The founder of the Sangharaja order was a monk who came to be known as Sangharaja Saramedha (1801-1882). Arakanese Buddhist tradition glosses over Saramedha's early years and really only first locate him in the physical landscape at the time he entered a Buddhist monastery in Arakan. At least one strand of Arakanese Buddhist tradition connects him to Arakanese royalty, as one with the physical signs of a king-to-be, or even as a member of the Arakanese royal family (Barua 1990, 6). Banga Buddhist histories of Saramedha are more direct and claim that he was born in the vicinity of Chittagong, and it was presumably only in his teens that he entered an Arakanese Buddhist monastery as a novice. There he was ordained as a full monk in Arakan at the age of twenty (in 1821). But even if we accept the Banga version of events, it is accepted by both traditions that Saramedha studied Buddhism in Arakan during the last decade of Burman rule (long after the problems of the 1790s, at a time when Burman rule had stabilized).

Prior to the end of Burman rule in Arakan, Saramedha returned, according to Banga histories, or went, according to Arakanese histories, to Chittagong. He was accompanied by his *saya*, Ashin Saralankara, and together they took refuge in British southeastern Bengal. It is unclear why these two monks were in flight, although there is some suggestion of instability in Arakan just before the Anglo-Burmese war (1824-1826). In any event, both monks returned to Arakan in 1826, after Arakan had been formally transferred to British rule.

Saramedha and Saralankara were not alone in moving back and forth across the northern border of Arakan. Over the next few decades, newly opened lands and commercial prosperity in Arakan conspired to produce an economy that drew in

numerous migrants, some Buddhist and some Muslim. Even in 1826, large numbers of Arakanese villagers quickly resettled in the Akyab area. As Eaton has argued for Islam in Bengal and I have argued for Buddhism in Arakan, religious sites and learned religious men, some even saints and *arahants*, provided a means of organizing community for groups new to an area. In the present case as well, Sandalankara and Samedha provided a centre around which villagers could organise their community at Sittwe, the village that would become the colonial centre of Akyab. Furthermore, the local villagers built a monastery entitled the Saralankara Vihara for Saralankara and Samedha, which became the centre for their new order. In 1836, Ashin Saralankara died and Samedha took his place as head of the monastery (Wimala 1963, 1-3; Barua 1990, 7).

Accounts of Ashin Samedha's activities focus upon several critical events, as I will explain more fully below. Between and around these events there are major lacunae. We are given vague statements in many cases, such as when we are told that Ashin Samedha went about Arakan, in this case, British colonial Arakan and not the littoral-wide entity, promoting Buddhism, although entirely what this entailed is unclear. This may simply represent attempts to place Samedha within a model of a proper missionizing Arakanese Buddhist monk. Indeed, Samedha's life in Arakan has been subject to considerable hagiography. Thus, much of what we know about Samedha's activities are not the day-to-day activities of missionizing in Arakan, as we find in the accounts of Protestant missionaries such as Comstock during the same period. Rather, we have a series of likely apocryphal stories. As Ashin Wimala relates, for example, Arakanese palm-readers, before Samedha entered the monastery, are said to have read his palms. They found that he had no marks at all upon his palms, save for a set of crossed lines on each palm that indicated special glory. He was thus urged to join the monastery, lest he be killed as a pretender to the Arakanese throne (Wimala 1963, 1). One story holds that Samedha received on one occasion the salutations of a family of tree spirits. Another story endows Samedha with the ability to converse with birds (Hla Tun Pru 1963, iii-iv). In the midst of such fables we do have hints that he had an important following among Akyab's Buddhist population and, in an 1846 ceremony, the title *sangharaja* was bestowed upon Samedha, who was soon known simply as 'Sangharaja' (Wimala 1963, 3; Okkanta 1990, 122). In response to Samedha's leadership in the growing order, the Saralankara vihara, named after his own *saya*, became known instead as the Sangharaja vihara and the order likewise as the Sangharaja *nikaya* (Barua 1990, 8).

Two events play a critical part in Banga-Arakanese Buddhist biographies of Samedha. One 'event' was Samedha's missionary tour of the Chittagong area to save the religion there from lax monks (who are said to have been monks only in that they wore yellow robes). Another event involved Samedha's missionary activities among the Chakmas. Together, the events provide at best an incomplete picture of Samedha's activities. Even so, these events contain kernels of information that allow us a better understanding of the activities of an Arakanese Buddhist reformist order.

For one thing, we do know that missionizing monks from Arakan aggressively sought to spread their reformist Buddhism throughout the Arakan littoral regardless

of political borders. In the 1850s, for example, Samedha gathered a group of monks from his own order and set about missionizing in the Chittagong area of the northern Arakan littoral. During this missionary tour, these monks sought out older Buddhist monks and the laity who strayed too far from their understanding (from the perspective of the Sangharaja *nikaya*) of the *vinaya*. Accounts claiming that Buddhism was on the decline in Banga and the northern Arakan littoral, especially because of monks who were only monks in that they wore the yellow robe, was what brought Samedha to Banga in the first place (Wimala 1963, 10). Certainly, Francis Buchanan, who toured the area in 1798 and left an account, describes local Buddhist monks whose idea of Buddhism clearly differed from Irrawaddy-valley Theravada Buddhist orthodoxy (Buchanan 1992, 92). The Sangharaja monks also targeted the growing influence of Hinduism upon Buddhism in the northern Arakan littoral and the borrowing from Hinduism by Banga Buddhists (Okkantha 1990, 185-186; Chaudhuri 1982, 130). In short, as Ashin Wimala explains: '[t]he channel of [Buddhist] reformation movement in Bengal ... flowed from Arakan' (Wimala 1963, 9).

Specific cases of confrontation between local interpretations of Buddhism and the Irrawaddy valley Theravada Buddhist orthodoxy are also incorporated into the Samedha story. Chandra Mohan, a Chittagonian Buddhist, for example, studied Buddhism broadly, but became concerned that he had been ordained at too early an age. He thus went to Akyab in 1853, we are told, to study the correct rules of the *vinaya* from Samedha. Later, after re-ordination within Samedha's order, Chandra Mohan, now known as Punnacara Dhammadhara, became an important missionary monk in Banga for the Sangharaja *nikaya* (Wimala 1963, 9, 12-13; Barua 1990, 8; Okkantha 1990, 184).

We also know that these missionizing monks worked against what they viewed as syncretic or heterodox approaches to religious patronage pursued by some local rulers in the northern Arakan littoral. Queen Kalindi, who was a patron of a multiplicity of local religions (Wimala 1963, 11-12; Okkantha 1990, 186), is a case in point. Certainly this was a common approach adopted by such a ruler in the context of a region defined by ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity. Kalindi had already built a monastery for local Buddhist monks, when she is said to have invited Samedha to that monastery where she and her people could receive moral precepts and *suttas* from him, Samedha complied and remained for a year. The real work of the Sangharaja order's missionizing among Kalindi's people, however, was done by Punnacara Dhammadhara, alias Chandra Mohan, who also came to missionize among the Chakmas for a year. Punnacara Dhammadhara, bringing with him twenty-five Buddhist monks from Ramu, where they may also have been missionizing, continued Samedha's work, persuaded Kalindi to build an ordination hall (Wimala 1963, 13), presumably to ordain local Buddhist monks according to the Sangharaja order's interpretation of the *vinaya*.

More importantly, however, the Sangharaja monks attempted to prevent competition with and harness the energy of rival Buddhist revivalist movements. In other words, Sangharaja monks sought to bring rival embryonic *nikaya* that were also promoting their own understanding of Buddhism under their influence. At Pahartali, for example, one missionizing monk, Ashin Chainga Thaur, who had gone to Arakan



during the period of Burman rule, made a hand-drawn copy of what he believed to be the Mahamuni image and then brought it back to Banga. What Ashin Chainga Thaur probably saw was a replica of the Mahamuni image, the original having been dragged off to Burma in 1785; indeed, Ashin Chainga Thaur did not go to the actual Mahamuni shrine, but rather to a site eight miles from Mrauk U (Chaudhuri 1982, 31). In 1813, after six months of construction, a new image of Mahamuni became the centre-piece for local Buddhist worship (the image was said to have been built with the help of Arakanese architects): an annual local fair, called the 'Mahamuni Mela,' was inaugurated in connection with the image site, making it into a pilgrimage destination (Wimala 1963, 11). Later, during one of these religious festivals, Saramedha and his party arrived at Pahartali. Speaking before the crowd, Saramedha is said to have persuaded them that his understanding of the *vinaya* was correct (Wimala 1963, 11). Gradually, many of the local monks chose the new ordination. Using the local *sima*, the Udaka-Ukkhepa *sima*, associated with the Mahamuni village at Pahartali and the occasion of the Mahamuni Fair, Saramedha re-ordained seven new monks according to the *upasampada* ceremony of the Sangharaja Order (Barua 1990, 9). Saramedha remained at work here re-ordaining and instructing for one year (Wimala 1963, 11).

The state was not entirely unconscious of these developments. Although in British eyes, and by treaty, Arakan was no longer under Burman rule, the Burman court still tried to harness such developments in Arakan and other areas which it had to cede to the British. In 1863, King Mindon called the Fifth World Buddhist Synod at Mandalay, and there recognized the Sangharaja by bestowing a special title on him for his work in the Arakan littoral. More importantly, however, Mindon dispatched twenty-five Burmese missionizing monks to accompany Saramedha back to British Arakan. There, they entered the chief monastery of the Sangharaja order at Akyab, where they aided monks of the order in Buddhist missionizing (Wimala 1963, 16-17). Although it is unclear what religious impact the special title or the Burman-sponsored missionaries had in this case, King Mindon was able to claim patronage over what had been a clearly autonomous movement in an area legally under British rule.

The Sangharaja order has remained very influential in the northern Arakan littoral up to the present-day. By the 1980s, there were 630 monasteries and pagodas in the northern Arakan littoral and the adjacent area of Banga. Of these, 580 belonged to the Sangharaja monastic order (Wimala 1963, 13; Chaudhuri 1982, 42). All Chakma Buddhist monks, as well, are said to be members of the Sangharaja order (Chaudhuri 1982, 57). Further, there are many Buddhist monks from Banga who continued to travel to Arakan for Buddhist instruction and 'proper ordination' well into the twentieth century (Barua 1990, 18, 21-3). This indicates a very significant influence of the Sangharaja missionizing monks in Banga and the northern Arakan littoral. In short, Sangharaja missionizing has been a success.

It is difficult to say why the Sangharaja order was so successful, but several general factors may be said to have certainly played a role. For one thing, the large-scale intra-regional migrations meant whole population groups moving about, entering Arakan, and opening up new lands. In other words, new communities were forming. Just as Eaton has explained for the rise of Islam in eastern Bengal and I have else-

where argued more generally for Arakan, religion provides a way in which to stabilize communities and to form collective efforts where other forms of organization are not available or are insufficient to accomplish required tasks. Indeed, the first sponsors of the Sangharaja order were villagers at Akyab. Second, the worldly orientation of the rival orders may have played a role. As I have argued elsewhere, *gama-vasi* monks have an advantage over *araña-vasi* monks, in that *gama-vasi* monks can interact more freely with local communities, whereas *araña-vasi* monks have to keep physical distance. There is some indication that the *araña-vasi* monks prevailed in Banga and the northern Arakan littoral prior to Saramedha's promotion of the clearly worldly or *gama-vasi* way. As Buchanan explained:

The Priests here, I am told, never go out to beg Alms, like those in the Burma Dominions, but sit in their convent, and receive the contributions of the Pious. They employ their slaves to dress their victuals, and to cultivate Jooms (Buchanan 1992, 92).

An aggressive missionizing group of *gama-vasi* monks would certainly have an advantage in winning converts in such a situation.

In any event, after the death of Saramedha, the Arakanese *sangha* went through further doctrinal cleavages. Twentieth century Arakanese Buddhism is divided between Dwara and Kan *nikaya*. Both of these *nikaya* emerged in the 1890s, a decade after Saramedha's death. The Sangharaja order was far more successful in Banga, where Buddhists are divided between the Sangharaja and Mahathera *nikaya* (Bechert 1970, 771). I tentatively suggest that the continuity of the Sangharaja *nikaya* and the Mahathera *nikaya* in Banga and not in Arakan is because of continued Buddhist interaction with Burma, while interaction between Burma and Banga has slowed. There are circumstantial reasons to suggest this, although providing clear connections is a little more difficult. Ultimately, with the rise of the Bangladesh and Burman nation-states and firmer political boundaries, a Banga Saramedha tradition and an Arakanese Saramedha tradition have emerged. Though differing in details and in 'ownership' of Saramedha himself, the two traditions agree closely enough in their overall structure as to allow a general scenario of what occurred.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to examine two episodes of local developments in Arakanese history that are considered by the Arakanese to be extremely important parts of their past, but have, nonetheless, been ignored in the prevailing Western-ordered histories of the region. As I have tried to show, these developments are not wholly unimportant for the state, in this case Burma, but fall to the wayside as they appear as mere local examples of broader developments, the Burman missionizing monks in the Arakan littoral for example, or as exceptions that do not fit well into state-centered histories because they are trans-border and thus trans-state, Saramedha and the Sangharaja order for example. As I indicated earlier in the introduction, when the available sources are read by a Western register, reformist orders and their 'borderless' activities would have otherwise made a state-centered historical narrative

difficult, if not impossible. In this latter case, by ignoring the boundaries of the state, and relegating it to the position of just one actor and not allowing it to 'frame' the discussion, I have attempted to look at Arakanese history as many Arakanese view it, looking at Arakan from within Arakan.

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