

CRISIS AND REFORMATION IN A MARITIME KINGDOM OF SOUTHEAST ASIA: FORCES OF INSTABILITY AND POLITICAL DISINTEGRATION IN WESTERN BURMA (ARAKAN), 1603-1701

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Abstract

This study of the initial collapse, revival, and finally a resumption of decline in the seventeenth century of the maritime kingdom of Arakan (in western Burma) attempts to establish a special place for Arakan in the general historiography of the seventeenth-century crisis in Southeast Asia. The unusual experience of Arakan in the seventeenth century was in large part due to both the blockades by autonomous Portuguese freebooters in the first two decades of the seventeenth century and the peculiar nature of a new trading relationship from the 1630s until the 1660s between the Arakanese and the Dutch, based on the Arakanese supply of slaves and rice to Dutch port-cities and plantations. The ebb and flow of Arakanese fortunes throughout the century were thus tied to the fortunes of the Dutch. Expanding Asian empires in Bengal and Burma also influenced the decline of the Arakanese maritime polity after the Dutch withdrew from Arakan in the 1660s. Afterwards, as the material resources of the Arakanese central court declined, the Arakanese littoral became politically fragmented, characterized and sustained by the rise of rival political centers and the rebellions of non-Arakanese ethnic groups who had been captured abroad and resettled in the Arakanese littoral. Arakan thus experienced its “own” crisis in the seventeenth century, a watershed that gives it a peculiar *niche* in the seventeenth-century history not only of Southeast Asia as a whole, but of the mainland in particular.

Introduction

In 1430, the Arakanese king Naramaikhla (r. 1404-1434), who had taken refuge in Gaur since 1404 due to Mon and Burman invasions, returned to central Arakan with the aid of the Sultan of Bengal and built the town of Mrauk-U

1) I would like to thank Dr. Victor Lieberman, Atsuko Naono, and Sun Laichen of the University of Michigan for reading preliminary drafts of this paper and for their helpful comments and suggestions. The author also thanks Dr. William H. Frederick, of Ohio University, whose guidance and encouragement directed early research for this paper on early modern Arakan in 1992 and 1993. I also owe an enormous debt to my *hsaya*, Professor U Saw Tun of Northern Illinois University, whose instruction in reading Burmese and Arakanese chronicles and his consistently helpful and informed observations on Burmese history have informed my discussion in important ways. It was upon the suggestion of the ever-helpful John K. Whitmore that I began to consider Arakanese political and economic behavior in the context

as the royal city for his new dynasty.²⁾ Utilizing revenues from Muslim trade connections and the agricultural and human resources of the Danya-waddy delta, Narameikhla's successors in the space of a century and a half constructed a maritime trading state which, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, encompassed not only the entire eastern coast of the Bay of Bengal up to Tippera, but also the Lower Burmese coast from Cape Negrais to what is now Moulmein.³⁾ The dramatic rise of the tiny maritime state of Arakan in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries can only be paralleled in magnitude and speed by its collapse in the second half of the seventeenth century, which left the Arakanese kingdom destitute of maritime trade, politically fragmented, and geographically reduced to a portion of the Arakanese coast.

Arakan's seventeenth-century collapse, however, does not fit well into the prevailing historiography on the seventeenth-century crisis in Southeast Asia. Anthony Reid, the historian of the seventeenth-century crisis in Southeast Asia *par excellence*, has constructed a generalized picture of the effects of this crisis for both the archipelago and the mainland. To summarize a complicated argument, Reid suggests that population decline and political fragmentation in major world markets (such as Ming China), accompanied by a decline in prices, a drop in world temperature (negatively affecting harvests), and a decline in world silver supply, produced a world trade depression. Reid also suggests that the Dutch made matters worse for archipelagic states in the seventeenth century, as they blockaded and destroyed port-polities throughout the region in their attempt to monopolize the pepper trade. As a result, these polities diverted their energies from cash crops and maritime trade to the cultivation of staple crops and a withdrawal from maritime trade in pursuit of self-sufficiency, resulting in a decline of port-cities, de-urbanization, and political decentralization.⁴⁾

For the mainland, Reid suggests that as coastal polities declined, interior states, less dependent on maritime trade, expanded and established their control over their maritime-based rivals.⁵⁾ Victor Lieberman in a corrective to Reid's analysis, changed the terminology of the debate from "crisis" to "watershed" and argued that Burma, despite a lull in maritime trade, avoided the long-term nega-

of the early modern Malay port-polities. The task of locating rare materials was aided significantly by Daw May Kyi Win and Susan Fe Go. Further, some of the general points made in this paper found earlier form in Charney 1993a; Charney 1993b; Charney 1994b; Charney 1994c.

2) Anonymous 1797, p. 11b [Note: for this and all following microfilmed palm-leaf ms., pagination follows my own system]; Sanda-mala 1932, pp. 27-8.

3) On the final stages of Arakanese expansion into Lower Burma see Charney 1994a, pp. 39-57.

4) Reid 1993, pp. 285-303, *passim*; Reid 1990, pp. 639-641, 645-6.

5) Reid 1993, pp. 303-311, *passim*.

tive impact of the events of the seventeenth century and, unlike the archipelago, experienced a continuation of long-term state expansion and political centralization, domestic commercial growth, and cultural homogenization, trends that survived Reid's seventeenth-century crisis.⁶⁾ In a related article,⁷⁾ Lieberman provided a more far-reaching analysis of the early modern period in mainland Southeast Asia, suggesting that along with the continuity of the above-mentioned long-term developments in core polities (such as Burma, Vietnam, and Thailand), smaller mainland Southeast Asian states on the periphery experienced crisis and decline in response to the expansion of the core states. Thus, while Burma, Vietnam, and Thailand expanded, centralized, and defined themselves and their cultures, smaller fringe polities such as Lan Na, Cambodia, and Chiangmai declined and became lost in the shadow of their expansive neighbors.

In their general features, Reid's and Lieberman's views are not irreconcilable, and with some give and take can be incorporated into a general view of the seventeenth century in Southeast Asia. Where they do disagree is on the impact of the seventeenth century on long-term historical development in Southeast Asia. Reid, for example, views the seventeenth century as ushering in a redirection of historical development in archipelagic Southeast Asia, while Lieberman suggests that for the mainland, no watershed occurred, as long-term historical developments survived the seventeenth century well into the early nineteenth century.

But in their current form, Reid's and Lieberman's scenarios for seventeenth century Southeast Asia do not explain the rise and decline of Arakan in the seventeenth century. This is not to say, however, that the case of seventeenth century Arakan cannot be incorporated by either view, but rather that Arakan presents a special case which has been overlooked by both Reid and Lieberman. Arakan, for example, did experience a "watershed" in the seventeenth century which led to a retreat from maritime trade and political fragmentation, which would seemingly place it within the fold of Reid's view of maritime port polities in the seventeenth-century archipelago. At the same time, however, it is clear that Arakan experienced a seventeenth-century crisis or watershed for very different reasons, and according to a different time-schema than Reid has proposed for Southeast Asia as a whole. While many of the port-polities of the archipelago flourished in the first two decades of the seventeenth century, Arakan was generally sequestered from maritime trade by autonomous Portuguese freebooters. While much of the archipelago after 1630 saw a rapid decline of maritime trade due to Dutch blockades and destruction, Arakan saw a major revival in maritime trade as a result of the Dutch presence in Southeast Asia,

6) Lieberman 1993a, pp. 230-1, 240-8.

7) Lieberman 1993b, pp. 475-572, *passim*.

rather than despite it. Similarly, Arakan only experienced a second seventeenth century decline in maritime trade connections when Dutch trade with Arakan was brought to a halt due to pressure put on them by an expanding Asian empire, that of the Mughals. Afterwards, the Arakanese crisis was characterized by a series of developments which were peculiar to Arakan, as I will explain later in this paper. In short, until the 1660s, while Reid's maritime states saw a retreat from maritime trade, political decentralization, de-urbanization, and depopulation, Arakan experienced the reverse, in large part due to its commitment to new sources of maritime commercial revenues, slaves and rice, made possible for the Arakanese only by Dutch demand.

At the same time, although Arakan does not contradict Lieberman's view of general mainland trends during the period, Arakan offers a different model for a minor state on the periphery than that offered by Lieberman. Lieberman's periphery states, for example, such as Chiengmai, declined in their competition with their core neighbors, Burma and Thailand, because of this competition *per se*. Burma and Thailand came to dominate the lowlands, the maritime coasts, and eventually expanded into the highlands, isolating and weakening Chiengmai as they did so. But the causes of Arakan's decline in the seventeenth century were rooted in the maritime world, rather than in mainland Southeast Asia. Can we explain Arakan's seventeenth-century decline, then, in Arakan's own terms?

To answer such a question requires the wedding of European trade records and indigenous chronicles. Scholarship on early modern Arakan has generally failed to bring together Arakanese (Burmese-language) sources with the European accounts. This paper seeks to rectify that problem. In this paper, I will examine how the early modern Arakanese kingdom, built up by the Early Mrauk-U rulers, fell apart after c. 1603 chiefly due to the effects of the early seventeenth-century struggle with Portuguese freebooters, a dependence upon a short-lived *niche* in regional maritime trade from about 1630 until 1664, and the rise of the Restored Toungoo Dynasty in Burma and the spread of Mughal power into Bengal. The resulting collapse of the Arakanese kingdom after the 1660s involved the reduction of Mrauk-U commercial revenues and supplies of firearms previously gained from maritime trade, the decline of trade to the east due to a unified Burma, Mughal pressure on the northern Arakanese littoral, the rise of rival commercial and political centers within the Arakanese littoral, and growing threats by non-Arakanese groups in the court and Danya-waddy nuclear zone to Late Mrauk-U rulers.

Arakan under the Early Mrauk-U Dynasty

The Arakanese littoral lies astride the eastern edge of the Bay of Bengal, south of what is today Bangladesh and west of Burma. Overland connections

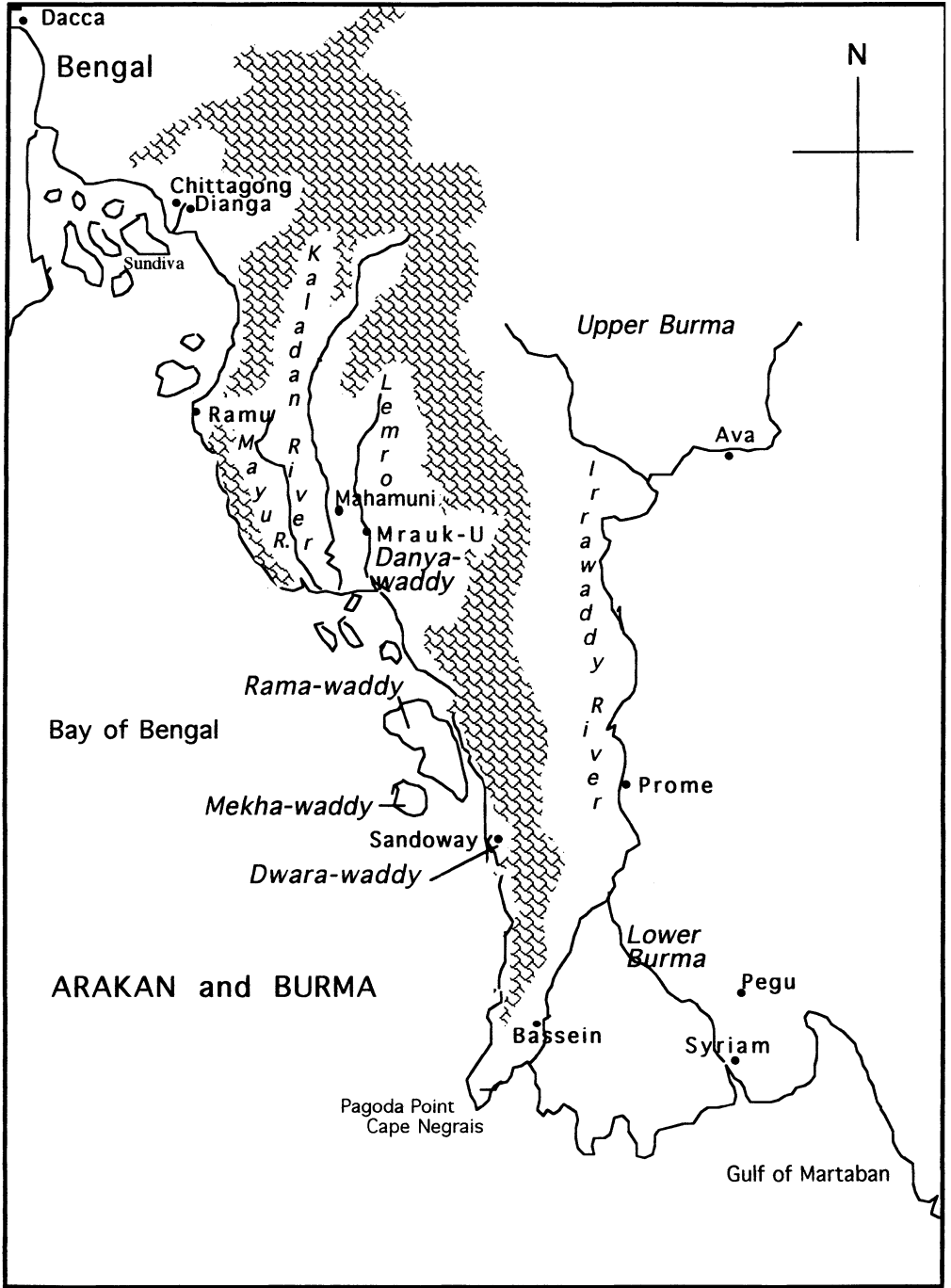
with Burma were limited to two chief passes through the Arakan Yoma, a mountain chain which separates Arakan from the rest of mainland Southeast Asia. The mountainous topography of the littoral, often delimiting potential areas of human settlement to small enclaves dotting the coast, slim river valleys reaching into the mountains, alluvial plains in central Arakan, and a few large islands, produced a fragmented settlement pattern. This made political centralization and cultural homogenization problematic.

Prior to the arrival of Burmans in the tenth century, Arakan fell within the Indian cultural complex, and although the Burmans quickly populated much of the littoral, they developed a separate cultural identity from their eastern counterparts in Upper Burma, influenced to a significant degree by their Indian predecessors, from whom they inherited the name, "Arakanese." Further, the littoral remained the home of significant non-Burman groups, who, in addition to highland peoples such as the Chins, included lowland peoples such as the Theks, the Myons, and the Lingeis.

From the tenth century until the founding of the Early Mrauk-U Dynasty in 1430, the foundations of the Arakanese cultural identity were laid. To be Arakanese, for example, gradually came to mean adherence to Theravada Buddhism, the use of the Burmese language, and settlement in any of the Arakanese littoral's four major and separate political centers: Danya-waddy (the central river delta of the Arakanese littoral), Dwara-waddy (the area around Sandoway), Mekha-waddy (Cheduba Island), and Rama-waddy (Ranprei or Ramree Island). Under the Early Mrauk-U Dynasty (c. 1430-1603),⁸) these four regions were brought under the sway of Mrauk-U, a political center in the heartland of the Danya-waddy region.

Traditional Arakanese political culture, which informed and conditioned the construction of the Early Mrauk-U state, encouraged a personal and particularistic form of political control. Traditional Arakanese political centralization involved the strengthening of the attractive aura and resources of the central ruler vis-à-vis leaders in outlying areas. Termed *myó-zà* ("town-eater"), *yua-zà* ("village-eater"), or *kyei-zà* ("settlement-eater"), local leaders ruled outlying areas as personal appanages and were the chief intermediaries between the resources, human and material, of outlying areas and the central court. The ability of the central ruler to extract resources from a local area depended upon the state of his personal relationship with the local "eater." Generally, the Early Mrauk-U polity may be conceived of as a *mandala* or galactic polity, with central control

8) The Early and Late Mrauk-U Dynasties break in the middle of the reign of Min-raza-grì (1592-1612), sometime around 1603, due to the fundamental developments that took place in that year, dramatically changing the character of the dynasty and the direction of its historical course.



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dissipating commensurately with increasing distance from the royal court.⁹⁾

The primary function of the central ruler was his role as the linchpin in a system of spiritual, material, and political redistribution, with his success or failure in this function determining his legitimacy or lack thereof. In terms of spiritual redistribution, the Arakanese king had to continually demonstrate his role as the chief patron and purifier of the religion through temple-building, maintenance of the *sangha* (the Buddhist monkhood), and other forms of religious patronage, by which the king made certain that his subjects could accumulate merit and improve their lot in succeeding rebirths until they reached release from *samsara* (the cycle of rebirths).¹⁰⁾

The practical concerns of earthly rule, however, also required political and material redistribution. Traditionally, the Arakanese king, upon taking the *beitheik* (*abhiseka* ceremony)¹¹⁾ and being invested with the throne, symbolically gathered together the kingdom under his rule and granted anew the political centers of his realm to important men, both his chief courtiers and powerful men in outlying areas. Often this amounted to a simple and symbolic reinvestiture of the *status quo*. For many, political investiture amounted to generous appanage grants, and only a hazy line can be drawn in such cases between political and material redistribution, if at all.

In other cases, economic redistribution was a matter of daily concern, as successful military commanders had to be rewarded with the war booty they brought back in *toto* to the royal court, continued court and outlying elite loyalties had to be encouraged through a redistribution of presents and trade goods which at first went to the central ruler, and foreign mercenaries had to be paid to maintain their fidelity to the king, and to prevent their support of rival claimants to the throne.¹²⁾ This movement of wealth to the king, and then from the king to the people, forming what Manguin has termed a “flow,” was an important part of legitimization of secular rule by maritime rulers in the Malay world.¹³⁾ This was true of Arakan as well, where, just as in the Malay world, the ruler’s legitimacy depended upon his ability to maintain the system, with himself as the

9) For a good description of such a polity see Tambiah 1976, p. 113.

10) Michael Aung-Thwin has examined an integrated system of symbolic and economic redistribution in his study of the Pagan Dynasty in classical Burma. See Aung-Thwin 1985, esp. pp. 172-182.

11) The relevance of the *beitheik* ceremony for Burmese kingship has been carefully studied by Ryuji Okudaira. The Arakanese chronicles that I have examined, however, do not refer to the variety of types of *beitheik* that Okudaira has encountered for Burma, as most Arakanese passages simply tie the assumption of the throne with “taking the *beitheik*.” For an English-language presentation of some of Okudaira’s findings, see Okudaira 1994; Okudaira 1996.

12) See Tambiah 1976, p. 120; Lieberman 1980, p. 207; Lieberman 1993a, p. 228.

13) Manguin 1991, p. 47.

center. Thus, for practical and symbolic reasons, the Arakanese king attempted to monopolize commercial revenues, commodities, and the spoils of war and then redistributed these resources amongst his most important subjects and functionaries. It should be stressed, however, that much commercial activity likely continued outside of the grasp of the Mrauk-U court, especially in outlying areas where monitoring by the central court was weak or ephemeral.

Early Mrauk-U rulers fashioned a state which was dependent primarily upon maritime-derived resources, such as commercial revenues and increasingly access to firearms. Through the monopolization of significant amounts of these resources, and further empowered by the agricultural and demographic superiority of the Danya-waddy delta, early Mrauk-U rulers brought the Arakanese littoral under their sway and then proceeded to expand their control beyond the littoral both east and west, as I have argued elsewhere.¹⁴⁾ With each step, the differentials in resources between center and periphery grew as captive populations were resettled in the delta,¹⁵⁾ firearms were captured or otherwise acquired from new sources,¹⁶⁾ and booty was sent directly to Mrauk-U for redistribution.¹⁷⁾

The vitality and continuity of Mrauk-U's control over the Arakanese littoral, however, never escaped its debt to, and dependence upon, continuing maritime commerce and a monopoly on firearms in the region. Meanwhile, the processes of demographic aggrandizement¹⁸⁾ (as opposed to natural population growth) and agricultural expansion, which occurred at an increasingly rapid pace toward the last half of the sixteenth century, in turn produced new pressures and developments which had the potential of undermining the continued expansion of Mrauk-U authority and control, as I will explain below.

An overview of the manner in which Early Mrauk-U rulers fostered cultural integration of the population of the Arakanese littoral reveals an inconsistent and often heterodox approach which perhaps was a result of the heterogeneous culture of the Mrauk-U court and its courtiers, many of whom were Muslim or otherwise foreign.¹⁹⁾ The reason for this tolerance of religious heterogeneity was

14) Charney 1996.

15) See examples of such inputs in the sixteenth century in Anonymous 1797, pp. 14b, 15a, 21a; Sanda-mala, 1932, pp. 148, 149; Kawithara 1787, p. 54b; Rakhine n.d., pp. 78, 116.

16) See examples of such acquisition in Rakhine n.d., pp. 51, 115, 116; Anonymous 1797, pp. 15a, 20b; Sanda-mala 1932, p. 148; Guerreiro 1930, I, p. 47.

17) See examples in Sanda-mala 1932, pp. 50, 51, 52, 78, 171. For a redistributive model similar to the Arakanese system that these resources supported, see Polyani 1957, pp. 253-4.

18) The reference to "demographic aggrandizement" here refers to the artificial increase of the kingdom's population through the forced resettlement within the kingdom of populations captured abroad and the acquisition by the kingdom of new territories with local populations.

19) Muslim representation in the Mrauk-U court was significant at least from Nara-meikhla's restoration in Danya-waddy in 1430. For an example of the high degree of their

likely the court's continued dependence upon Muslim trade connections and Muslim mercenaries. While the First Toungoo ruler, Bayin-naun (r. 1551-1581), was sufficiently confident of his ability to attract Muslim trade without patronage of Islam to force Muslims to participate in royal Theravada Buddhist ceremonies and to raze to the ground Muslim shrines,²⁰⁾ the Early Mrauk-U rulers, dependent upon the attraction of Muslim traders to Mrauk-U as opposed to secondary centers at Sandoway and Chittagong, did not have that privilege.

Theravada Buddhism, however, could allow for the Arakanese king to be a world ruler and world conqueror and thus Muslim dress and cultural activities and nominal patronage of Muslim traders and courtiers was not inconsistent with early Mrauk-U patronage of Theravada Buddhism.²¹⁾ Arakanese kings adopted, in addition to their Buddhist and Brahmanical regnal titles, Muslim ones, a practice begun in c. 1430 by Naramekhla and continued until 1622. Such an approach, however, did not favor cultural and ethnic integration among the increasingly diverse population groups resettled throughout Arakan, but particularly in the Mrauk-U nuclear zone. The Arakanese kingdom became peopled with defeated littoral tribes, such as the Theks, Myons, and Lingei,²²⁾ Mon refugees,²³⁾ Japanese Christians and Portuguese freebooters,²⁴⁾ war captives from Bengal,²⁵⁾ and captured Mons, Thais, and Burmans from Lower Burma.²⁶⁾ But ethnicity and cultural identities are complex issues that cannot be dealt with

influence with Arakanese kings as late as the early seventeenth century, see Guerreiro 1930, I, p. 291.

20) Bayin-naun, for example, "determined . . . to pull down this mosque and put up a preaching hall in its place, where the Indians might be required to go and hear sermons." See Shorto n.d., p. 98.

21) Anthropological work has suggested that the role of a ruler as the chief intermediary between the god(s) of each religious community among his subjects in a heterodox state defined the relationship between the ruler and each community. Thus, as we find in Arakan, a Theravada Buddhist ruler could patronize Islam as well. See general anthropological perspective in Hocart 1936, pp. 95-100.

22) See Kawithara 1787, p. 53b; Sanda-mala 1932, pp. 32-3, 67, 87, 144; on the service of levies of these hill tribes groups, along with Bengalis, in major Arakanese expeditions into Burma in 1516 and 1599 see Anonymous 1797, pp. 14b, 16b; Rakhine n.d., p. 115.

23) On Mon migration into the Arakanese littoral in the late sixteenth century, see Guerreiro 1930, I, p. 292.

24) On Japanese Christians and Portuguese freebooters settled in and around Mrauk-U by the early seventeenth century (presumably having already been settled there from the sixteenth century), see Manrique 1946, I, p. 147.

25) On war captives brought back from Bengal and Prome in the sixteenth century, see Anonymous 1797, pp. 14b, 15a; Rakhine n.d., p. 78; Sanda-mala 1932, pp. 58, 166, 169.

26) See resettlement in Danya-waddy and Dwara-waddy of "thousands" of Mons, Thais, and Burmans captured in Lower Burma in 1599-1600 in Kawithara 1787, p. 54b; Rakhine n.d., p. 116; Anonymous 1797, p. 21a; Sanda-mala 1932, pp. 148-49; See settlement of five thousand Mons, and others in Dwara-waddy in 1518 in Rakhine n.d., p. 78; Of resettlement of war captives in Rama-waddy as well, see Kawithara 1787, p. 54b.

adequately here, and it is unclear if groups at this time understood the differences amongst themselves that appear so clearly when read by the criteria which inform our perceptions today.

Arakanese Expansion and Collapse: 1599-1612

Arakanese control of maritime ports in western mainland Southeast Asia was extended in 1599 to include Bassein and Syriam. Mìn-raza-grì (r. 1592-1612), in an alliance with Toungoo, besieged Pegu, the capital of the last of the First Toungoo kings of Burma, Nan-dá-bayin (r. 1581-1599), in 1599.²⁷⁾ After the capture of Nan-dá-bayin, however, an invasion of Burma and siege of Toungoo in 1599-1600, by the Ayudhyan king, Naresuan (r. 1590-1605),²⁸⁾ weakened Toungoo sufficiently to leave Arakan in supreme control over the Lower Burmese ports. Mìn-raza-grì entrusted the richest of these ports, Syriam, to the wily commander of his bodyguard, Filipe de Brito de Nicote, supported by a contingent of Portuguese.²⁹⁾ Still, Mìn-raza-grì attempted to guarantee De Brito's fidelity by stationing, nearby, a rival garrison of Muslim mercenaries under the command of a Mon vassal. De Brito, now entitled *kyei-zà*, subsequently began to entrench his personal control over Syriam with the arrival of additional Portuguese freebooters, particularly Salvador Ribeyro de Sousa, whom De Brito made a *capitão* ("captain") and his second-in-command.³⁰⁾

A challenge to Arakanese control over Lower Burma and its trade developed with the rebellion, *in absentia*, of De Brito (De Brito was in Goa at the time, attempting to obtain official recognition and material support for his venture from the Viceroy of the *Estado da India*) via Salvador Ribeyro, in 1603. After Ribeyro expelled the rival Muslim garrison, De Brito returned from Goa and succeeded in reorganizing under his control local Mon groups, supplemented by Mon refugees brought back from Prome and Toungoo.

With ships and supplies sent by Goa, De Brito maintained a blockade of the Lower Arakanese and Lower Burma coast, forcing trading ships, particularly those from the Choromandel coast, to his *feitoria* ("factory") at Syriam.³¹⁾ To further strengthen his grip on the maritime commerce of the region, De Brito

27) Arakanese forces took Syriam and Bassein in 1598, and then, in conjunction with Toungoo forces besieged Pegu from 1598 until 1599, when the city fell. See Charney 1994, pp. 44-46. Burmese chronicles, however, claim that the Arakanese took Syriam in 1596 and that Pegu fell in 1599. See *Hman-nàn* 1955, pp. 100, 102; Kala 1960, pp. 97, 100.

28) *Hman-nàn* 1955, pp. 104-5; Kala 1960, pp. 101-102.

29) Charney 1994, p. 53.

30) The backgrounds of these Portuguese adventurers, Filipe de Brito de Nicote and Salvador Ribeyro de Sousa, and their subsequent activities are provided in full in Charney 1993a; Charney 1994a; Mousinho 1936; Guedes 1994.

31) Sousa 1945, V, p. 255.

prevented the resumption of trade activities at Pegu, occupied Bassein, established an alliance with the *myó-zà* of Martaban,³²⁾ fortified Cape Negrais, and by 1610 attempted to seize important interior centers such as Toungoo in Burma. Further, De Brito was aided by orders from Goa which commanded all Portuguese traders to trade only at Syriam. These efforts were aided by the discouragement of trade at rival neighboring ports which was affected by continual Syriam-based raids on their shipping.³³⁾ As a result, the merchants who thrived on Lower Burmese trade in particular were ruined.³⁴⁾ The Portuguese also targeted the control of Muslim trade to these areas by forcing Muslim traders to go to Syriam or eliminating them.³⁵⁾ Likewise, these blockades were also meant to keep the Dutch out of Arakan and Burma.³⁶⁾

Thus, the Portuguese effectively cut-off Lower Burma from much of its maritime commercial connections, and interior Burma from maritime-derived firearms, salt, textiles, and other commodities.³⁷⁾ From the Portuguese point-of-view as well, the blockades were not entirely successful, due to the continual campaigns waged by Arakan, Prome, and Toungoo forces against the Portuguese *feitoria* and fortress,³⁸⁾ which led to the near-collapse of trade for the Portuguese by making the region generally unattractive for trade. Contemporaneous Portuguese documents, for example, confirm that as a result of continual warfare in Lower Burma, De Brito's *feitoria* was earning very little income and De Brito had run into debt, as Southeast Asian, Indian, and Portuguese sea-merchants ceased trading in Lower Burma.³⁹⁾ Instead, these maritime traders moved on to other ports, including Tenasserim, Tavoy, Martaban (at this time under Ayudhyan domination) and Phuket (Junkceylon island).⁴⁰⁾

The numerous Arakanese campaigns against Syriam, led first by the Arakanese *myó-zà* of Sandoway and *ein-shei-min* (heir-apparent) Min-kamaun, and second

32) The Burmese chronicles simply say that De Brito, *alias* Nga-zin-ga, and Binnya Dala "became friends" (*a-hmi pyu*). See Kala 1960, 109.

33) Portuguese documents confirm that armed assaults by De Brito's neighbors was due to his commercial blockade. See Pato 1880, I, p. 353; Pato 1884, II, pp. 392-3.

34) See Pato 1880, I, pp. 353-6.

35) See Pato 1884, II, p. 392.

36) Pato 1893, IV, p. 142; Further, in addition to Indian Muslims and the Dutch, the Turks were also of important concern. See Pato 1880, I, p. 23.

37) See Lieberman 1984, 44.

38) For these campaigns see Charney 1993a, pp. 83-124, *passim*; Kala 1960, pp. 109-111; Nicote 1962, pp. 233-241.

39) Overland merchants, both Indian and Chinese Muslims, however, continued to trade in interior Burma, and it was upon these that interior towns such as Toungoo relied for cloth and other supplies after De Brito closed off the ports of Bassein and Dala. See Kala 1960, p. 111.

40) See Pato 1880, I, p. 175; on De Brito's attempt to prevent this shift in trade, see Bocarro 1876, I, pp. 135-6.

by King Mìn-raza-grì, from 1603 until 1607 also compounded the detrimental effects of the Portuguese blockade for the Arakanese. To summarize a complicated process, these expeditions failed with considerable loss of manpower,⁴¹⁾ firearms,⁴²⁾ and royal prestige.⁴³⁾

The problems of maintaining control over large groups of disaffected population groups within the Danya-waddy nuclear zone was underscored as the Arakanese court suffered continual military reversals in Lower Burma, devoted significant manpower and material, especially firearms, to the campaigns against Syriam, and succeeded in losing much of these resources. Labor and military demands, for example, upon heterogeneous population groups, many of whom had only been settled in Arakan for a generation or two, likely increased and these groups began to show signs of increasing agitation. In one case, in 1604, after De Brito's forces had destroyed several Arakanese expeditions and had brought the Lower Burmese delta under his control, one thousand of the Mons assigned to the Kyei-tei group fled their settlement.⁴⁴⁾

More threatening was dissatisfaction among Mons and Bengalis settled at Sandoway, who apparently bore the brunt of military levies for the 1601-1603 campaigns against Syriam. In 1605, the *ein-sheí-mìn*, Mìn-kamaun, made warriors out of five thousand Bengali and Mon cultivators assigned to the Thinkyin pagoda and then marched to seize the royal capital. This attempt failed, as the nuclear zone does not seem to have suffered similarly and Mìn-raza-grì quickly organized an army and suppressed the rebellion.⁴⁵⁾ One thousand of the rebels who were recaptured were reassigned in groups of five hundred men to the Ratana-pon and Maharani pagodas in the nuclear zone.⁴⁶⁾ Three or four thousand Bengalis who fled in the aftermath of Mìn-kamaun's failed attempt to seize Mrauk-U in 1605 could not be stopped by Mìn-raza-grì's forces and they fled to the eastern hill country with their families.⁴⁷⁾

Arakanese fears that the Portuguese community at Dianga near Chittagong

41) As Manrique commented on Danya-waddy, these and other campaigns of the period, "[p]ues auiendo dexado . . . estos Reynos quasi despopoblados de gente, por la mucha, que perdio en varias guerras, que [Mìn-kamaun] tubo con los Mogores, Asamares, y Pegus," Manrique 1946, I, p. 133.

42) On these campaigns, see Guerreiro 1930, II, pp. 139-40; III, pp. 72-83; Sousa 1945, V, pp. 255-257, 262-265.

43) The Arakanese chronicles describe De Brito's rebellion as hurting the king's pride as much as anything else. See Rakhine n.d., p. 116; Even the Arakanese *ein-sheí-mìn*, Mìn-kamaun was captured by De Brito, doubtless an embarrassing situation for Mìn-raza-grì. See Kala 1960, p. 110.

44) Rakhine n.d., pp. 117-8; Sanda-mala 1932, p. 153.

45) Rakhine n.d., pp. 117-8; Kawithara 1787, p. 55b; Sanda-mala 1932, p. 154.

46) Rakhine n.d., p. 118; Sanda-mala 1932, p. 154.

47) Rakhine n.d., p. 118; Sanda-mala 1932, p. 154.

would repeat De Brito's rebellious actions, led Mìn-raza-gri to destroy the semi-autonomous community in 1607.⁴⁸⁾ Portuguese refugees from this massacre and from a similar massacre on Sundiva island in 1602 joined with Portuguese freebooters under Sebastião Gonçalves y Tibao in 1609, retook the island of Sundiva, and with their vessels began to raid the Arakanese coast.

The ensuing Sundiva-based Portuguese blockade of maritime commerce along the Arakanese coast that restricted Arakanese access to maritime commercial revenues. Gonçalves' forces blocked off the Arakanese coast, including both Chittagong and Mrauk-U, twice attacking the royal city and destroying trading vessels found there. Gonçalves' policy was to force all of the ship captains in the area to submit to his control and thus force all merchant shipping to go to Sundiva island.⁴⁹⁾ Gonçalves seems to have succeeded, for, in one Portuguese royal document he is said to have "subjected all the coast of Bengala [including Arakan]" and with "these fortresses he controls the commerce from those parts."⁵⁰⁾ Gonçalves' blockade probably ended the Arakan-Ava trade as well, for we hear nothing more about it after this time until the eighteenth century,⁵¹⁾ despite occasional efforts by the kings of both kingdoms to maintain a good relationship for several years afterwards.⁵²⁾ In any case, supplies of firearms, mercenaries, and, above all, maritime commerce were halted until 1617.

As commercial resources declined, the areas on the fringes of the kingdom sought to break away. Aided by the Sundiva-based Portuguese freebooters, the *myó-zà* of Chittagong rebelled against royal authority in 1609. Although this revolt was suppressed by the Mrauk-U ruler, Mrauk-U resources were at a sufficiently low ebb to require assistance from the Portuguese freebooters on Sundiva island in a campaign against the Mughals in 1611. The campaign failed after the Portuguese seized the Arakanese naval contingent, killed the commanders, and sold the crews into slavery to East Indian ports; while on land, without support from his ships, Mìn-raza-gri was soundly defeated.⁵³⁾ The Portuguese became bolder and after raiding the Arakanese coast, the Sundiva-based Portuguese and a Portuguese fleet from Goa sailed up the Leimro river and raided Mrauk-U in 1615.⁵⁴⁾ Anauk-pet-lun in Burma seems to have used the opportunity

48) See Guerreiro 1930, III, p. 84.

49) See Pato 1880, I, p. 357.

50) Pato 1884, II, p. 393; On Gonçalves, see Sousa 1945, V, pp. 284-292; VI, pp. 80-86.

51) The Arakan-Avan trade is discussed in Charney, n.d.; recent attention has also been paid to this trade and its importance during the period of Burman rule after 1785, in Leider 1994.

52) See Anauk-pet-lun's presents to Arakan on the eve of his Prome campaign in Kala 1960, p. 145.

53) Sousa 1945, V, pp. 290-292.

54) Sousa 1945, VI, pp. 80-86.

of Arakanese preoccupation with the Portuguese in the north to raid the southern Arakanese town of Sandoway in the same year.⁵⁵⁾

Political Reintegration and Commercial Revival

Despite the loss of maritime commercial revenues prior to Mìn-raza-gri's death in 1612, it would be incorrect to overestimate the detrimental effects of the Portuguese blockade on the nuclear zone's control over the Arakan littoral. The weakening of the royal court was not necessarily irreversible, and the resumption of trade could revive royal commercial resources sufficiently to restrengthen its grip over outlying areas, none of which had yet broken free from the Mrauk-U dynasty. More importantly, the peculiar nature of the Portuguese blockade actually aided later Mrauk-U rulers in their attempts to revitalize royal control over the Arakan littoral. The most important potential threat to Mrauk-U control over the Arakan littoral, for example, was the rise of an indigenous commercial rival within that littoral. As the Portuguese monopolized trade for themselves, and ruined trade evenly across the Arakan littoral,⁵⁶⁾ all Arakanese centers were restricted from commercial revenues. Indeed, it might have been such a realization that prompted the *myó-zà* of Chittagong to seek an alliance with the Sundiva Portuguese to end their blockade of his port and in this way allow him to develop resources to pursue a course of development independent of the Mrauk-U court. In any case, Mrauk-U was still left in command of superior non-commercial resources, agricultural and demographic, with which to dominate the littoral until maritime commerce returned.

Any decline in commercial resources could also be offset in part by a resumption of war-booty raids into neighboring kingdoms, which provided a direct source of goods and valuables available for redistribution by the Mrauk-U king. Later Mrauk-U kings continued and intensified raids on Bengal and Lower Burma for booty.⁵⁷⁾ Raids on Dacca in 1625, for example, seem to have been sent for the chief purpose of gaining booty, and, instead of establishing royal control over Dacca, the Arakanese simply returned after they had gained "gold, silver, horses, elephants, and weapons and supplies," which they then brought back to the royal capital.⁵⁸⁾ Similarly, in 1626, while Thiri-thu-dhammaraza (r. 1622-1638)

55) Kala 1960, pp. 176-177.

56) There were efforts by Goa to have De Brito and Gonçalves join forces and thus create a single blockade of both Arakan and Lower Burma, stretching from the Megna river and Chittagong to the Kra isthmus south of Martaban. See Pato 1880, I, p. 357; Pato 1884, II, pp. 393-4.

57) See Mìn-kamaun's raid on Dacca in 1614, Mìn-kamaun's raid on the twelve Bengal towns in 1621, and Thiri-thu-dhammaraza's raid on the same in 1622 in Sanda-mala 1932, pp. 166-170, *passim*.

58) Sanda-mala 1932, p. 171.

sojourned in Sandoway, he sent a raiding expedition against “the entire country of Than-lyn (Syriam) and Hanthawaddy towns,” which brought back “many bundles of gifts and property.”⁵⁹⁾ King Tha-lun (r. 1629-1648) of Burma was so concerned about such Arakanese raids that he stationed warships as far north as Prome to defend against Arakanese penetration.⁶⁰⁾ Tha-lun’s appointments of *yè-hlei-wuns* (warboat-supervisor), with contingents of warboats to guard Syriam may have been the result of the same consideration.⁶¹⁾

Prior to Thiri-thu-dhammaraza’s assumption of the throne, his father, Mìn-kamaun (r. 1612-1622), had encouraged the return of Muslim trade to Mrauk-U and continued the patronage of Muslim traders and culture in certain court functions, giving “good respect and entertainment” to Persians, Arabs, and traders from Golconda and Masulipatam,⁶²⁾ that had characterized Early Mrauk-U rule. Under Mìn-kamaun, Muslim trade with Mrauk-U quickly revived. Early seventeenth century English accounts from East India, for example, report yearly trading missions from Golconda to Arakan, which brought back, amongst other things, gold, and gum-lac, but chiefly rice, destined for markets in Pulicat and Narsinga.⁶³⁾

After the Portuguese siege in Lower Burma was lifted and the Portuguese siege of Arakan weakened shortly afterwards (and ended completely in 1617), the kings of both Arakan and Ava actively sought a resumption of European trade as well. While the Avan court sought a resumption of Portuguese trade,⁶⁴⁾ the Arakanese court targeted both Muslim and Dutch commerce. Both courts, however, were disappointed with the reluctance of both the Portuguese and the Dutch to couple trade with military aid, presumably involving supplies of firearms.⁶⁵⁾ Still, Mrauk-U effected some degree of success in bringing back limited Muslim

59) Sanda-mala 1932, p. 171.

60) See Furnivall 1915, p. 55.

61) On one such appointment in 1638, see Than Tun 1983, p. 345.

62) This included maintaining some Muslim rituals at court, a practice that led William Methwold to observe: “[The Mrauk-U king] profess[es] publicly the practice of their [Muslim Traders’] Mahumetan superstition.” See Methwold 1931, p. 42.

63) Methwold 1931, pp. 37-8; on general trade between Golconda and Arakan, see Schorer 1931, p. 59.

64) In 1617, for example, Anauk-pet-lun sent an embassy to Goa led by two Muslims and a Mon (“os embaixadores . . . quer eram dois mouros e um pegu”) with the request for a commercial relationship. As Anauk-pet-lun promised: “. . . ser amigo do Estado e irmão em armas de sua Magestade, com todos os portos do seu reino francos para os portuguezes e vassallos de sua Magestade poderem ir e vir a elles, e fazerem todo e tracto e commercio sem impedimento algum.” Bocarro 1876, II, pp. 693-4.

65) Although Anauk-pet-lun believed that the Portuguese would establish commercial ties, when he realized that no military aid was forthcoming, he refused to meet with the Portuguese envoy and nothing came out of the return Portuguese mission. See Bocarro 1876, II, pp. 693-5; Similarly, Arakanese demands for Dutch military aid against the Mughals forced the Dutch to abandon initial trading activities in Mrauk-U. Hall 1936, p. 12; A mission sent

and other Asian trade, at least into the 1630s, as Manrique noted the presence in Mrauk-U of traders from Bengala, Masulipatam, Tenasserim, Martaban, Aceh, and Jakarta.⁶⁶⁾

Other attempts were more successful and were aided, at least in Arakan, by the arrival in Asian trade of maritime traders not associated with the Portuguese. As early as 1618, the English showed interest in establishing trade with Arakan, particularly for rubies. Later, the English factory at Armagaon saw Arakan as a potential supply source, and other Englishmen seem to have carried on a small trade which included gum-lac.⁶⁷⁾ Further visits to Arakan by new European traders included Germans, traders from the Spanish Netherlands, and Danish merchants during the 1630s.⁶⁸⁾

Another new European source of maritime commerce was the trade relationship between the Mrauk-U court and the V.O.C. (*Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* or Dutch East India Company). The Dutch required a large supply of slave-labor to work the plantations on Amboina and Banda island and to lower labor costs in Dutch port cities in Asia where wage-labor was notoriously high.⁶⁹⁾ As slaves could not be supplied sufficiently by archipelagic sources, the Dutch founder of Batavia, Jan Pieterszoon Coen, determined that Arakan might be able to provide a cheaper supply of slaves.⁷⁰⁾ Further, the V.O.C. needed large supplies of rice to feed its labor in the spice islands, and these supplies, again, could not be derived from local sources. In the mid-1630s, for example, the Arakanese king observed that the Dutch were desperate for Arakanese rice because of the Dutch armed conflicts with Makassar, Mataram, and Bantam. The English faced this problem as well, particularly from the Mataramese economic blockade in western Java.⁷¹⁾ Thus, the Dutch established a permanent factory at Mrauk-U in the early 1620s.⁷²⁾

from Goa to Mrauk-U in 1631-2, faced a similar impasse as that faced by the Portuguese mission in 1617 to Anauk-pet-lun. After five months, the Portuguese ambassador refused to make the concessions demanded by the Arakanese until further consultation with the Viceroy. Manrique 1946, I, pp. 285-6.

66) Manrique 1946, I, p. 192.

67) Foster 1906, (1618-1621), p. 14; Foster 1909, (1624-1629), p. 315; Foster 1911, (1634-1636), p. 66.

68) Manrique 1946, I, p. 288; Hall 1936, p. 5.

69) Arasaratnam 1995, pp. 198, 203.

70) Prakash 1984, p. 52; It is possible that Coen saw Arakan as a potential source of cheap slaves because he may have heard about Gonçalves' periodic sale at cheap prices of his captives from captured Arakanese ships. See, for example, Gonçalves' sale of the captured Arakanese crews in 1609 in Bocarro 1876, II, p. 442.

71) Hall 1936, p. 8; Foster 1909, (1624-1629), p. 26.

72) For the most comprehensive analysis of the Dutch-Arakanese arrangement, see Hall 1936, pp. 1-31, *passim*.

To meet the Dutch need for labor and foodstuffs to feed their slave-laborers, the Mrauk-U court developed an interconnected rice and slave trade for the next half century.⁷³⁾ Using Portuguese who had been captured on Sundiva island in 1617, and Arakanese slave-raiders, the Arakanese continually raided Lower Bengal as far as Hughli and Jassòr for slaves and labor over the next few decades.⁷⁴⁾ In meeting Dutch demands for rice and slaves, two phenomena developed: (1) Danya-waddy's hegemony vis-à-vis Dwara-waddy, Rama-waddy, Mekha-waddy, and less significant areas in outlying areas to the south of Danya-waddy, was strengthened by the inflow of new commercial revenues, the increased cultivation of the nuclear zone, and the importation of additional groups of war-captives to supplement local labor available for rice cultivation; and (2) the growth of a rival commercial *entrepôt* to Mrauk-U, in Chittagong. We should now turn to each of these developments in turn.

Mrauk-U benefited from the slave and rice trade with the Dutch, and from the raids into Bengal to feed it, in the form of commercial revenues, increased agricultural cultivation in Danya-waddy, and major manpower inputs in the nuclear zone. Slaves taken in raids into Bengal were examined by royal agents, to determine the skills of the captives and to remove some for use in the royal court, but the primary goal was to obtain those who were fit to be used for labor in working paddy fields.⁷⁵⁾ Arakan's population base was low, by comparison with the huge population of Upper Burma, and likely could not have increased rice cultivation without significant inputs of manpower. By diverting captive Bengalis from the slave export trade at Chittagong, to agricultural areas in the Danya-waddy nuclear zone, the Arakanese court was able to supplement its agricultural labor force in order to cultivate the additional supplies of rice necessary for export to the Dutch.⁷⁶⁾ The Mrauk-U court also gained commercial revenues, especially silver,⁷⁷⁾ from the slave and rice trade with the Dutch

73) As Khin Maung Nyunt has explained, the growth of the slave trade and the rice trade in Arakan were inseparable. Khin Maung Nyunt 1970, p. 15.

74) Manrique observed: "quantas entradas hazen todos los años con sus armadas por las tierras, y Reynos de Bacalà, y Solimanuàs, Iassòr, Angelim, Ourixa, y con estas entradas no solamente disminuyen la potencia del enemigo, mas tambien aumentan la vuestra." Manrique 1946, I, p. 133.

75) Khin Maung Nyunt 1970, p. 15; As Shihabuddin Talish observed in the mid-seventeenth century, "[o]nly the Feringi pirates sold their prisoners. But the Maghs employed all their captives in agriculture and other kinds of service." Sarkar 1907a, p. 422.

76) Manrique explained that it was under Mìn-kamaun that "los Portugueses [who had been settled at Chittagong by Mìn-kamaun] fueron la principal parte para que los veays oy otra vez poblados, trayendo a vuestras tierras Ciudades, y poblaciones enteras, auiendo años que metieron passante de onze mil familias." Manrique 1946, I, p. 133.

77) See the cargo of the Arent, and the purpose of this cargo, sent from Batavia on 26 September 1625 in Chijs 1896, p. 197.

by selling captives (those not funneled into rice cultivation in the nuclear zone) and rice, the surplus likely available due to increased cultivation by the new slave-labor inputs. An overview of Dutch trade records appears to support the observation that the bulk of Dutch purchases of rice and slaves from Arakan appear to have occurred during the c. 1630-1664 period.⁷⁸⁾

But the Arakanese were not totally dependent upon rice and slaves for the maintenance of foreign commercial connections and resources derived therefrom. Additional trade during this period, for example, involved a variety of commodities, such as musk, gum-lac, saltpetre, dungarees, indigo, black cloth, and elephants, which were shipped by foreign traders to eastern India (especially Pulicat), Java, and elsewhere.⁷⁹⁾ Further, during periods when the Dutch did not come to Mrauk-U to trade, the Mrauk-U king sent royal trading missions to maritime ports in India and the archipelago to sell his commodities. When the Dutch temporarily closed their factory at Mrauk-U in the 1620s, for example, the Arakanese king sent rice cargoes to Pulicat.⁸⁰⁾ Similar royal Mrauk-U trading missions to Java have been recorded for 1643.⁸¹⁾

Decline and Collapse of Mrauk-U Control in Bengal

Tensions developed, however, in the northern half of the Arakanese littoral between the *entrepôts* of Chittagong and Mrauk-U, as Chittagong was also able to develop as a commercial rival to Mrauk-U from the 1620s. A major reason for the slow development of Chittagong under Arakanese control in the six-

78) See references to purchases of Arakanese slaves and rice in Chijs 1896, (1624-29), pp. 239, 335; Chijs 1898, (1631-1634), pp. 32, 65, 353; Chijs 1899, (1636), pp. 35, 175; Chijs 1899, (1637), pp. 44, 58, 71, 87; Chijs 1887, (1640-1641), pp. 167, 169, 211; Chijs 1900, (1641-1642), pp. 140, 145, 300; Chijs 1902, (1643-1644), pp. 41, 53; Chijs 1903, (1644-1645), p. 60; Chijs 1888, (1653), pp. 102, 122; Chijs 1904, (1656-1657), p. 158; Chijs 1889, (1659), pp. 25, 71; Chijs 1889, (1661), pp. 55, 56, 57, 114, 520, 521; Chijs 1891, (1663), pp. 6, 95; Chijs 1893, (1664), p. 113; Coolhaas 1960, I, pp. 156, 185, 196, 294, 508, 526, 628; Coolhaas 1964, II, pp. 99, 145, 223, 327, 623, 718; Coolhaas 1968, III, pp. 162, 400, 497.

79) See, for example, references to exports of gum-lac in Coolhaas 1960, I, p. 566; Coolhaas 1964, II, pp. 145, 223; Chijs 1889, (1636), pp. 175, 214; Chijs 1889, (1637), pp. 41, 44; Chijs 1887, (1640-1641), p. 211; Chijs 1900, (1641-1642), p. 140; references to musk in Chijs 1887, (1640-1641), p. 211; references to dungarees in Chijs 1889, (1637), pp. 41, 44, 87; references to exports of black cloth in Coolhaas 1964, II, p. 223; Chijs 1889, (1637), pp. 41, 44; Chijs 1887, (1640-1641), p. 211; references to exports of sulphur and saltpetre in Chijs 1889, (1637), pp. 41, 44, 71; references to exports of indigo in Coolhaas 1964, II, p. 145; Chijs 1889, (1636), p. 35; Chijs 1889, (1637), pp. 58, 71; references to exports of elephants in Coolhaas 1964, II, p. 327; Chijs 1889, (1636), p. 37; Chijs 1887, (1640-1641), pp. 322, 419; Chijs 1900, (1641-1642), p. 300.

80) Foster 1908, (1622-23), p. 260.

81) Foster 1913, (1642-1645), p. 131.

teenth century had been the existence of Sundiva as a rival, and dominant *entre-pôt* in the northeast Bay of Bengal. This check on Chittagong was gradually removed from the mid-1610s.

In 1617, Mìn-kamaun destroyed the Portuguese position on Sundiva and resettled the Portuguese near Chittagong, not as traders involved in the *entrepôt* trade, but as servicemen devoted to raiding Lower Bengal for loot and slaves. These Portuguese captives were either forced into Arakanese military groups, or were commanded to operate their war *jalias* (an oared indigenous warboat) under royal supervision.⁸²⁾ While their service-group was referred to as *Harmad* (corruption of *armada*) and the “headman” of their group was known as the *capitão-mor* (“captain of the sea”), the Portuguese servicemen were no longer autonomous and were under the supervision of the *myó-zà* of Chittagong, to whom they gave half of their booty. Further, the Portuguese organization was stripped of its political autonomy, commercial activities, and independent overall command structure which they had previously enjoyed. The Portuguese were given stipends from the central court, but they largely drew their income from their relationship with the *myó-zà* of Chittagong. The Portuguese *capitãos* were granted *bilatas* (“revenue-producing lands”), in return for which they maintained their individual crews on their own lands with a portion of their income. The Arakanese practice of forcing the Portuguese to keep their women and children in Arakanese territory also helped to ensure Portuguese loyalty or at least dependence.⁸³⁾

As royal servicemen to the rulers of Arakan, the role of the Portuguese in northern Arakan as commercial competitors to Muslim traders was largely reduced. Since Mìn-kamaun had destroyed Sundiva as a commercial rival to Chittagong, Chittagong became the sole commercial port in the area, largely due to its proximity to the rich Megna river trade. Second, while a major proportion of Bengali slaves were transshipped to Mrauk-U and the nuclear zone for cultivation,⁸⁴⁾ for service in the court, and for sale as slaves, Portuguese and local merchants in Chittagong also sold a portion of the slaves they had captured; they seemed to have prevented much of the war booty taken, although half of the proceeds from the sale of the slaves in Chittagong did reach Mrauk-U royal coffers.⁸⁵⁾

The expansion of slave-raiding activities brought a proliferation of the number of slave-raiding communities, which became high growth settlements, in response to the tremendous influx of slaves and booty. Manrique observed, for

82) See Pato 1893, IV, p. 251.

83) Sarkar 1907a, pp. 424-5.

84) In addition to the Portuguese slavers, there were also Arakanese slave-raiders who did not sell their captives, but rather took such slaves with the express purpose of acquiring agricultural labor for the Mrauk-U court. Sarkar 1907a, p. 422.

85) Sarkar 1907a, p. 424.

example, that during a five-year period, two formerly small centers, Angarcale and Dianga, handled eighteen thousand new slaves. As a result, small fishing villages such as Angarcale grew into larger urban centers.⁸⁶) As these settlements became more economically attractive, “persons of higher standing” settled there as well.⁸⁷)

An additional factor which detracted from the effect of Mrauk-U efforts to strengthen control in the seventeenth century over the local nuclear zone’s population and over outlying areas, was the decreasing flow of firearms. Information on this subject is sketchy. We do not have figures from which we could extrapolate as to how many guns were available to late Mrauk-U rulers as compared to early Mrauk-U rulers. Several observations, however, point to the dissipation of arms supplies in the seventeenth century. Two of the chief sources of early Mrauk-U firearms, for example, were the Muslim traders and the Portuguese. As for Muslim sources of firearms, while fifteenth and sixteenth century Muslim trade connections centered on Mrauk-U, the increasing shift of Muslim trade to Chittagong points to the likelihood that if arms availability in the Arakanese littoral did not decrease for Mrauk-U, it probably became more diffuse within the region (e.g., access to firearms increased for Chittagong, an outlying center).

The second source of firearms for the Mrauk-U court, Portuguese trade, decreased in the seventeenth century, and after the Portuguese freebooters were finally suppressed completely, in 1617, difficulties between the Mrauk-U court and Goa lessened the likelihood of a resumption of trade on par with that of the sixteenth century. Perhaps the chief source of Portuguese arms for Arakan in the early seventeenth century was Hughli, but this Portuguese settlement was conquered by the Mughals in 1632, perhaps in an attempt to stop the flow of these firearms to Arakan. As for other European trade connections of the seventeenth century, after perusal of Dutch trade records concerning Arakan currently available to me,⁸⁸) I have yet to find any evidence of Dutch arms deliveries to the Mrauk-U court specifically, or to the Arakanese littoral in general. Finally, the successful campaigns against foreign kingdoms which had led to the seizure of large supplies of firearms in the late sixteenth century, especially from Pegu, were less frequent in the seventeenth century. Instead, numerous Arakanese defeats in the seventeenth century may have produced a reversal in the supply of arms, with an increasing net Arakanese loss of firearms throughout the seventeenth century.

86) Manrique 1946, I, pp. 253, 260.

87) Manrique 1946, I, p. 261.

88) This includes only published Dutch records. I am currently preparing to examine the Dutch archives for non-published Dutch records on trade with Arakan, for there is certain to be much more material which can substantiate and enhance information available from indigenous Arakanese sources.

If the Danya-waddy nuclear zone generally, and the royal court in particular, lost its monopoly of firearms in the seventeenth century, it would shed some light on the situation developing in Chittagong throughout the middle of the seventeenth century. The Portuguese slavers at Chittagong and the *myó-zà* of Chittagong showed signs of an increasing inter-dependent economic, political, and military relationship. The growth of this relationship was extremely dangerous to the royal court's continued dominance over Chittagong, as the Portuguese slavers possessed firearms, ships, and soldiers which could support pretensions by the local *myó-zà* to rivalry with the royal court at Mrauk-U. Equally dangerous were alliances between the local *myó-zà* and the centrally-appointed *u-si* ("group-leader") and his contingent.⁸⁹⁾ Such relationships may have been encouraged by the growing resources and increasingly unchallenged authority of the *myó-zà* of Chittagong.⁹⁰⁾

Seventeenth-century Asian maritime trade was also in the midst of a major crisis,⁹¹⁾ which would have major repercussions for Mrauk-U royal attempts at maintaining control over both the Danya-waddy nuclear zone and the Arakanese littoral as a whole. In the climate of the general decline of Muslim trade during the late seventeenth century, for example, the Dutch trade with Arakan, in slow decline for several decades, was brought to a virtual end in the 1660s. The Dutch decision to abandon Mrauk-U, as Khin Maung Nyunt has explained, was due to demands by the Mughal *nawab* ("governor") of Bengal that the Dutch abandon Mrauk-U or lose their trade in Bengal, as the Arakanese-sponsored slave-raids in Lower Bengal were destroying the population base of Lower Bengal.⁹²⁾ The Mughals thus forced the Dutch to choose between the security of their Choromandel coast factories and their trade with Arakan, and the Dutch chose the former.⁹³⁾

The loss of the slave and rice markets was a major blow to Mrauk-U's maritime commercial resources. This was doubly important, as the other commodities, gum-lac for example, which Arakan could offer maritime traders could be

89) In order to provide ships for his rebellion, the *myó-zà* of Chittagong in 1638, had to persuade the *ko-ran-gri* ("commander"), "who had been entrusted . . . with sole charge of the Rakhine fleet of boats," to help him. Khan 1990, pp. 249-50.

90) The *myó-zà* of Chittagong who rebelled in 1638, was said to have "ruled with unlimited sway." Khan 1990, p. 250.

91) On the general character of this crisis and its effects on Southeast Asia generally, see Reid 1993, pp. 285-325.

92) Sarkar 1907b, p. 406; Numerous contemporary accounts describe in great detail the devastation that the *Harmad* and the Arakanese caused to the population of Lower Bengal. See Bernier 1947, p. 175; Bowrey 1905, pp. 211-2.

93) Khin Maung Nyunt 1970, p. 19; Hall 1936, p. 27; Another possibility, suggested by Sinnappah Arasaratnam, is that the Dutch closed the factory due to competition from Choromandel Muslims. See Arasaratnam 1986, p. 144.

had elsewhere, and it is unclear if such Arakanese commodities had by themselves sufficient draw in the second half of the seventeenth century to sufficiently entice Dutch or other traders to come to Mrauk-U on a regular basis without accompanying cargoes of rice and slaves. In terms of the Dutch trade, for example, the references to purchases of slaves and rice in the *Dagh-Register* decline rapidly after 1664. While some trade with the Dutch continued, one is hard-pressed to find anything more than references to semi-periodic and relatively minor purchases of rice and no slaves.⁹⁴)

Previously, the Mrauk-U court had been able to substitute Dutch trade for lost Portuguese maritime commercial connections. Commercial connections with the English developed slowly and remained minimal in the late seventeenth century. Arakan, for example, remained the final stop for the English-Bengal fleet after trading in Bengal, but by 1689, it had “effected nothing there [at Mrauk-U],”⁹⁵) and, afterwards, only a moderate English trade with Arakan was seen.⁹⁶ Attempts at a late seventeenth century resumption of Arakanese royal trading missions to overseas ports also appears to have been relatively minor.⁹⁷)

Thus, the effect of the Dutch commercial withdrawal from Mrauk-U was worsened as the weakening commercial position of Mrauk-U fostered a feeling among foreign traders that Arakan was no longer politically-stable and thus Mrauk-U was not a reliable market in the long-term. English traders in the Bay of Bengal, for example, were extremely worried about the political and economic repercussions in Bengal if the Arakanese lost Chittagong.⁹⁸) The English were also worried that, with cheap prices of Arakanese rice due to the surplus brought by the commercial vacuum in Arakan, dangerous circumstances would arise which would allow the Dutch to take over Arakan and drive the English out of Bengal.⁹⁹) Given the less than reliable Arakanese market, the English thus focused on establishing a more secure position in Bay of Bengal trade, which included an attempt to persuade the Arakanese king to grant the British Negrais: which would be “a great check upon Bengall, Pegu & Arrakan, & be a Mart for the commodities of these parts.”¹⁰⁰) To compensate for fast-disappearing commercial revenues, Mrauk-U kings engaged in sea-raids of Bay of

94) On these minor purchases see Chijs 1902, (1674), p. 62; Chijs 1907, (1678), p. 121; Chijs 1909, (1679), p. 202; Chijs 1919, (1681), p. 107.

95) IOR 1916, XV, p. 19.

96) For references to occasional English-Arakanese trade in the late 1680s-1690s, see IOR 1913, XI, p. 74; IOR 1914, XII, pp. 26, 27; IOR 1916, XV, pp. 13, 19, 20; IOR 1917, XVI, pp. 22, 35.

97) Foster 1923, (1661-1664), pp. 275, 281.

98) Foster 1923, (1661-1664), p. 399.

99) Hedges 1887, p. 117.

100) IOR 1913, XI, p. 54.

Bengal shipping and even seized, in desperation, the riches of Muslim refugees. This was in evidence when Shah Shuja was given sanctuary, granted on the condition, he brought his immense treasure. When he was killed, his treasure, which would have been seen as insignificant by previous Arakanese kings, such as Min-raza-grî, was the object of frantic efforts by the Arakanese king to recover all of it.¹⁰¹⁾

The changing nature of late seventeenth century Bay of Bengal trade and problems with the Mughals generally, also contributed to the souring of relations between the Late Mrauk-U kings and Muslim traders. A series of conflicts with Muslims at the Mrauk-U court, caused by, and contributing further to, these bad relations, occurred in the 1660s, and many involved Shah Shuja and his followers. Shah Shuja's men, for example, were spared under orders of the king so that these "famed archers" could serve as his new bodyguard," receiving their own settlement.¹⁰²⁾ Other Muslims, however, did not fare as well. After the Mughals attempted a raid in July, 1663, to secure the release of three princes of Shah Shuja held by the Arakanese court, for example, the Arakanese king Sanda-thu-dhammaraza (r. 1652-1674) beheaded the princes and massacred many Bengalis and Muslims in Mrauk-U.¹⁰³⁾ Further, after the rebellion in 1664 of the royal bodyguard, including Shah Shuja's old followers, in which the *myó-zà* of Mrauk-U, Ma-naw-thiri, was killed and the palace set afire, Sanda-thu-dhammaraza became extremely insecure in his position at the central court. As a result, Sanda-thu-dhammaraza was quick to distrust all foreigners as potential threats to the throne, as in the case of Thomas Pratt, who fled to Arakan to fight against the Mughals, but was tied up with his men and sunk along with his ship.¹⁰⁴⁾

Political Disintegration of the Arakanese Littoral after 1664

With what appears to be declining commercial resources, the desire of local leaders in the nuclear zone and in peripheral areas for continued vassalage of the Mrauk-U monarch may have dissipated. This dissipation of dynastic authority occurred at two levels: (1) politically, as local leaders within the nuclear zone and in outlying areas asserted their independence from royal demands for

101) As the *Dagh-Register* entry of 22 December 1661 records: "[d]agelyks werdt het goud en zilver, dat de Arracanders gekregen hebben, gesmolten en in des Konings threesoor gebragt." Chijs 1889, (1661), p. 520.

102) San Baw U 1933, p. 19.

103) Ali 1967, p. 351.

104) Manucci 1907, p. 103. The Dutch, however, denied that the story was true. Foster 1923, (1661-1664), p. 393; San Baw U 1933, p. 19.

manpower and agricultural levies and (2) socially, as the Mrauk-U monarch's status (and authority) diminished within the court and vis-à-vis courtiers, the *sangha*, the foreigners and their leaders who formed the royal bodyguard and the elite military formation within the capital city. I will examine each of these levels in turn.

In the context of declining maritime trade for the Arakanese littoral as a whole, Mrauk-U's previous monopoly of maritime trade was no longer a resource which gave it an edge over local rulers, whose lack of maritime commercial resources was now shared by the central court. The struggle for control of the Arakanese littoral would now be decided by who controlled more directly, the agricultural and manpower resources of local areas. Thus, as Late Mrauk-U prestige and authority declined and was increasingly unable to enforce royal demands in local areas, local leaders in outlying areas and within the nuclear zone, with local manpower and agricultural resources under their direct control, increasingly asserted their independence from the Mrauk-U court and often pursued their own claims to the central throne.

Thus, from at least the 1650s, *myó-zà* rebellions in the nuclear zone increased as central authority declined. In 1640, for example, a minister, the *myó-zà* of Laun-kyet seized the throne. In 1657, a rebel named Winmana burned the royal granaries as well as the Maharani ordination hall. In 1685, the *myó-zà* of Taunbek made a bid for the palace, which, although failing, succeeded in penetrating the royal capital. In 1686, another revolt, this time of a minor court officer, Thunkei-taw-kyi, fostered a major rebellion against the king which was only suppressed by mercenaries from India and the support from the royal bodyguard.¹⁰⁵)

Perhaps a more ominous symptom of the decline of royal strength was the increasing ability of neighboring kingdoms to raid the nuclear zone and even to sack the royal capital. In 1663, for example, Mughal raids succeeded in killing the *myó-zà* of Mrauk-U and burning down the *pyathad* of the golden palace within the royal compound. By the end of the century, the Assamese also began to raid the Danya-waddy nuclear zone, with one such Assamese raid devastating Myingaba in 1691.¹⁰⁶)

Reflecting and encouraging the decline of Late Mrauk-U power within the nuclear zone, administrative cohesion also broke down in the outlying areas. As the ability of the Mrauk-U king to command the resources of the nuclear zone diminished, Late Mrauk-U attempts to defend and maintain control over the

105) Sanda-mala 1932, pp. 173, 241, 224-226.

106) Sanda-mala 1932, pp. 228, 242. While Arakanese accounts generally refer to these raiders as "Shans" they almost certainly were Assamese, who were Tai, and thus were considered to be Shan as well, by the Arakanese.

northern littoral failed. In 1664, the Arakanese permanently lost Chittagong and the northern Arakanese littoral down to Ramu (to the South of Chittagong) to the Mughals.¹⁰⁷⁾

The long-term decline of royal commercial revenues, worsened by the loss of control over the *entrepôt* of Chittagong to the Mughals in 1664, and the decline of the Dutch trade from the 1660s, quickened the pace of diminishing royal status and authority within the court and royal capital. Those most directly affected by declining royal cash revenues were the foreign mercenaries, primarily from India, who made up the royal bodyguard and filled the elite military groups stationed within the nuclear zone. In 1685, the royal bodyguard and elite military groups rebelled and took the palace killing King Okgabala-raza (r. 1674-1685), the queens and handmaidens, the *sit-ké* (“war commissioner”) Lekwamyān, and many others and then burned the royal palace. The sole object of this rebellion seems to have been gold and silver loot, which the rebels carried away in great abundance. Supporting their own candidate for the throne, the Bengali bodyguard established a firm grip on an admittedly much-diminished royal court from 1686.¹⁰⁸⁾

Another group threatened by the diminished wealth and authority of the Mrauk-U ruler was the *sangha*. As religious donation lapsed, and as royal forces were unable to prevent the escape of cultivator groups assigned to feed the monasteries, the role of the Mrauk-U ruler as the chief patron of Buddhism could fall into doubt. This view would no doubt have been strengthened by the observation of the control by Muslim (that is, non-Buddhist) Bengalis of the Mrauk-U king and their obvious manipulation of succession; from 1692 until 1694, for example, the royal bodyguard rotated two kings, Wara-dhammaraza and Manithu-dhammaraza, removing one from the throne and installing the other in three cycles.¹⁰⁹⁾

In any case, later Mrauk-U rulers had an interest in emphasizing their role as Buddhist *dhamma-razas* (“rulers of the Dhamma” or “rulers of the Law”) and demonstrating it through religious patronage. This effort was made easier by the fact that, after 1622, Mrauk-U rulers, for an as yet undetermined reason, dropped Muslim appellations and presumably ended their patronage of Islam, at least the most symbolic and participatory aspects of it. Thus, we find many

107) Sanda-mala 1932, p. 242.

108) Sanda-mala 1932, pp. 225, 226.

109) The order of succession was Wara-dhammaraza, Mani-thu-dhammaraza, Wara-dhammaraza, Mani-thu-dhammaraza, Wara-dhammaraza, Mani-thu-dhammaraza. The primary reason for this confused situation was the strategy by the royal bodyguard to make each king provide more “gold and silver” to the royal bodyguard under threat of the reinstatement of the other king. Sanda-mala 1932, pp. 228-229.

attempts at royal temple-building for the eighty years from c. 1650 to 1730, despite the concomitant trend of disappearing maritime trade, the loss of Chittagong, and weakening administrative control over both the Danya-waddy nuclear zone and the outlying areas.

It may be the case that Michael Aung-Thwin's theory concerning the debilitating impact of large-scale religious construction and donation by Burmese kings of land and manpower to the *sangha* upon royal reserves of human and material resources is applicable to seventeenth century Arakan.¹¹⁰) There is currently, however, insufficient information available to make such an argument for the case of Arakan with any degree of certainty. If this were the case, however, we could reasonably expect that other factors were equally relevant in the process of royal decline in late seventeenth century Arakan. It is highly likely, for example, that as maritime commercial revenues and goods available for redistribution among important court men and through them, local leaders, decreased, and such men began to avoid central calls for local labor levies, labor demands fell more heavily upon population groups assigned as *ahmú-dàns* (servicemen) and settled in the Danya-waddy nuclear zone in areas closer to the royal city and thus under the king's more direct control. This may have been a contributing factor to the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century phenomenon of rebellions by non-Arakanese ethnic groups taken in war and resettled in the Danya-waddy delta.

A major source of Late Mrauk-U weakness involved the ethnic and religious diversity of the nuclear zone, where the Danya-waddy population was remarkably heterogeneous. Over the sixteenth century, as Mrauk-U military campaigns were increasingly waged farther afield of the Arakanese littoral, into areas such as Lower Bengal and Lower Burma, Mon, Burman, and Bengali captives provided substantial populations which were resettled throughout the nuclear zone. Within the royal capital of Mrauk-U itself, a substantial portion of the population was of non-Arakanese ethnicity. In addition to Muslim Indian traders and mercenaries, the Mrauk-U population included Dutchmen retired from East India Company service, and permanent English and French residents. Other foreign mercenaries present in Mrauk-U in the 1630s, on royal salary ("*reciben sueldo*"), included Portuguese, Mons, Burmans, Mughals, Japanese Christians, Bengalis, and "other nations."¹¹¹) Further, by the mid-seventeenth century, Arakanese war levies included so many Mons that Arakanese soldiers were generally known in the northern Arakanese littoral as Telingas (Talaings or Mons).¹¹²)

110) See Michael Aung-Thwin's argument in Aung-Thwin 1985, pp. 183-198.

111) Manrique 1946, I, p. 192; II, pp. 15-6.

112) Sarkar 1907b, p. 414; Methwold 1931, pp. 42-3.

Lieberman, in his study of eighteenth century “ethnic” conflict in Burma, however, has suggested that what were in actuality political allegiances have been misconstrued as ethnic loyalties in prevalent historiography. Both the northern kingdom of Ava and the southern kingdom of Pegu, were not entirely Burman and Mon endeavors and both sides included heterogeneous populations, with some Mons fighting for Ava and some Burmans fighting for Pegu.¹¹³⁾ Indeed, the hazy boundaries of ethnicity and ethnic loyalties in Burma may have been partly true for the Arakanese littoral as well. But still, by the eighteenth century, the Mon and Burman populations of Burma had experienced centuries of interaction, cultural and otherwise, by which to develop some common cultural understandings and accommodation. Both Burmans and Mons subscribed to Theravada Buddhism and, within Burma, the *sangha* and *sasana* (“the religion”) were by the eighteenth century the result of a blending of Mon and Burman traditions and personnel. The court culture of Burma was also a common ground for Burmans and Mons, due to a sharing of political traditions from First Toungoo times, a Burman respect for the older cultural manifestations of Mon society, and the integration of court language that had presumably developed during the period from Tabin-shwei-hù (r. 1531-1550) to Anaukpet-lun (r. 1606-1628) when in the royal court “the manner of referring to things was confused and mixed,” including both the Burman and Mon languages and usages.¹¹⁴⁾

I have found less evidence of such a process of cultural homogenization in Arakan and, indeed, by the mid-seventeenth century, most non-Arakanese groups resettled in the Arakanese littoral had not been in contact with the dominant Arakanese culture for more than two generations. Further, in Danya-waddy, most of those war-captives taken were brought over in village groups, along with their families, culture, religion, and traditions independent of the dominant Arakanese population. Japanese Christians also maintained their religious affiliation with, and appear to have allied themselves more to, the Portuguese Christian community than with the Arakanese population.¹¹⁵⁾ Portuguese communities, at Chittagong and elsewhere, maintained their Portuguese culture, language, leaders, Christian religious affiliation, and even Portuguese titles inherited from

113) Lieberman 1978, pp. 455-458.

114) As Jeyathinkaya records, “Because Hanthawaddy-hsin-hpyu-mya-shin was the Burman lord in the Ramanya region, there was both Ramanya language and usage and a Burman language and usage, so that the ways of referring to things was confused and mixed. From the reign of Hanthawaddy-hsin-hpyu-mya-shin to his son, Nyaun-yan-min, the kingdoms were linked and the mixed way of speaking continued).” See Jeyathinkaya 1963, p. 26.

115) For one example of Japanese and Portuguese collusion see Manrique 1946, I, pp. 173-4.

the *Estado da India*.¹¹⁶) Further, the Muslim Bengalis settled along the Kaladan river, who seemed to have formed almost the whole population on a regional level, were perhaps even more resistant to cultural homogenization from the dominant Arakanese culture of the nuclear zone.

Thus, while non-Arakanese rebellions may not have developed out of ethnic hostility or were not even held together by ethnic loyalties, once royal authority within the Danya-waddy nuclear zone lessened, there were few cultural affinities or shared religious affiliations to tie large groups of resettled Bengalis to the court. Especially since court-sponsored punitive missions lacked supplementary levies from outlying areas or local areas within the Danya-waddy nuclear zone, the royal court was unable to prevent large numbers of Bengalis roaming around the Danya-waddy nuclear zone, seizing towns, removing accumulated donative wealth from pagodas, and establishing small chieftainships independent of Mrauk-U. In 1686, for example, when one group of Bengalis revolted against royal authority, Arakanese forces, though successful in preventing incursions by these Bengalis deeper into the nuclear zone, failed to bring the Bengali rebels back under control, allowing them to escape to Mughal territory in the west. In 1688, as well, a Bengali *thu-kyi* also led a revolt, and yet again, royal troops repulsed the rebels but were unable to bring them back under royal control.¹¹⁷) Similarly, as the Burman rulers of the First Toungoo and Restored Toungoo dynasties discovered of the Mon population of the Lower Burmese delta, Mrauk-U rulers found that even shared religious affiliation did not completely assuage ethnic differences or ease cultural integration of the Mon settlers within the Danya-waddy nuclear zone with the dominant Arakanese society, and large numbers of Mons soon joined, and in some cases, led, the Bengali rebels.¹¹⁸)

The general decline of central authority both within and without the nuclear zone, contributing to and reflected by Mon and Bengali rebellions in the nuclear zone, debilitated the royal bodyguard. The problems which plagued Later Mrauk-U rulers throughout the seventeenth century, such as declining commercial revenues, dissipating command of the nuclear zones manpower and agricultural resources, and the loss of outlying political centers, and reduced status and attraction of the Mrauk-U ruler, also worked against the royal bodyguards whose own power was reduced by the failure of areas still under royal control to provide the resources necessary to sustain continued suppression of local revolts and bids for the throne by local leaders.

116) Sarkar 1907a, pp. 424-4.

117) Sanda-mala 1932, pp. 226, 227.

118) Sanda-mala 1932, pp. 134-5, 227, 229-230.

But the decline of central political authority may have encouraged other long-term trends which would affect the construction of an “Arakanese” identity over the following two centuries (that is, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries). In the context of the loss of the northern portion of the Arakanese littoral in the 1660s to the Mughals, the decline of maritime trade connections with both Europeans and Muslims (that trade being focused on the rival *entrepôt* of Chittagong (now in Mughal hands), and the increasing reliance upon passes through the mountains to Burma as conduits of foreign commerce, cultural contact, and war booty, the breakdown of central authority seems to have permitted a diffusion of foreign contacts (again, increasingly Burmese) throughout the central and southern sections of the Arakanese littoral. A related and contributing factor to this process was the movement of “non-Arakanese” (Bengalis, Mons, and so on) out of local and isolated settlement *niches* and into increasingly Burmese-ized areas during their predatory migrations across the littoral, as mentioned earlier. “Non-Arakanese” rebels may have burned Theravada Buddhist ordination halls, or sacked the royal capital, but to do so meant their passage through areas of substantial settlement by Burmese-speakers, who were Theravada Buddhist and enjoyed an increasingly Burmese material culture, thus increasing exposure to new cultural items, new ideas, the Burmese language (how else, for example, could the Mons and the Bengalis have communicated with one another in their collaborative rebellions?), and generally fostering cultural homogenization throughout the Arakanese littoral. In short, when we begin to look for the construction of the “Arakanese identity” of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a search that is only beginning to be made, we may find the critical period in the last half of the seventeenth century, when central royal authority was in retreat. For now, however, these suggestions must remain speculative until further studies are conducted.

Conclusion

The decline of maritime trade in Arakan due to the decade and a half of Portuguese blockades and raids, the growth of Chittagong as a commercial rival within the Arakanese littoral to Mrauk-U, and the Mughal role in putting an end to the short-lived Portuguese trade all played a role in the declining resources available to the Mrauk-U ruler for redistribution in his society. The supply of firearms seems to have lessened, and with the loss of major sources of war levies from the northern littoral due to Mughal expansion, the poor prospects of successful Mrauk-U-organized campaigns and thus the decreasing promise of war booty from abroad increasingly produced hesitant local leaders who focused more on developing local resources than on heeding demands from a weakening

court. Further, those groups most likely to rebel against royal authority, such as foreign mercenaries who could not be paid as well or as often, and masses of recent deportees to the nuclear zone, whose integration into Arakanese culture and adherence to the Theravada Buddhist belief system had not yet been effected, were also those groups upon which the Mrauk-U ruler depended most heavily for his immediate support.

In essence, then, Mrauk-U administrative control crumbled first in the nuclear zone, and this disintegration of a state based on a no longer functioning system of redistribution was soon reflected in outlying areas. By the end of the seventeenth century, while the population of the Danya-waddy nuclear zone became carved up into disparate groups with no allegiance to, and respecting no authority of, the Mrauk-U court, outlying local “eaters” no longer contributed war levies on royal command and this too detracted from the Mrauk-U ruler’s ability to reintegrate the nuclear zone.

How, then, does Arakan fit into seventeenth century Southeast Asian history? This question cannot be answered easily. While Arakan did experience a seventeenth century crisis, this was not produced, at least generally, by temperature change, Dutch assaults, demographic decline, the decline of major world markets *per se*, or any of a variety of factors that would neatly tie up Arakan with archipelagic polities of the same period. On the other hand, the decline of the Mrauk-U Dynasty for reasons primarily rooted in the maritime world and not in the mainland, suggests that the case of Arakan may present a special case overlooked by Lieberman for the decline of a peripheral state in his view of early modern mainland Southeast Asia. Still, the extension of Mughal power into the northern Arakanese littoral (leading to the loss by Arakan of Chittagong) was both a symptom of and a contributing (although a secondary) factor in the decline of Arakan and would thus seem to support Lieberman’s overall picture of regional trends, should the special situation involved in the case of Arakan be taken into consideration as well.

Long-term and regional trends aside, we should also consider the question of whose history we are writing when we talk about the negative aspects, implied by terms such as “crisis” and “decline,” of the late seventeenth century in Southeast Asia. From the perspective of core polities (Burma, Thailand, and Vietnam), for example, this may have been a period of continued political, economic, and cultural expansion and penetration of their smaller rivals on the fringes of the mainland’s major river systems. From the perspective of the Mrauk-U court, however, it was a period of embarrassing decay, so much so that many Arakanese chroniclers chose to record the reign dates of a few kings for the second half of the seventeenth century, and focused more substantial writing on the period preceding c. 1660 and on the episodic revival of central

control during several reigns in the eighteenth century. Still, from a perspective often not discussed, for the Arakanese¹ who were freed from Mrauk-U political control and were thus enabled to pursue local political, economic, and cultural experimentation, and now had greater freedom to both influence and be informed by the development of a new Burmese identity in Burma via mountain passes and coastal connections, the late seventeenth century must have been an exciting period. Thus, it seems more appropriate to suggest for Arakan a peculiar *niche* in seventeenth-century Southeast Asian history, somewhere between the core areas of the mainland and the coastal polities of the archipelago, and somewhere between “decline” and new possibilities.

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