

ANCIENT ARAKAN

with special reference to its cultural  
history between the 5th and 11th centuries

Volume I

TEXT

by

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TO MY SAYAGYI  
PROFESSOR GORDON LUCE

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ABSTRACT

The early history of Arakan has been generally considered to be that of a province of eastern India, and hence its study has been neglected by both Indian and Southeast Asian historians. This dissertation seeks to examine the dynamics of the history from the beginnings of urbanization until the rise of the Burmese empire which subsequently dominated Arakanese culture. The first chapter deals with the geographical and ethnolinguistic background to the development of the earliest cities. In the second, all the inscriptions of the period, in Sanskrit, Pali and Pyu are catalogued and edited. The inscriptions issued by the kings establish a chronology for the period and illustrate the nature of the cult surrounding the institution of kingship, while copper-plate and votive inscriptions elucidate the nature of state organisation and the popular religion. Chapter Three deals with the coinage which emerged following the development of a centralised economy, and discusses the impetus for this and the role of the king on whom the prosperity of the county depended. A comparison with similar coin types in Southeast Asia is made and the catalogue includes all the coins yet discovered. The sites of the most important monuments are discussed in Chapter Four, which catalogues all the architectural and sculptural remains. A comparative analysis of the Buddhist and Hindu images and of the minor arts reveals, to a greater extent than do the inscriptions, the nature of contact with India and the rest of Southeast Asia. The conclusion deals with the political and cultural history which thus emerges, examining in detail the rationale behind the development of the concept of divine kingship in Arakan.

Preface and Acknowledgements

It has been generally assumed that Arakan in ancient times was a province of Eastern India. Her history has therefore been neglected by both Indian and Southeast Asian historians, despite the efforts of a series of scholar-administrators since the British annexation in 1826. The first Commissioner, Mr. Robertson, collected a number of local chronicles, on which Charles Paton, the Sub-Commissioner based his "Historical and Statistical Sketch of Arakan" in *Asiatic Researches* of 1828. The eminent Arthur Purves Phayre, while Senior Assistant to the Commissioner, wrote his first article "An Account of Arakan" published in *JASB* X, (1841), considering archaeological material, inscriptions and coins. His study of the chronicles, "On the History of Arakan" *JASB* XIII (1844) contains a chronology of the Arakanese kings accepted by all later writers. Other British officials maintained an interest in the coins of the ancient and medieval kings, which culminated in Phayre's "Coins of Arakan, of Pegu and of Burma" in the *International Numismata Orientalia* III of 1882. His *History of Burma*, published in 1883, expanded his earlier works on Arakan into three chapters, on which G.E. Harvey was greatly dependent for his *History*. Maurice Collis, indefatigable administrator and novelist of the British Empire, collaborated with the eminent Arakanese scholar U San Shwe Bu to produce a number of articles on the history and archaeology of the region, and his *Land of the Great Image* (1942) is still the book by which the English-speaking world knows Arakan.

The founder of the Archaeological Survey of Burma, Dr. Emil Forchhammer undertook a survey of the antiquities of Arakan in 1885. His pioneering study of the Mahāmuni shrine and the tradition surrounding it in his *Arakan, A Report on the Antiquities* (Rangoon 1891)

remains the best source for the early period. He was the first to record the existence of epigraphs in early Indian scripts, notably the inscriptions of the Shitthaung pillar in Mrohaung. The later archaeologists found that the more accessible sites of Pagán and Śrīkṣetra demanded more attention than those in remote and un-  
helathy Arakan. However, Charles Duroiselle, then Director of the Archaeological Survey, visited Dhaññavatī, Veśālī and Mrohaung briefly in 1920. His short report on the city of Veśālī remains the only survey to date. In 1940, his successor, U Lu Pe Win, went to Mrohaung and Veśālī and noticed a number of new finds. U San Shwe Bu became Honorary Archaeological Officer for the area in 1917, and until 1923 his reports to the Archaeological Survey on numismatics, sculptures and local traditions generated interest in the history.

The introduction of the printing press, nationalist sentiment and a revival in Burmese historical writing combined to bring about a number of historical works by Arakanese and Burmese scholars based on manuscripts preserved in local monasteries and in Mandalay. The best known of these are the *Danyawadī Yāzawinthit*, New Chronicle of Arakan, written by Minkyaung Sayadaw U Pandi of Pegu in 1910, and *Rakhaing Yāzawinthit*, New History of Arakan, by Taungkyau Sayadaw Tsandamalalaṅkara, edited by U Ba Yin at Mandalay in 1931. Both follow the model of U Kala's *Mahāyāzawin*, drawing upon Pali commentaries and comparing earlier histories where discrepancies appear. For the period beyond the 11th century, the sources used by the early historians appear to be confined to oral tradition and Pali manuscripts dealing with the history of important shrines, notably the Mahāmuni shrine at the first capital of Dhaññavatī.

Although Forchhammer had noticed the Shitthaung pillar inscriptions as early as 1885, their significance was not realized until, under the instigation of Professor Luce, then compiling *Inscriptions of Burma*, Professor E.H. Johnston wrote his paper "Some Sanskrit Inscriptions of Arakan" unfortunately still unpublished when he died in 1942. His was the first serious attempt to reconcile the evidence of the Sanskrit inscriptions, the coins and the chronicles. Johnston's notes, gathered and edited by Luce and L.D. Barnett in *BSOAS* XI (1944) are the basis of this thesis, and the extent of my debt to his work will be seen on the following pages.

Since the War, a number of new Sanskrit inscriptions have been discovered in Arakan, the most important of which were edited by D.C. Sircar in *ET*. The excavations at Mainamatī, a Buddhist centre near Comilla in Bangladesh, have provided new evidence of Arakan's contacts with the west. Lucien Bernot, in his work on the anthropology of the Arakanese in Bangladesh *Les Paysans Arakanais du Pakistan Oriental* (Paris 1967) has provided a new dimension for the study of history, particularly with regard to the transmission of traditional history and concepts of time. His and Denise Bernot's work on the language of the hill tribes is supplemented by Professor Luce's unpublished vocabularies of the Mro (Māru-ts'a), Sak (Thet), Awa K'ūmi, Ahraing K'ūmi and Asho. Interest in Burma has been stimulated by the Archaeological Survey, through U Oo Tha Tun, field officer in Arakan, whose intimate knowledge of the ancient sites has resulted in the discovery of many new sculptures and inscriptions. The historian U Aung Tha Oo has published a number of papers on the early history, and the Director-General of Higher Education, U San Tha Aung, has recently written two books on the inscriptions. Professor U Myo Myint Sein, head of the Department of

Architecture at Rangoon Institute of Technology has undertaken a survey of Arakanese monuments, and Professor Dr. Daw Thin Kyi of Rangoon Arts and Sciences University has provided an excellent geographical background for the history with her study of "Arakanese Capitals: A Preliminary Survey of their Geographical Siting" *JBRBS* LII (1970).

This study of Arakan was suggested by my teacher and friend, Gordon Luce, whose inspiration and generous help over the years, both by letter and in Jersey, are gratefully acknowledged here. I have attempted to collect all the primary sources: the inscriptions, including a number of unpublished epigraphs, have been examined along the lines established by the editors of *Epigraphia Indica*; the coins, comprising all published and new specimens, have been catalogued and annotated, and the sculptural and architectural remains have been examined according to the methods established by the French art historians of Southeast Asia. From these emerges the outline of the history, which, as will be seen, is more typical of the so-called "Indianized" states of Southeast Asia than that of a province of Eastern India. Arakan's unique position on the Bay of Bengal, with both land and sea routes to the east and west, resulted in the development of political and cultural traits which later emerged in other centres in Southeast Asia.

This thesis is also conceived as a prolegomena to the excavation of the early cities, to be undertaken over the next few years by the Archaeological Survey of Burma.

In Burma, the project benefitted through the cooperation of various bodies. The Director of the Archaeological Survey, U Aung Thaw, gave me access to invaluable photographs and other material. Mon Bo Kay, the conservator at Pagán discussed many problems with me and other members of the Survey helped in many ways. The

Director-General of the Department of Higher Education, U San Tha Aung, permitted me to join Professor Myo Myint Sein's expedition to Arakan in 1974 and kindly invited me to accompany his own expedition in 1975. My friend U Tin Oo, who came on both trips, provided most of the excellent photographs, often taken under trying conditions. Discussions with Professor Dr.Daw Thin Kyi of Rangoon University, U Myint Swe and Professor Dr.Than Tun of Mandalay University considerably benefitted my work. The Arakanese historians U Oo Tha Tun of the Archaeological Survey, U Aung Tha Oo and U Aye Kyaw of Monash University have contributed invaluable suggestions on the interpretation of the material. The cooperation and hospitality of the Chairman and members of the People's Councils at Akyab, Mrohaung, Kyauktaw and Wethali, and the trustees of the Mahāmuni shrine contributed to the success of the expeditions. The Sayadaws of monasteries too numerous to mention have allowed us to examine their collections of antiquities. U Thein Tun, then at this University, made an excellent translation of the *Rakhaing Yāsawinthit* and portions of the *Dannyawadī Yāsawinthit*.

In Bangladesh, I was assisted by the Director of the Archaeological Survey, Dr.Nazimuddin Ahmed and his staff in Dacca and Comilla, and Dr.Momin Chowdury and other members of the history departments of Dacca and Chittagong Universities. In London I was able to discuss a number of problems with Mr.Anthony Christie and Mr.John Okell at the School of Oriental and African Studies, and Mr.John Irwin and Mr.John Lowry at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Dr.D.C.Sircar and Dr.A.H.Dani have helped at times with the interpretation of the inscriptions. At this university, the members of the Department of South Asian and Buddhist Studies, particularly Dr.T.Rajapattirana and Mr.Greg Schopen have helped to solve a great many problems, and the Thermoluminescence Laboratory and the

Laboratory of the Department of Prehistory have undertaken testing of some archaeological material. Chi Chi Beaton prepared Plates I, XXXV and XXXVI, and reproduced the plates for Ch.III and IV.

My two supervisors, Professor A.L.Dasham and Dr.H.H.E.Loofs, have spent many hours over the years discussing the thesis, which without their unstinting help and generosity with their libraries would never have been written. The staff of the Menzies Library have helped in many ways, notably in acquiring rare books and microfilms.

Finally I must thank my friend Anna Straughair, who typed the thesis, provided the Chinese characters and translations and bore with me throughout.

#### Transliteration

For Sanskrit and Pali words I have adopted the most familiar usage, while for Burmese the normal transliteration has been followed. Duroiselle's system of transcribing Sanskrit and Pali-derived Burmese names has been generally followed, and village names in Arakan have been taken from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Maps NF 46-14 and NF 46-15, Series U542. Blagden has been followed for Pyu, Shorto for Old Mon and the Wade-Giles system for Chinese. For the minority languages, I have used Professor Luce's unpublished charts. Dravidian words have been taken from T.Burrow and M.B.Emeneau *A Dravidian Etymological Dictionary* (Oxford 1961) and Supplement (1968).

The modern name of Wethali has been used to distinguish the present village from the site of the ancient city, which is described as Veśālī, following Duroiselle. Similarly, the classical name Dhāñjavatī is used for modern Burmese Dinnyawadi.

## ABBREVIATIONS

- AA *Artibus Asiae*, Ascona
- AARP *Art and Archaeology Research Papers*, London
- ADM Malleret, *L'Archéologie du Delta du Mekong*  
Publ. EFEO No. XLIII, 4 vols. (1959-63)
- Arch.Neg. Followed by a serial number of the Photo-Negative as given in U Mya, *A List of Archaeological Photo-Negatives of Burma* (Delhi 1935) or in "The List of Photographs taken by the Archaeological Survey" appended to each yearly report of ASB to 1965.
- ASB *Report of the Superintendent, Archaeological Survey, Burma* (from 1901-2 to 1904-5) Report on Archaeological Work in Burma, issued annually until 1926, then incorporated into ASI until 1947, 1947-65, Report of the Director, Archaeological Survey
- ASI *Archaeological Survey of India Annual Report*  
Yearly from 1902-3 to 1936-7
- BEFEO *Bulletin d'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*
- BHS Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit
- BRS Burma Research Society
- BSOAS *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, London
- CII *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*
- DYT *Danyawadi Yāzawinthit* (New History of Arakan, Burmese) by U Pandi of Mingyaung, Pegu.  
Edited by U Hpye (Rangoon 1910)
- EB *Epigraphia Birmanica* (from 1919, Vol. I, pt. 1)
- EI *Epigraphia Indica*
- GPC *Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma*  
translated by Pe Maung Tin and G. H. Luce,  
(London 1923, repr. Rangoon 1960)
- IA - A Review *Indian Archaeology, A Review*  
Department of Archaeology, New Delhi, yearly from 1953
- IB *Inscriptions of Burma* Portfolios I - V (Plates 1 - 609, arranged chronologically down to 1364 A.D. and the founding of Ava. Publ. by the University of Rangoon.)

IHQ	<i>Indian Historical Quarterly</i> , Calcutta
JAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i> , London
JASB	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal</i> , Calcutta
JBRB	<i>Journal of the Burma Research Society</i> , Rangoon ( from 1911)
JGIS	<i>Journal of the Greater India Society</i>
JNSI	<i>Journal of the Numismatic Society of India</i> , Calcutta
JSEAH	<i>Journal of Southeast Asian History</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of the Siam Society</i> , Bangkok
List	<i>A List of Inscriptions found in Burma</i> Pt. 1 Inscriptions arranged in order of their dates by Charles Duroiselle (Rangoon 1921)
MASI	<i>Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India</i>
OBEP	<i>Old Burma - Early Pagân</i> 3 vols. <i>Artibus Asiae</i> Supplement (New York 1969-70)
Photo	Photograph(s) by.....
PTS	Pali Text Society
Publ. EFEO	Publications de l'école française d'Extrême- Orient
RYT	<i>Rakhaing Yāzawinthit</i> , by Taungkyaung Sayadaw Tsandamalañkara ed. U Ba Yin (Mandalay 1931)
<u>S.</u>	Cūḷa-sakarāj, the Pyu/Burmese/Arakanese era beginning A.D. 638
SBB	Sacred Books of the Buddhists
SBE	Sacred Books of the East
UB I	<i>Inscriptions Collected in Upper Burma</i> Vol.I 1900