The political history of ancient Arakan can now be seen to conform to the periodization defined by Coedes for the rest of Southeast Asia, each epoch in our period corresponding to critical developments in India and China.

The first two centuries of the Christian era, which saw the development of the Pyu centres in Burma proper and the kingdoms of Funan and Linyi further east, are characterised by maritime trade with South India. This trade, stimulated by the interruption of the central Asian overland trade routes which led to the development of sea routes connecting western and eastern Asia, brought Southeast Asia for the first time into world history. In Arakan, a number of trading centres were established along the coast, engaged in the export of forest products of the hill tribes. By the beginning of the 3rd century this had resulted in the emergence of local chiefs, half-remembered in the early historical portion of Anandacandra’s Prakriti (11. 9-17) as the ancestral monarchs, whose power extended beyond the limits of a village or group of villages. However, the narrow plains behind the coastal towns prohibited the formation of agriculturally-based urban centres, and it was not until the second half of the 4th century that Dvacakandra established the city of Dhamavatī inland, on the rich alluvial plain of the Kaladan valley.

The same period saw the conquests of Samudragupta in the Ganges valley, and coincided with the troubled period of the Three Kingdoms and Six Dynasties in China. In Southeast Asia, this is the time of

1 The Indianised States of Southeast Asia (Canberra 1968) pp. 347-256
Coedès' "Second Indianization", the manifestation of Indian forms of state organisation and religion in the Pyu centres of Halin and Šrikyetra, the proto-Cham kingdom of Lin-yi, in Funan and the Mon kingdom of Dravastī and the Indonesian kingdoms in Borneo and Java². The maritime trade based on the ports of South India continued to flourish, but in Arakan, at least, situated near the India-China overland route in use from about the 4th century, and on the sea route following the coast of the Bay of Bengal, contact with north and northwest India is also evidenced.

The threat of kingdoms emerging in Southeast Bengal and Assam following the disintegration of the Gupta empire, and possibly a Sak invasion from the east, led to the transfer of the capital to Vesālī, farther south, at the beginning of the 6th century. Throughout most of the century the country was stable, re-establishing the South India link with the early Čāityakas, themselves inheritors of the Gupta tradition, and maintaining close contact with northeast India via the overland route, and with the emerging centre of Šrikyetra over the Yoma and by sea.

The fall of the Candras at the end of the century coincides with the fall of Funan and rise of Chen-la, and a possible unification of the Pyu centres to the east, while neighbouring kingdoms to the west were disrupted by the expansionist policies of Śāskha of Gaya. Ānandaśandra's prāšasti even implies that a king from across the Janf river ruled Vesālī between c.600-612.

Although the restoration of the fortunes of the Candras was attempted by Śrīyacandra sometime in the first half of the 7th century

the country appears to have been ruled by a series of local chiefs. The centre of power in the region was southeast Bengal, where the kingdom of Harikela was established at this time. Harikela's first kings may have originated in Arakan; the style of the coins and the copper-plates were copied directly from those of the 6th century Candras.

By 328, a treaty may have been reached with Śrīksetra, and contact with northern India, now facilitated by safe land routes after Harpa, brought Arakan into contact with the Mathurānāist centres of Milinda and Mainasati, while maritime trade with south India forged links with the Calukyas and Pallavas. The new dynasty only regained the power of the former Candras for the brief period of the first third of the 8th century. Its economic base was no doubt strengthened after the rise of the maritime kingdom of Śrīvijaya. The invasions of Yaovaran of Kanauj again had unsettling repercussions in southeast Bengal, and the Pus of Śrīksetra, then at the height of their power, must have coveted the safer ports of Arakan. Coehoorn has pointed out that the 8th century was an agitated period in Eastern Indochina, coinciding with the accession of the Tang emperors in China and the rise of the Pāla in Bihar and Bengal.

By the 9th century, Arakan proper was divided into three kingdoms each of which was to influence the history of Arakan during the next 200 years. From the Mi-no (Nya-na) kingdom of the China, centred around Ningin, came the raids over the Yoma which resulted in the settlement of Kuki-Chin speakers along the length of the Yoma as far south as Sandwiyah; central Burma, from the northern Shan states to Śrīksetra in the south was controlled by the Pus, whose relations with Arakan were generally friendly, but who occasionally took advantage of weak governments at Vesali to attack the north and the
south. The town of PāṇāMaṣa, their capital northeast of Pāñya, was said in the chronicles to have occupied the south in the 10th century.

According to the Mahāvaṃsa, all these kingdoms were destroyed by the Man-choa raids of A.D. 832-835. If not wholly destroyed, their disintegration was accelerated by the descent of the Mrauna (Burmans) to the Central Burma plain, where they finally built the walls of Pāñya in A.D. 3504. From the early 9th century the Mrauna must have been infiltrating over the Yoma, where they eventually gained control of the lowlands and became the Rakshā king of Northern Arakan5.

3 For the early kingdoms and the coming of the Mrauna, see G.N.Jace, "Sources of Early Burma History" in C.Cowell (ed.) Southeast Asian History and Historiography, p. 95.

4 The Rakshā invasion of Arakan coincides with the first appearance of the Candras in Bengal, whose connections with Arakan have often been postulated but never proved (cf. A.N.Dani, "Mainmautie Plates of the Candras" Pakistan Archaeology III (1969) pp. 27-38; D.C. Sinha, Epigraphical Discoveries in East Pakistan (Calcutta 1971) p. 25). H. Rashid (op. cit. pp. 29ff) has gone to some length to prove, successfully to my mind, that by the 15th century, the Candras were firmly established in Bacterias, whence they proceeded to control all southeast Bengal over the next 150 years. The dynasty, according to the inscription of its king, is said to have originated in the Rudrīgiri- or Rudrīgīri-vaṃśa, "the family ruling the Red mountains". Rashid has pointed out that the usual identification of Rudrīgīri with the Lalan hills of Mainmautie cannot be maintained, as this area was not conquered by the Candras until the mid-13th century. He was, however, unable to place it in Bengal and suggested that Arakan was a possibility. Today, the hills surrounding Vessif are red, in the dry season at least, and it is likely that Rudrīgīri-vaṃśa could be a synonym for the Arakanese Candras, unwilling to admit defeat by the Rakshās in their Bengal inscriptions.
By the mid-11th century, the external economy was weakened after the 
Cela raids and a temporary decline in the power of Pratihara, and 
control of the Kalinga valley was threatened by raids from the wild hill 
tribes and Ma's expansion into east Bengal. The capital was moved east 
to the Lango valley and Central Burma dominated Arakan's history for 
the next 300 years.

The cultural history of this period is largely the outcome of 
the multifarious political influences on the country.

The introduction of irrigation and water storage techniques 
from northeast India accelerated the exploitation of the alluvial plains 
and precipitated changes in the distribution of wealth, demography 
and social organisation. The first city, Dhammanavi, was perhaps 
initially the site of a cult connected with the Kalazirii hill and its 
resident soil fertility goddess. Situated in a protected position 
controlling the Kalinga valley, with access to the sea and external 
trade routes, it dominated the hill-coast trade.

The role of the chief in the earlier bauya-based society was 
transformed into that of a king. In the earlier society, the chief had 
sought to ensure social stability and reproduction and soil fertility 
through the propitiation of the tribe's common ancestor who could mediate 
with the terrestrial and celestial spirits. In a society dependent on 
irrigation technology revolving around an urban centre, it was necessary 
for the king to have the power to control not only the retention and 
distribution of water but also the coming of the monsoon rains which 
would guarantee the prosperity of the country. The new rationale for

5 Following the model formulated by Pfeifer in his analysis of 
Leach's study of the Khasi "Tribees States and Transformations" 
in W. Bloch (ed.) Marxist Analysis and Social Anthropology 
(London 1975) pp. 161-202, esp. figs 4 and 5
leadership was borrowed from India as trade contacts increased. Indian religion, prestigious enough to provide the king with the magic power required to rule, was familiar in its substratum of beliefs developed in the same monsoon-dominated environment. Indra, the source of Dharma and the regulator of the cosmic cycle, became the chief source of the king's divine right to rule. The king, seen as the sole mediator between his people and the celestial and terrestrial deities who governed the prosperity of the land and maintained the social order, was no longer a representative of the community to the gods, but descended from heaven as the representative of the gods among the people.

The textual basis for this transformation of the role of the chief is found in accounts of Brahmanical ābhirāga ceremonies, notably the śindurakābhirāga, the consecration of Indra of the king on earth, described in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa (VIII.9ff).

During this ceremony the king enters into a contract with his people, pledging to maintain the rājadharmas in order to assure the continuance of the cosmic and moral order and thus the prosperity of the land. However, the concept of royal divinity could never be explicitly pronounced in the context of Hindu society, where it would have undermined the authority of the Brahmans and thus their rationalization of the class system. The idea, which was gaining ground during the Gupta period, but was eventually thwarted by the Hindu revival, was developed in the Mahāyānaist texts originating from the northern fringes of India and gained ready acceptance in China, where the divinity of the king and the concept of the cosmic model of the state had developed in the pre-Wu period. Arakan, close by the India-China land route used by Buddhist monks, had no Brahman-dominated class system, and, as we have seen, a need to justify the king's power to the people. Thus, there was a ready acceptance of texts like the Bhūmīṣṭhāna śūtrya.
which states that the king was blessed by the 33 divine kings (Indra and the 32 gods presiding on Mt. Meru, the earth’s axis) before entering his mother’s womb, hence becoming a divine son of the gods, magically created to rule on earth.

This evolution is remembered in the Arakanese chronicles, where the cities are said to have been founded by the gods, including Mahādeva (Śiva) and, at a later time, a princess from Pandava (the most prominent ancient trade centre) became ruler of Vīśālī with the Purusha Brahman as her king, an allegorical account of the Brahmanization of the kingship. A later dynasty was founded by Narayu, a heavenly deity instructed by Indra to rule as Mahāravatī as an earthly king, and whose ties with the Indus, original inhabitants of the area, were sealed by his marriage to the daughter of their chief. The subsequent acceptance of Mahāyāna Buddhism is contained within the traditions surrounding the Mahāmuni shrine (see Appendix 3).6

The Mrauk established a hierarchy of divinities gathered from Buddhist, Hindu, and indigenous traditions, governing the three worlds in the macrocosmic and microcosmic sense. The celestial gods were headed by a Buddha, in the case of the century Arakan Asita or, accompanied by the Bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Mahākālāmunā, who promised believers rebirth in his heaven. Under him, residing on Mt. Meru, were Indra and the 32 gods, the latter the divine prototypes for the ministers of later Southeast Asian courts7. The middle world was governed by the four Lokapālas, led by Kuvera-Yājñavāla, the guardians of the four quarters of the universe and the realm.

7 N. Shonto, “The 3d Myms…” passim.
Rarely mentioned in the sūtras but obviously recognized, were the spirits of crops and local deities protecting the palace and the areas under the king’s jurisdiction, as the chief who became a sacred king naturally appropriated all of the community rituals. The underworld, ruled by the Nāga kings was also the abode of the powerful earth goddess, Hindu Śrī, who became in Arakan Buddhist Vasundhara, governing the fertility of the soil and increasing the wealth of a deserving king. Correct recitation of the sūtras and the king’s upholding of the royal dharma were thought to guarantee the cooperation of all these deities in the maintenance of the royal dharma to ensure moral, judicial and cosmic order. Many of the deities of this hierarchy can be identified among the sculptures and traditions of the Mahāmuni shrine. The shrine, moreover, was situated northeast of the palace, a direction associated with an older ancestor cult, further strengthening the king’s right to rule by this link with the dharma of the past. Thus the king, seen as the pivot of the microcosm of the kingdom and the embodiment of the cosmic law which regulated it, became a Cakravartin, the turner of the wheel of the law, who ensured the continuity of this dharma.

Śālvāte Brahmins appear to have been influential at court only until the reign of Bhūticandra. The later Candra kings of Vemali, no doubt in imitation of the imperial Guptas, favoured the worship of Viṣṇu Vaiṣṇava, who by this time had inherited many of the functions of Indra as Cosmocrator (see p.271). Initially this cult appears to have been introduced from the Mathurā region, but by the late 7th century an association with Vaiśalipuran is also noticed. During the 6th century the influence of the Mahāyāna vanced under the impact of southern Buddhism introduced through Śrīketra,
but revived by the middle of the 7th century following the establishment of contact with Nalanda and the monastic centres of Bengal.

The new dynasty established at Yeşâlî at the end of the 6th century restored the Maheśvaram as a royal shrine. The central image, however, was no longer Amitabha but Sakyamuni, wearing royal ornaments, a type introduced in Bodhagaya and known in later Burmese Buddhism as Jambapati, the Buddha as Cakravartin king. The subsidiary images, too began to be identified as local deities protecting the country. We gather from the Shwe-daung-gyi Shinja-strakhà that ceremonies connected with Indra, probably centred around a royal lustration at the New Year before the breaking of the monsoon, were still performed. Even today the Thingu-yan festival is a fertility rite for the young. As the Buddha came to be seen as Cakravartin par excellence, his images also received the royal lustration at this time.

Under the influence of Pala Bengal, Vaishnavism was briefly re-introduced, and local female deities were anthropomorphised in the form of Hindu Tantric goddesses. The 11th century, however, saw the increasing influence of Burmese proper and the gradual adoption of the Theravāda. However, the later culture of Arakan, and indeed of Burma proper, was to retain many of the political and religious institutions evolved at Thamānavatī and Yeşâlî.

Many gaps in our knowledge of the history of ancient Arakan are soon to be filled. We look forward to the publication of the official History of Arakan by the Burma Socialist Program Party, and to the completion of the catalogue of Burmese manuscripts (including chronicles collected by Pagan in Arakan) in the British Museum. The Archaeological Survey of Burma plans to excavate Yeşâlî and it is certain that their efforts will be richly rewarded.