

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Name

Today the Arakanese call their country Rakhaing. The name is traditionally derived from the Pali *Rakkha*, Sanskrit *Rākṣasa*, synonymous with the Burmese *Bīlu*. The country is said to have been named Yakkhapura by Buddhist missionaries from India because of the ferocious nature of its inhabitants¹, and the transition from Rakkha to Rakhaing to have taken place at the time of the establishment of the first city, Dhaññavatī, when the hermit Nagīnda told the founder Marayu that because the people now followed the Buddhist precepts, they might drop the final *a* from Rakkha, and be called Rakhaing².

It is interesting to note that the old Tamil word for demon, derived from Sanskrit *rākṣasa*, is *arrakan*³. There appears to be some connection here with Tamil *arrakan*, "shellac", said to be derived from the lexical Sanskrit *rākṣā* "lac"⁴. It may be that Arakan, in the first centuries of the Christian era, was a major source of lac, still a product

¹ Phayre, "On the History", cf Judson, *Dictionary*, s.v. Bilu. This tradition is shared with the old Mon country of South Burma, where the ancient name for Thatôn was Rākṣapura, and the original inhabitants, according to Buddhist sources, were regarded as demons. See G.H.Luce, "The Advent of Buddhism to Burma" in L.Cousins *et al* (eds.) *Buddhist Studies in Honour of I.B.Horner* (Dordrecht 1974) pp.120-1

² Ashin Kethara *Mārayu nhañ Bedhā rājawin nhañ:tham*...[The History of Mārayu and Bedhā] (Rangoon 1955), cited in L.Bernot, *Les paysans Arakanais*...Vol.1, p.144

³ First found in references to the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Tamil poetry of the 2nd-3rd centuries A.D. See G.L.Hart, *The Poems of Ancient Tamil, their Milieu and their Sanskrit Counterparts* (University of California Press, 1975)p.61

⁴ cf also Tamil *arakku* "lac, sealing wax, shellac", Malayalam *arakku* "gumlac, sealing wax" Kannada *aragu*, id. Tulu *araku*, *aragu* id. in Burrow and Emeneau *Dravidian Etymological Dictionary* (Oxford 1961) no.164; Hobson Jobson s.v. *lac*

of its oldest hill tribes. The earliest recorded trade routes to Arakan originated in the south of India.⁵ The classical geographers initially referred to Southeast Asia as the Golden land, Chryse, and the Silver land, Argyre⁶. Ptolemy, whose informants seem to have obtained their information on the coastline of Southeast Asia from South India, may have been inclined to equate Tamil *arrakan* or Kannada *aragu* with Argyre, his name for the country stretching from the Naaf River to Cape Negrais⁷. As has often been pointed out, evidence of silver production in this area is almost non-existent.

The name Harikela, first mentioned by I-tsing in the 7th century as the easternmost country of India, may be connected with Arakan⁸. As we shall see, the histories of Southeast Bengal and of northern Arakan during this period are inextricably bound together. The fragmentary *praśasti* on the north face of the Shitthaung pillar, written in the mid-11th century, mentions Arekadeśa, the land of Areka, which was probably the name for Arakan at the time. In the inscriptions of Pagán and Ava, from the 12th to the 15th centuries, the country is

⁵ For the lac trade see F.M. Lebar *et al*, *Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia* (Newhaven 1964), p.52; Hobson Jobson; D.G.E.Hall, "Studies in Dutch Relations with Arakan" *JBR* XXVI, pp.1-10.

⁶ e.g. the *De Situ Orbis* of Pomponius Mela (c.50 A.D.), quoted in Coedès, *Textes d'auteurs grecs et latins à l'Extrême Orient...* (Paris 1910), pp.11-12

⁷ cf McCrindle's *Ancient India as Described by Ptolemy*, (1885, repr. Calcutta 1927).

⁸ A-li-ki-lo or O-li-ki-lo: J.Takakusu, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as practised in India and the Malay Archipelago* (A.D. 671-695) by I-tsing (Oxford 1896, repr, Delhi 1966) p.xlvi; see also S.Beal, *The Life of Hieun-Tsiang* (London 1914), pp.xxxix, xli. For later references to Harikela in Indian sources, see R.C.Majumdar, *History of Ancient Bengal* (Calcutta 1971), p.9

referred to as *Rakhuin/Rakhaing*⁹, from which Nicolo dei Conti, quoted in Poggius, *De Varietate fortunae*, derives his *Racchani* in c 1420¹⁰, *Tāranātha* in his *dGos-'dod-kun-'byuñ* of 1608 *Rākhañ* and the Sri Lankan chroniclers *Rakhaṅga*. The form *Aracan* was first used by Barbosa quoted in Ramusio in 1516, and he was followed in this by the later Portuguese and English writers .

The Land 11

The physical boundaries of Arakan determined on one hand the extent of control possible by a central authority and on the other the opportunities for migration of peoples and cultures from Bengal on the west and Burma proper on the east. Throughout most of her history, the country reached from Lat 21°20' N to Lat.16° at Pagoda Point, and from Long. 92°20'E at the Naaf River to Long.95°20' E at the crestline of the Arakan Yoma. The latitudinal spread varies from about 160 km. in the north to about 40 km. about the latitude of Sandoway, narrowing to a point at Pagoda Point. The early capitals were based on the narrow alluvial plain in the north, comprising a region between 12900- 15480 sq. km in area, and the addition of the small strip to the south gives a maximum area of 38700 sq.km.

The high ranges of the Arakan Yoma extend from the Chin hills to Pagoda Point, forming a series of ridges and spurs reaching to the sea, and enclosing narrow strips of land in the Kyaukpyu and Sandoway

⁹ List 963a.U.B. I 94. Sagaing Htupayôn pagoda inscription, Obverse, II.20-23 804 s. 1442 A.D.

¹⁰ *Hobson Jobson*, s.v. Arakan, Arrakan; D.Chattopadhyaya (ed.) *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India* (Simla 1970) pp.330-1; DPPN, s.v. *Rakkhaṅga*; R.C.Temple, "Contributions to the History of Anglo-Burmese Words" *JRAS* 1894, pp.158-60

¹¹ This section is largely dependent on Professor Daw Thin Kyi's Presidential Address to the Burma Research Society in 1970, "Arakanese Capitals: A Preliminary Survey of their Geographical Siting" *JBRS* LIII (1970) pp.1-13.

districts. In Akyab district, west of the main ranges, low ridges trend south-south-east, a continuation of the Chittagong Hills, separating the series of Arakanese rivers, Naaf, Mayu, Kaladan and Lemro, which have built up narrow alluvial flood plains. The flood plains of the Kaladan and Lemro rivers have coalesced to form a single deltaic plain, with a few ridges rising above the plain like islands. The ridges, of early Tertiary age, were to supply the sandstone for the religious structures and city walls of the urban period. Over the last two millennia, the extent of *taungya* (slash and burn) cultivation in the hills has increased the load of silt carried by the rivers, and during the early urban period, the deltaic swamps were larger and tillable land must have stood out as islands¹². At the time of early settlement the entire plain was criss-crossed by tidal streams, ringed with mangroves, and even today in the southern portion, large areas of mangroves need extensive draining to alleviate flooding and drain salt water so that cultivation is possible. However, the agricultural base of Northern Arakan was capable of producing a surplus of rice, and this area was always the most important part of the kingdom. The narrow plains behind the coastal towns of Sandoway, Ramree and Manaung prohibited the formation of agriculturally based urban centres, although they comprised the traditional administrative divisions controlled by Dhaññavatī, Akyab district; Dvāravatī, Sandoway district, Rammavatī, modern Kyaukpyu and Meghavatī, Manaung. The northern base is also referred to as Rakhaing-pyi, or Rakhaing land, while the rest of the country is known as Rakhaing-taing-gyi, or Rakhaing kingdom.

¹² Daw Thin Kyi notes (pp.2 and 12, n.1) that the chronicles refer to "islands" separated by tidal creeks, while today deltaic lands separated by tributaries of the Kaladan and Lemro are referred to as "islands".

The hot wet tropical monsoon climate allows continuous cultivation throughout the year. However, although Arakan is dry for half the year it is swamped with water during the wet season, obviating means both of water retention and of extensive drainage. The problem of water supply is acute on the Akyab plain. The streams are tidal and the water brackish, while the mountain streams are short and swift, and hold little water in the dry season. All the Arakanese capitals have a series of large storage tanks centred around the palace sites and apparently administered through the court.

Most internal and external communication is by water. While the ridges retard east-west movement in the north, and even north-south movement in the south, the rivers are tidal, the Kaladan as far north as Paletwa. It would have been possible for sailing ships to reach Dhaññavati, via the Thare-chaung, and Veśālī via the Rann-chaung, both tributaries of the Kaladan. Contact between the capitals and the islands of Ramree and Manaung was maintained by sea-going ships.

Overland contact with Bengal is possible via the coastal road passing from Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar to Ramu, crossing the Naaf river near the mouth and bifurcating, either along the coast to Akyab or passing over the ridges to Buthidaung on the Mayu river, and to Paletwa on the upper Kaladan, from which the early cities could be reached by boat or by road. This route connected with the Tsang-ko road between Szechuan and Assam, which was in use from about the 4th century to the mid-7th century¹³

¹³

I-tsing's account of the road is given by Chavannes in *Mémoires sur les religieux éminents qui allerent chercher la loi dans les pays d'occident* (Paris 1894)p.82 and note, Chinese text Taishō 2066 Vol.LI, pp.1-12, which records that twenty Chinese monks used the route at the time of Śrī Gupta. Chavannes also quotes a passage from Hui-lin's Glossary (Taishō Vol.LIV p.835a, 11-16) finished in 817, but relying on an old geography, *Kua-ti-chi* composed in 642 when Yünnan was garrisoned east of Ta-li. According to this, the road entered Eastern India at Kāmarūpa(Assam) and Ho-lai-kai-lo →

Recent excavations by the Bangladesh Archaeological Survey have unearthed a Buddhist complex at Ramkot, on the road known as the old Arakan highway, two miles east of Ramu. The archaeological remains provide a link between the great Mahāyāna Buddhist centre at Mainamati near Comilla, and the 7th-8th century culture of Veśālī. I have also seen eye copies of votive inscriptions found by monks in the north Arakan Yoma, which appear to be typical of the 6th-7th century inscriptions found in the area of the old Arakan capitals. Another route used in the late 8th and early 9th centuries went from Yünnan to the Pyu capital, crossed the Arakan Yoma and went overland to eastern India, probably at Kāmarūpa whence it led to Magadha. Although it is not certain whether by the Pyu capital either Halin or Śrīkṣetra is meant, it seems that the route used across the Yoma went through Buywetmanyō road, said to have been built across Mt. Victoria by Pyu kings with the intention of invading Arakan. If any of the southern passes were used, the easiest route to eastern India would have been by sea from Sandoway, and no sea journey is mentioned in the itineraries. Veśālī is never mentioned in the Chinese sources, probably because the land routes ^{they describe} were mainly in use during the 7th century, a period of great confusion in the country.

¹³ cont. (Harikela/Arakan) lay to the south. See also Luce, "Countries Neighbouring Burma" *JBRs* XIV (1924) pp.138-9; W.Liebenthal, "The Ancient Burmese Road - a Legend?" *JGIS* Vol.XV (1956) pp.9-12; Pelliot, "Deux Itinéraires de Chine en Inde" *BEFEO* IV (1909) p.403

¹⁴ Pelliot, *op cit* pp.131-414, quoting the itineraries compiled by Chia Tan (A.D. 730-805) dating from the period 785-805, now only extant in summaries preserved in the *Hsin T'ang shu*, 43(b), 17b-18a; cf Luce "The Ancient Pyu" *JBRs* XXVII (1937) pp.239-53; A.Christie, "Ta-Ch'in P'o-lo-men" *BSOAS* XX (1957), pp.159-166.

Contact with the east by land was easier. A number of routes over the Yoma in the south are possible¹⁵, although the best-known is over the Taunggup pass, which connected the Sandoway district with Śrīkṣetra. Further north the An pass provided a link between the cities of central Burma, connecting An with the Man valley in the Minbu district. The traditional route between the northern capitals of Arakan and the cities of Halin and Pagán was the Buywetmanyō road, mentioned above, which led to the Lemro valley¹⁶. Contact with the west via the Bay of Bengal was no doubt well-established by the beginning of the Christian era. The early references to "The Islands of Gold and Silver" which must have included Arakan, are vague¹⁷.

¹⁵ R.B.Pemberton in his *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India* (1835, repr. Gauhati 1966) pp.102-3, reports that "almost all the passes between Arracan and Ava were comprised within the ancient limits of the Sandoway district; and between Talak and Cape Negrais there are said to have been no less than twenty-two: of these however, not more than four or five have been generally resorted to...." cf Daw Thin Kyi, *op cit* p.3

¹⁶ San Shwe Bu "Buywetmanyō Road" *ASB* 1920-21, pp.39-40

¹⁷ Luce has summarised the Greek, Latin and Indian texts relating to Burma in "The Tan and the Ngai-lac" *JBRs* XIV (1924) pp.127-37 and "Burma down to the Fall of Pagán" (with Pe Maung Tin) *JBRs* XXIX (1939), pp.264-82; see also H.Frisk, *Le Périple de la Mer Erythre* (Göteborg 1927) pp.119, 121-2; Louis Renou, *La Géographie de Ptolémée* VII, 1-4 (Paris 1925), pp.42-61; G.Coedès, *Textes d'auteurs grecs et latins relatifs à l'Extrême Orient* (Paris 1910) McCrindle, *op cit*; D.C.Sircar, *Geography of Ancient and Medieval India* (Calcutta, 1960). Pomponius Mela, c. 50 A.D. was the first to mention the islands of Chryse and Argyre beyond the Ganges. These correspond to the vague Suvarnabhūmi of the *Dīpavaṃsa* (ed. Oldenburg) VIII,12, *Samantapāsādikā*, (ed.PTS) I,64,68-9, *Mahāvamsa* (ed.PTS) XII,6,44ff; *Mahānidāsa* (ed.PTS) 155,415; *Milindapañha* (ed. Trenckner)359; *Apadāna* of *Khuddaka Nikāya* (ed. PTS) pt.II,359; *Manorathapūraṇī* I,265; *Jātaka* (ed.Fausboll) III,188,IV 15, VI 34 etc. *Petavatthu-aṭṭhakathā* (ed.PTS) 47, 271-2. Sircar (p.73) adds "The Purāṇas, the *Bṛhatkathāślokaśaṅgraha*, *Vimānavatthu* etc." and connects the islands of gold and silver with the Suvārṇa-Rūpyakadvīpa of the *Ramāyāna* and Rūpyavara and Kāñcanaka of the post-Gupta *Tiloyapaṇṇatī*. For further identifications see S.Lévi, *Journal Asiatique*, jan-fév. 1918, pp. 74-76 and his "Ptolémée, le Nidāsa et la Bṛhatkatha" in *Études Asiatiques* (Paris 1925) II, pp.13-55.

However , after the first century the references are more specific. In the latter half of the first century , the anonymous author of the *Periplus* saw in South India some vessels "called Kalandiophônta, very large, which hoist sail for Chryse and the Ganges", implying a route passing across the Bay of Bengal and along the Arakan coast¹⁸. Ptolemy in the 2nd century mentions a number of ports in Argyre, which must be Arakan. His list begins with the port of Barakoura, which as we shall see can be identified as situated on the mouth of the Naaf river, the traditional border between Bengal and Arakan. Southwards along the coast comes Sambra, possibly at the mouth of the Mayu river and a port through which the forest products of the hills were dispersed. The name may survive in modern Simbaik and Sinbaiktaung, west of the mouth, or Sabyinchaung and Sabyingyi to the east of the mouth where the Kywede river meets the Mayu. Sada can be identified with Sandoway (Burmese Thandwè), which has a reasonable port, probably even larger 2000 years ago before the build-up of silt washed along the coast from the Ganges delta. Ptolemy mentions a sea-route to Sada from Paloura in Eastern India, identified by Yule with Palur in Orissa, whereas Braddell preferred the delta between the Kistna and Godivari Rivers¹⁹.

Archaeological evidence further corroborates the existence of a sea-route from South India to northern Arakan from about the end of the 4th century. As the overland route from China to India became more

¹⁸ cf Frisk, *loc cit*; Coedès, *op cit* pp.25-26; Luce and Pe Maung Tin, *op cit* p.265.

¹⁹ Coedès, *op cit*, p.37; R.Braddell "An Introduction to the Study of ancient times in the Malay Peninsula and the Straits of Malacca", *Journal of the Malay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XVII, pt.3 (1936) pp.17-18

difficult, from the middle of the 7th century we find accounts of Buddhist pilgrims who used a sea-route which passed around or over the Malay peninsula, and along the Arakan coast to the Ganges, terminating at Tāmralipti²⁰. Another route from Sri Lanka was used by at least the 7th century, when the monk Wu-hing some time between 671 and 695, took a month to reach A-li-ki-lo²¹. Shortly before 729 A.D. the Arakanese king Ānandacandra sent a gift to the monks of Sri Lanka by the same route²².

The People

The nature of the population during our period is a complex question and only the broadest outline can be attempted here. The present minority groups, Mru, Sak, K'ūmi and other Chins can be seen to have preceded the Rakhaing and the related Chaungtha. Phayre noticed that the names of the Bilu, or Rākṣasas, the demon-like creatures in the chronicle accounts of the coming of Buddhist missionaries to Arakan bear a strong resemblance to names common among the K'ūmi and Chin, and certainly the reputation of some Chin tribes is consistent with the activities of the Bilus. Before the slow drainage and formation of the alluvial plain of the Kaladan valley, the population was confined to limited ecological niches; the ridges, where *taungya* agriculture has long been practised, for now most of the natural tropical rain forest has been replaced by secondary growth and the

²⁰ S.Beal, *Life of Hiuen-Tsiang* (London 1914) pp.xxvi. The priest Tan-Kwong [T'an K'uang] is recorded as having travelled to India by the southern sea route, arriving at A-li-ki-lo [Harikela/Arakan] where he found favour with the king (p.xxxix)

²¹ *ibid* p.xli and J.Takakusu *A Record of the Buddhist Religion* (London 1896, repr. Delhi 1966) p.xlvi

²² see below, p. 49

banks of the streams and rivers where sedentary dry rice and millet production is possible. These remain the habitat of the minority groups today.

The Mru²³, who numbered 14,000 in the 1931 Census, now inhabit the northern part of Akyab and the southern part of Paletwa subdivision, while a further 4-8,000 live over the border in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Professor Luce considers that the Mru entered Arakan from Central Burma, noting that "Linguistic connections with Sak-Kantū, Karen and Old Burmese seem certain, and a few influences from Old Mon likely. Connections with the Shan are not obvious. Chin connections are often plain, and pre-Chin connections with K'ūmi are sometimes striking....an early Tibeto-Burmese language, grafted, it seems, on an earlier pre-Tibeto-Burman stock". They are, he says, essentially hillmen, slow in progress from the state of hunters and food-gatherers to that of food producers, and were never wet rice cultivators. Their original claim to the land is reflected in the Arakanese chronicles, which refer to the Mru as inhabitants of the country when the Arakanese entered it, and imply that both races are of the same

²³ Sometimes called Mro, in Old Burmese *Mrui*. Their name for themselves is *maru ts'a¹*,⁴ "children of Man". See *Census of India*, Vol.XI, Burma,pt.I Report, App.D,pp.248-264, U Ba Thin, the Awa Khamis and Mros in the Chin area (Saingdin) Buthidaung" and U Ohn Pe "The Awa Khamis in the Ponnagyun Chin hills, Ponnagyun Township"; U Ba Myaing "The Northern Hills of the Ponnagyun Township" *JBRS* Vol.XXIV (1934) pp.127-148; L.Bernot, "Les Mro et leurs Orgues à bouche" *Science and Nature* I (1954) pp.13-16, "Ethnic Groups of Chittagong Hill Tracts" in *Social Research in East Pakistan* (Dacca 1964) pp.158-61; R.Shafer "The linguistic relationship of Mru - traces of a lost Tibeto-Burmic language?" *JBRS* Vol.XXXI (1941) pp.58-79. I have also used Professor Luce's chapter "Mru and K'ūmi (North Arakan)" in his *Phases of Old Burma* (unpublished).

lineage. The legendary hero-ancestor of the Arakanese, Marayu, founder of the city of Dhaññavati, is said to have married the daughter of a Mro chief, and to have cleared the country of Bilus who had ravaged it before that. The story no doubt had its origins in the time of the advent of lowland rice cultivators and the fierce fighting with the original inhabitants which ensued before they were able to control the land²⁴. The same sources refer to a succession of three Mru kings ruling Arakan in the confused period after the mid-10th century²⁵. During the 12th century, two Mros are said to have helped Datharaza, king of Arakan, in his search for the Mahāmuni image²⁶. Phayre mentions that local tradition regards the Mru as having been a very powerful tribe on the Kaladan, in remote times driven out of its possession by the K'ūmis, who came from the north.

The Awa and Ahraing K'ūmi, neighbours of the Mru living on the ridges in the central Akyab district and the western part of the Paletwa subdivision, numbered over 30,000 in 1931. About 2,000 K'ūmi also live over the border in the Chittagong hill tracts. Also *taungya* cultivators, they speak languages more akin to the western Tibeto-Burman Kuki-Chin than Mru, and are usually classified as Chin²⁷. The culture of the K'ūmi tribes in Arakan is in many respects identical to the earlier phases of that of the Yao, widespread in southern China, including Yünnan, and regarded there as

²⁴ Phayre "On the History...", p.34; L.Bernot *Les Paysans Arakanais du Pakistan Orientale* (Paris 1967) p.149

²⁵ *ibid* pp.37-8, YRT

²⁶ San Shwe Bu "The Story of Mahāmuni" *JBRIS* Vol.VI (1916) p.227 cf Forchhammer, *Arakan...* p.6

²⁷ F.Lebor *et al*, *Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia* (New Haven 1964) pp.49-55 →

a Tibetan tribe²⁸.

The Sak (Burmese Thet²⁹) were probably the next group to move into Arakan. Once spread over the north of Burma, from Manipur perhaps to northern Yünnan, the Sak and the closely related Kādu people are fragmented, a series of tiny minorities in remote places. Luce describes their Tibeto-Burman language as "remarkably pure, as well as old", with little admixture, if any, of Mon Khmer, and not very much of Burmese. In the 1931 census the number of Sak speakers in the Arakan district is given as only 691, but that of their neighbours, the Daingnet, also classed as Sak, is given as 6159, suggesting a mistake here, as Daingnet (or Hsang-ma) is more akin to modern Chak-ma and Chittagonian. Luce estimated that there were

²⁷
(cont) For the K'ūmi (variously written Khami, Khimi, Kumi, Kweeymnee, Kwemi, Hkamie) see *Census of India 1931*, Vol. XI, *loc cit*; L. Bernot, *op cit* pp. 166-168, esp. his bibliography on p. 168; R. Shafer "Khimi Grammar and Vocabulary" *BSOAS* XI, pp. 386-434, esp. his bibliography on p. 386 and *Bibliography of Sino-Tibetan Languages* (Wiesbaden 1957) pp. 109-110; Luce, *loc cit*.

²⁸ See W. Eberhard, *The Local Cultures of South and East China* (Leiden 1968) pp. 33-139. Notable is the association of both groups with the dog. Eberhard, p. 49 says "That the descendants of the dog god had tails was already reported in the *Hou-Han shu* (116, 1a) and this has been repeated frequently. In Yünnan, too, there was a tribe supposedly wearing tails, and it was reported of the Ai-lao in that area that they had tails on their clothes (*Hou-Han shu* 116, 8a)..." St. Andrew St. John in his "A Short Account of the Hill Tribes of North Arakan" *J. of the Anthropological Institute* II (1873) p. 236 writes that the word Hkamie means "man" when the people are speaking about themselves, which is expanded by T. H. Lewin in "The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein" (Calcutta 1869) p. 88 "'Kwey' or 'Kwee' in Arakanese means a dog, and 'mee' is an affix conveying the idea of men; Kweymee therefore means 'dog men'". Now the K'ūmi wear a very scanty breech cloth, which is so adjusted that a long end hangs down behind him in the manner of a tail; add to this that the dog is a favourite item of food among them, and the derivation of the name seems pretty clear." Both the Yao and the Arakan K'ūmi wear peculiar hairstyles, contrived by rolling the hair into a knot at the front of the head (1931 Census, pp. 250-1, 262) cf. Eberhard, pp. 49-50.

²⁹ For the Sak, variously called Asak, Saak and Thet, and sometimes not differentiated from the related Kādu, see L. Bernot, "Ethnic Groups..." pp. 151-3, esp. his bibliography on p. 153, and his *Les Sak: Contribution à l'étude ethnographique d'une population de langue Loi* (Paris 1967). I have also used Luce's chapter IV, "Sak-Kantū (Thet-Kādu) of his unpublished *Phases of Old Burma*.

approximately a dozen Sak villages between Bawtala, about 30 km. south of Ramu, on the Arakan side of the Naaf, and Dodem, about 40 km. further to the southeast, at the foot of Taung-yo-daung, east of Kyaungdaung Bazaar. Across the border, about 3,000 Cak live in 14 villages in the southern Chittagong hill tracts, and in others alongside Mru and Marmas (Arakanese)³⁰.

The Sak attained a higher cultural level than any of the other minority peoples in Arakan. Their descendants, the Loi "conquered people" of Manipur³¹, are according to Hodson, "the silk manufacturers, the smelters of iron, the distillers of spirits, the makers of earthen vessels for containing water or for cooking in, the cutters of posts and beams and canoes, manufacturers of salt, fishers etc. etc."³². The Loi also manufacture stone bowls which they turn from rough sand-stone which is blackened by lamp-black and then wrought to a high polish. Such bowls are often found at Dhaññavatī at Veśālī, (below, p. 314) and are said to have been used by the ancient kings. Today the Sak women wear large round earrings inserted into the earlobes, remarkably similar to those portrayed on the late 5th century Mahāmuni sculptures. If not Saks themselves, the ancient kings must have had Saks in their employ. Luce even proposed that north Indian religions arriving in Burma via the overland route were transmitted

³⁰ Bernot, *Les Cak*..., p.21

³¹ Yumjao Singh Report on the Archaeological Studies in Manipur, Bulletin No.1 (Imphal 1935) p.61, cited in Luce, *loc cit*.

³² Hodson, *The Meetheis* (London 1908) quoting McCulloch's summary in his *Account of the Valley of Munnipore and of the Hill Tribes* published as *Selections from the Records of the Government of India*, Foreign Department, No.XXVII (Calcutta 1859), cited in Luce, *loc cit*

³³ L.Bernot, *Les Cak*, Pl.VI, cf below, pls. XLV-L

to the Pyu from the Sak, noting however that they do not seem to have had a script of their own, other than Burmese and Shan³⁴.

The Sak controlled central Burma in the 9th century, when the Burmans (Mranmā) sought to rule the plains. Eight miles southeast of Pagán stands Mt Thetso (Old Burmese *Sak-cuiw*) "Ruling the Thets" and Pagán ministers had their title, Sanskrit *Mahāśakti* "great and powerful" corrupted into *Mahāsakthit*, meaning "Great Terror of the Thets"³⁵. The Burmans also come into conflict with the Saks in Arakan. Luce writes: "It seems, from the Burmese chronicles, that there were Thets in the Arakan Yoma (*Macchagiri* "The Fish Mountains") with whom some early Pagán kings were rather shamefacedly in conflict: in particular with Thet-min-kadôn, King of the Sak"³⁶. A giant king with a similar name, Nga Maung Kadôn, appears in the folklore of the Saingdin valley and waterfall in North Arakan, not far to the east of Dodem³⁷. Now the Kādu and Gānan word for "Burmans" is still *Kātō*². During the Pagán dynasty, the pioneers of the invading Burmans, the Rakhuin, must have been pushing over the passes into North Arakan. Was the giant king really one of the pioneer Burmans who had made himself king of the Sak? "³⁸

Perhaps it was a result of Burman invasion into the central plains that Arakan suffered another Sak invasion, or uprising, in the 10th century when they are said to have destroyed the Mahāmuni shrine in

³⁴ *loc cit*

³⁵ Luce, *loc cit*, cf his "Note on the Peoples of Burma in the 12th-13th Century A.D." *Census of Burma 1931*, Vol. XI, pt. 1, Report App F, p. 297; *Sak-cuiw*, IB, pl. I, 126b (596s/1234 A.D.); *Mahāśakti* Ep. *Birm* III, pt. 1 p. 22 (Inscr. IX, Face G, l. 10 and n. 7); *Mahāsakthit* IB 1, 90²¹ (597s 1235 A.D.) ii, 205¹⁰, III, 235⁴³, 250³⁴, IV 413⁹ etc.

³⁶ GPC pp. 106-7, 118-9

³⁷ *Census of Burma 1931*, Vol. XI, pt. 1, Report App. D, pp. 248-9

³⁸ Personal communication, Sept. 3rd 1973, from "Phases of Old Burma"

Arakan³⁹. That they still posed a threat to the kingdom in the 18th century can be seen from the inscriptions of the Yattara bell at the Mahāmuni shrine, where a magic formula for the destruction of the Saks is given⁴⁰. The Sak, then, entered Arakan from the west and northwest at an early period. Was this the invasion which precipitated the transfer of the capital to Veśālī at the beginning of the 6th century, or the cause of the fall of the Candara kings at the beginning of the 7th?.

The Chin (Khyang) the most widely spread and diverse of the minorities in Arakan, now occupy the Yoma as far south as Sandoway. They usually practice *taungya* cultivation, growing both rice and millet, as well as legumes, yams, taro, cotton etc. although some hill Chins also grow wet rice in the valley bottoms.

Luce considered that the Chin may have been in the lowlands of Burma east of the Chin Division from the middle of the 1st millennium A.D.⁴¹ It is difficult to say when they began to cross the Yoma, although the infiltration into Arakan had certainly begun before the arrival of the Burman Rakhaings, as considerable fighting is recorded between the two groups. The Chin do not figure prominently in the Arakanese chronicles, and later seem to have had fairly amicable relations with the lowlanders, trading forest products such as beeswax

³⁹ Chan Htwan Oung, "The Mahāmuni Shrine in Arakan" *JBRS* Vol.II (1912) p.263

⁴⁰ Forchhammer, *Arakan...*, p.12

⁴¹ For the Arakan Chins (Burmese Khyang, variously spelt Khyeng, Khyan, Khyen etc. in the literature) see Bernot's bibliography in *Ethnic Groups...* pp.162-3.
Chin Hills - Linguistic Tour (Dec 1954) University Project *JBRS* XLII (1959) pp.24-25

and stick-lac for salt, iron and prestige goods.

The Rakhaing were the last significant group to come to Arakan. The date of their arrival is contentious, the chronicles exaggerating the antiquity of their hold on the land. Both culturally and linguistically the Rakhaing are closely related to the Burmans, although they regard themselves as the older branch of that race. It is well-known that the Arakanese language preserves a number of archaisms, principally the use of *r* for *y*, no doubt because of the relative isolation imposed by the Yoma, but this same isolation has also led to the development of new forms⁴². A related group speaking an almost identical language, the Chaungthas (Khyongsa, Khyoungtha) "river's sons" live, as their name implies, along the banks of the rivers and principally practice *taungya* cultivation⁴³. The majority of the Rakhaing, however, practise wet-rice agriculture supplemented by *taungya* on the more accessible reaches of the plains, having displaced the previous lowlanders, some of whom must have been Saks. In Old Burmese, the name Rakhuin first appears in slave names in inscriptions

⁴² One of the oldest Western accounts of the Arakanese language, J. Leyden's "On the Language and Literature of the Indo-Chinese Nations" Pt.VIII, Rukhéng (*Asiatic Researches* Vol.X, 1911, pp.222-232) states "The Rukhéng race is admitted to be of the same radical stock as the Barmas or Birmans, and is understood to have greatly preceded that nation in civilisation. The Barmas, indeed, derive their own origin from the Rukhéng, whom they generally denominate Barma Kyi, or the great Barmas, and they consider the Rukhéng as the most ancient and original dialect of the Barma language." See also D.Bernot, "Vowel Systems of Arakanese and Tavoyan" in G.B.Milner and E.J.A.Henderson (eds) *Indo-Pacific Linguistic Studies* (Amsterdam 1965) "Rapports phonétiques entre le dialecte marma et le birman" *Bulletin de Linguistique de Paris* Vol.LIII (1957-58) pp.273-294 and R.K.Sprigg, "Comparison of Arakanese and Burmese based on Phonological Formulae" in H.Shorto, (ed) *Linguistic Comparison in South-east Asia and the Pacific* (London 1963)

⁴³ L.Bernot, *op cit.* Les Paysans Arakanais du Pakistan Orientale, pp.67-71-3, 660; T.H.Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein* (Calcutta 1869) "The Khoungtha" pp.36-62.

of the late 12th century⁴⁴. The Rakhuin may have been an advance guard of the Mraṃmā, beginning to cross the Yoma in the 9th century and finally dominating the lowlands by the middle of the 11th, when the last Sanskrit inscription was written and the capital at Veśālī was abandoned for a series of smaller cities in the Lemro valley, facing east rather than west, gradually adopting the religion and culture of central Burma.

A late Burmese inscription (1442 A.D.) of the Htupayôn pagoda at Sagaing, which was built by the king of Ava, Narapati, tells of the king's accession to the throne and how the peoples of Burma from all the eight directions came to do him homage. These included the *Rakhuin Mañ* "King of Arakan", who ruled over the *Sak*, *Mrun* (Mro) and *Khyan* (Chin)⁴⁵. The situation in the 15th century was no doubt the result of the conflicts of the early period, resolved by the 11th century and remaining unchanged until the Burmese conquest in 1784.

The Cities

The earliest cities in Arakan, Dhaññavati (Danyawadi, Dinnyawadi) and Veśālī (Wethali) are both situated west of the ridge lying between the Kaladan and Lemro rivers, occupying the well-drained foothill area and backed by the ridge.

⁴⁴ *IB* 15²⁷; 117a⁶ 559§ (1197 A.D.)

⁴⁵ *List* 963a. UB I 94. Sagaing Htupayôn Pagoda Inscription, Obverse, II 20-23 804^s/1442 A.D., cited by Luce, *loc cit*, where he notes that the final nasal of *Mrun* may be accounted for by the tendency in Burmese sometimes to add a nasal to a final back vowel, perhaps for euphony.

Dhaññavatī (Plates IV and V) 9.6 km. east of the Kaladan, 96 km. upriver from Akyab, was built in the middle of the 11th century, when only the upper Kaladan was above high water level. From about 32 km. south of the city the land was a vast mass of swamps and mangroves, with only the edges of the "islands" reclaimed for cultivation. Small ships could reach the city from the Kaladan tributary, the Tharechaung on the east, while the ridge provided natural protection on the west. The remains of brick fortifications are still seen along the ridge, which protrudes into the city itself.

The city walls, made of brick and roughly forming an irregular circle, have a perimeter of about 9.6 km. and enclose an area of about 4.42 sq. km., almost the size of the contemporary Pyu city of Halin⁴⁶. Beyond the walls, the remains of a wide moat, now silted over and occupied by paddy fields, are still visible in places. The Tharechaung may have fed the moat, and formed the western part.

Within the city, a similar wall and moat enclose the palace site, which has an area of .26 sq. km. Another single wall surrounds the square area of the palace proper, enclosing about .12 sq. km. At the northeast corner of the palace site, on a small hill, is the Mahāmuni shrine, once the centre of the royal cult, which played a central role throughout the history of Arakan. Daw Thin Kyi observed that, as at the Pyu cities Halin and Śrīkṣetra, the majority of the population lived within the outer city, whose walls enclosed the fields in which they worked. At times of insecurity, when the city was subject to raids from the hill tribes or attempted invasions by neighbouring powers, there would have been an assured food supply

⁴⁶ cf Myint Aung, "The Excavations at Halin" *JBRS* Vol.LIII (1970) pp.55,62

enabling the population to withstand a siege. Normally, the city would have controlled the valley and the lower ridges, supporting a mixed wet-rice and *taungya* economy, with local chiefs paying allegiance to the king.

The palace site, in the centre of the city, was the focal point of an irrigation system which can be discerned on aerial photographs. Water collected in the wet season was stored in four main tanks in the city proper, alligned north, south east and west of the palace. The tanks at the north, east and west are still in use today, the southern tank having recently silted over. The larger tank at the east, situated along the inner moat, appears also to have supplied the palace complex. The introduction of wet-rice agriculture and subsequent urbanisation is reflected in the chronicle traditions regarding the naming of the city. During Gotama Buddha's stay in Arakan he is said to have declared to his disciples:

"In Jambūdīpa, among the sixteen countries of Majjhimadesa the food offered to the priesthood consists of a mixture of maize, beans, corn, and millet. But in this country, the food offered consists of various kinds of barley and rice; such food is eaten by the priests with relish; my preceding elder brothers (Kakusandha, Gonagamana and Kassapa, i.e. the three Buddhas who preceded Gotama) have called this country Dhaññavatī, and as the inhabitants have never suffered from famine, this region shall in all times to come continue to be called Dhaññavatī (i.e. 'grain-blessed')"⁴⁷.

About 7 km. to the south of the outer wall of Dhaññavatī is the

⁴⁷ Forchhammer, *Arakan...*, p.5, after the *Mahāmuni Thamaing* and the *Sarvasthānaprakaraṇa*. The mention of maize shows that the legend, in its present form at least, is a late one, as maize was introduced into India by the Portuguese. "Corn" in Forchhammer's translation presumably means "wheat".

small city now called Kanthonsint, which appears to have been built hurriedly and occupied for only a brief period as the kings moved their capital southward. The city is rectangular, with an outer moat and a wall, enclosing an area of about .49 sq. km.. There is no trace of an inner palace site. No survey of the site has been undertaken, but it was most likely built during the confused period at the end of the 5th and the beginning of the 6th centuries.

According to the *Danyawadi Ayedawpon* and the *Rakhaingyāzawinthit* chronicles, the last king of Dhaññavatī, having reigned for six years, decided to move the capital after his astrologers foretold the destruction of the city. The "gardens, parks, ponds, wells, pavilions, resthouses, pinnacled houses, moat and walls" of the new city were completed within five months, although the king was to reign for only one year in the new city before being assassinated by his three ministers, who ruled successively for a total of 16 months. Another version of the decline of the city in the same chronicle states that the site was inauspicious, as over 3,000 men, elephants and horses died there, and a mass of red earth in the shape of a dragon was found below the ground. These evil omens were construed as being a result of the god Indra's negligence in protecting the king. After the king was forced to leave the city Indra assumed the shape of a donkey and indicated the site of the new city of Veśālī by circumambulating it⁴⁸.

Veśālī (Plate VI) 9.6 km. south of Dhaññavatī is flanked by the Rann-chaung, a tributary of the Kaladan to the west, and the ridge between the Kaladan and Lemro valleys in the east. The walls, almost straight in the east and west, are rounded at the north and south, forming

⁴⁸ RYT pp.226ff, 280ff

an irregular oval shape enclosing an area of about 7.02 sq km.. Parts of the wide moat still fill with water during the wet season. The palace site, again surrounded by a moat, is a rectangular area aligned slightly west of north. Its brick outer wall measures about .45 km along the north side, while the east-west width is .30 km. The main gate of the palace was at the east, marked by the colossal Man-U (Noble Palace) image today. Within the inner walls is the royal lake, which still remains full in the dry season. A large tank in the eastern sector of the city provided the central water storage, supplemented by a series of smaller tanks. Like Dhaññavatī, Veśālī had a large temple complex northeast of the palace. The city is traditionally known as "Veśālī, the city of stone stairs" (*Wethali kyaukhlega*). Remains of these stairs, leading to the pier on the old course of the Rann-chaung, can still be seen in the south of the city.

Archaeological evidence points to the founding of Veśālī around the beginning of the 6th century. The chronicles report that in the building of the city the king was assisted by subject kings from surrounding areas, who would have supplied corvée labour in return for protection. Lying further to the south, Veśālī was even more open to western influence than Dhaññavatī. More easily reached by the overland route, it also took advantage of increased trade in the Bay of Bengal during the 6th century and later. When that trade was interrupted by the Cola invasions of the mid-11th century and the increasing incursions of the Mraṃmā from the east, the economic viability of the city was undermined. The next period was characterised by the establishment of the smaller capitals of the Lemro valley, resulting in an influx of population and cultural influences from the east.

The beginnings of urbanisation in India have been inadequately studied, and at this stage it is premature to draw any conclusions from a comparison. However, it is certain that the Arakanese, in the building of their cities, consulted the *Nīti* literature, notably the *Arthaśāstra*, portions of which are still retained in the chronicles. The royal cities of the Kuṣāṇas, notably Mathurā, dominated by the Buddhist royal sanctuary of Maṭ, may have inspired the builders of Dhañṇavatī, whose power centred around a similar royal shrine. The earliest sculptures at Dhañṇavatī and Veśālī are stylistically and iconographically connected with the later art of Mathurā.

The geographical position and the nature of the economy of the ancient Arakanese cities, however, indicated a different rationale for nation building. The dominant problem was that of a regulated water supply, without which surplus grain production could not be maintained. The king, as we shall see, was symbolically given the power to control the coming of the rains and to placate the forces of the underworld in order to guarantee the fertility of the land, uniting in this rôle a triple hierarchy of heaven, earth and underworld. Thus the state was seen as a miniature cosmos, centred around the king, whose palace was appropriately in the centre of the city and the focus of the water storage and distribution system. The king's secondary rôle was that of protector of the people in the four quarters of the country of Arakan against the inroads of the hill tribes and occasional foreign invaders. To maintain his authority to perform these tasks, divine sanction was ceremonially given in the royal shrine, situated in the auspicious northeast corner of the palace associated with the sun and the dead ancestors⁴⁹.

⁴⁹ cf. L. Bernot, *Les Paysans Arakanaïs...* I, p. 160; P. Paris "L'Importance rituelle du Nord-est et ses applications en Indochine" *BEFEO* XLI pp. 313ff

This cosmological model of the state, typical of later kingdoms along the migratory routes from South China through the basins of the Irawaddy and Menam to Indonesia, is derived from Chinese as well as Indian prototypes⁵⁰. Its importance and its ramifications will become apparent in the following chapters.

⁵⁰ H.L.Shorto, "The 32 Myos in the Medieval Mon Kingdom"
BSOAS Vol.XXVI (1963) pp.572-91