

Conquest and Resistance



WHEN THE KINGDOM OF
RAKHINE BECAME A
PROVINCE OF THE MYANMAR
KINGDOM...

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Seminar on the history of Rakhine/Arakan

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Towards a historical appreciation



- The Myanmar conquest of Rakhine
 - Important chapter of Rakhine's history: period of dramatic changes and a point of historical no-return
 - Negatively viewed from a Rakhine nationalist point of view
 - Need for a critical historical review:
 - A complex picture
 - The past (what happened), history (what is written down), memory (what and how people chose to remember), identity (who you are), autonomy (to stand on one's own feet) and connection
 - The central perspective of the conqueror *vs* the view of the victims
 - Political and economic context
 - Long decline of Rakhine monarchy and receding political and economic role in the Bay of Bengal: not a threat anymore
 - Rise of Western colonialism: East India Company in Bengal (the British in India)
 - Resurgence of Myanmar expansionism (early Konbaung dynasty)

What is particular about the conquest...



- Not in a historical continuity with ongoing warfare against Rakhine
 - Rakhine not a traditional enemy of the Myanmar
 - Rakhine never dominated by Myanmar like Mon or Shan area
- Not a revenge for Rakhine aggression
- Similar, but different....
 - Rakhine shares a common Buddhist culture and religion with Myanmar
 - ... but not the same history, not the same heroes, not the same religious roots, not the same exposure to Indian/Bengal influence

The official motivation of the campaign against Rakhine a royal order of 16 October 1784



- The king states that Rakhine had not bent in humble submission and that it should be conquered so as to put an end to the country's political anarchy and the sad state of the Buddhist institutions.
- The condition of Buddhism in Rakhine was compared to a parasite in the flesh of an animal.
- The Myanmar crown prince was told to make the religion shine again by arresting the scum of bad people who did not abide by the law and were a stain on the *sasana*.

Why did King Bodawphaya conquer Rakhine?

The historical context of the conquest



- No Myanmar attempt at conquering Rakhine since late 16th century (Bayinnaung's failed attempt in 1580-1)
- The eastern and southern orientation of Myanmar expansionism (1600-1740)
 - Shan country; northern Thailand; Siam
- The renewal of the Myanmar kingdom under the early Konbaung dynasty
 - Unification and centralisation : Pegu
 - New orientations since the reign of Alaungmintaya : Tenasserim and Manipur
- The reconfiguration of Myanmar expansionism (early Konbaung)
 - Slow decline of Myanmar domination in areas east of Salween River (Chiang Mai, Sipsong Panna, Upper Mekong): 1770-1804
 - Southeast expansion: Tenasserim, Siam and Ayutthaya
 - West and North-west expansion: Manipur, Jaintia, Rakhine, Assam, Bengal

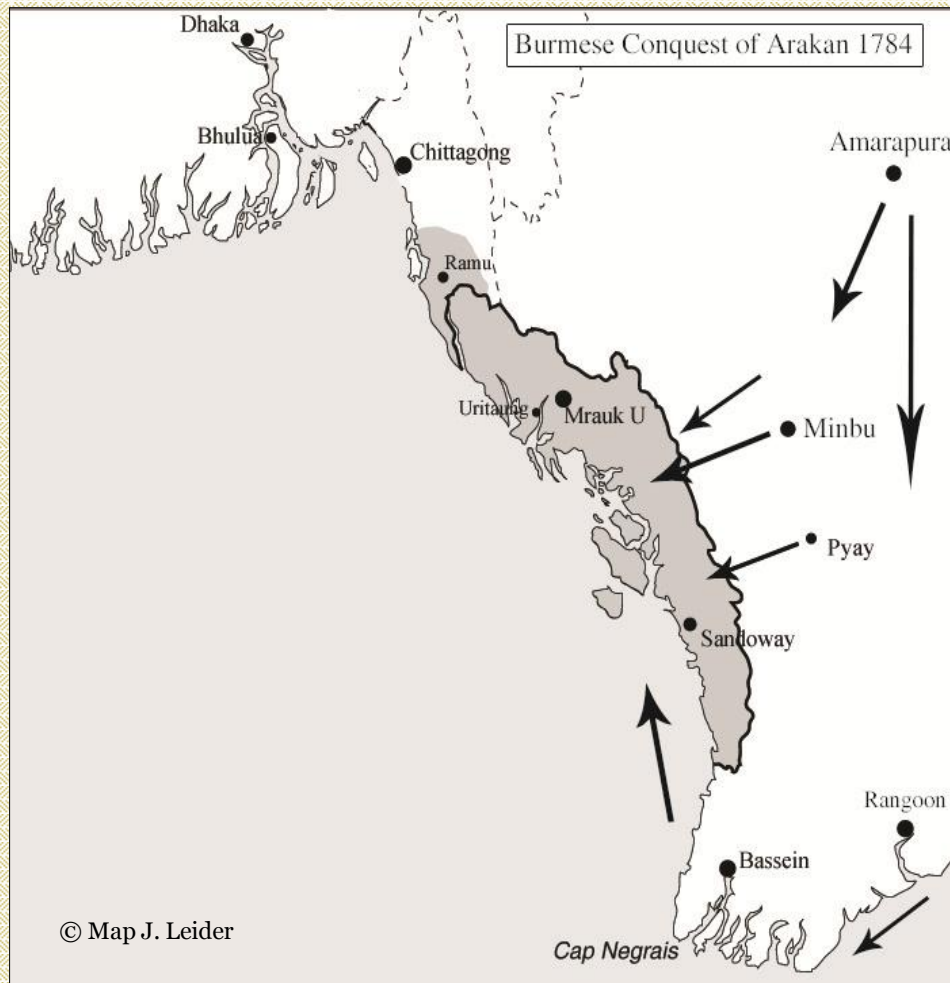
Why did King Bodawphaya conquer Rakhine?

Motives of the conquest



- Political and ideological motives
 - Establish political order and the rule of law in a lawless area
 - Re-establish “peace” in a politically divided and often anarchic Rakhine
 - Match the ideal of a Buddhist king (*dhammaraja* kingship)
 - Reform the *sasana* in Rakhine
 - Acting as a patron of the old and contemporary Buddhist world
 - The re-discovery of “Majjhimadesa” (North India) and the land of the Buddha
 - An opportunity for political intervention
 - Request for intervention by Rakhine malcontents
 - An easy prey
 - Demonstrating royal grandeur
- Religious motives
 - Rakhine’s prestigious antiquity
 - Origins of Buddhism in Rakhine
 - Continuity of Buddhism and a particular royal tradition in Rakhine
 - The cult of the Mahamuni
- Economic background motives
 - Trade with Bengal/ trans-Arakan Yoma road

Campaign against Rakhine, 1784



Strategy

Advance by the southern, maritime road and move north, after taking Than-dway, Yan-byay and Man-aung

Myanmar Troops

❑ *U Yin Pu road (Taunggup)*

11,158 men, 488 horses

❑ *Linpate road (Am-Maphè & Talak-Pha Aing?)*

4554 men, 332 horses

❑ *Mindon road (Thayet)*

5048 men, 283 horses

❑ *Maritime road*

6321 men, 165 boats

Chronology of key events

Years	Key events
Nov-Dec 1784	Myanmar troops in Taunggup, move to Launggrak, no co-ordinated Rakhine resistance, local feats
1 January 1785	Myanmar Crown prince in Mrauk U
22 January 1785	Mahamuni Statue put on raft
February 1786	Rakhine rebels flee to Chittagong area
1787	All members of Rakhine court to be deported
	Problems with British authorities about rebel activities
1789	Conscription: Rakhine men join war against Chiang Mai
1791-93	Succession of four Myanmar governors: administration problems?
1795	Surrender of Nga Po Lum to Myanmar authorities
October 1798	Chin Byan becomes a rebel Massive departures to Chittagong district
December 1799	Hiram Cox (Chittagong) discusses Rakhine rebels issue with Myanmar side
1800-1802	Population census: overstated results lead to overtaxation
1806	Conscription: Rakhine men join war against Siam
1811-12	Chin Byan's three campaigns in Rakhine
1813-14	Rebels defeated and repression
10 March 1819	Myanmar claim to formerly Rakhine territories in Bengal
1820	Rakhine rice sent to Muttama for war campaign against Siam

Myanmar Administration



- Administrative Divisions (*myo*)
 - Dhañawati/ Rakhine (later Akyab /Sittway district): divided into 44 *kywan*
 - Dwarawati (Thandway/Sandoway) + *khayaing* of Seven Mountain Ranges
 - Meghawati (Cheduba / Man-aung)
 - Rammawati (Ramree / Yan-bye
- Provincial Myanmar administration
 - Each *myo* was under the authority of
 - a *myo-wun* (governor) assisted by
 - one or two *sitkè* (officer in charge of civil and military affairs),
 - an *akhwan-wun* (land revenue officer),
 - an *akhauk-wun* (tax officer),
 - one or two *na-khan* (information officer, often simply called ‘spy’), and
 - a *myo-saye* (district secretary in charge of the records).

Local administration



- Myanmar administration depends on local support
- Local men pass on orders at the district and village level (*ywa-thugyi*, *kywan-up* and *myo-thugyi*) – in charge of tax perception and providing labor
 - Toll gates : Rala, Pe, Manbra, Urittaung and Lemro
 - Sale tax on market goods: sugar, indigo, chalk
 - Land: taxation of rice fields and gardens on royal land, monastic land, common land
 - Ferries paid with cowries, silver coins or cotton
 - Tax on fishing (according to the type of net or water)
 - Mountain people: house tax, annual quantity of rattan and bamboo, flowers
- Prominent Rakhine figures in early Myanmar administration
 - Nga Than Htwe, *myothugyi* of Dhañawati
 - Nga Htun San, former governor of Le-khak-taung, *myothugyi* of Rammawati
 - Thet Nham We, son of Nga Htun San, *myothugyi* of Lemro
 - ★ belonged to the group of men who had gone in 1782 to Amarapura to obtain military support to revolt

Myanmar Rule in Rakhine (1785-1825)



- **Conquest and pacification (1785-1795)**
 - Political decapitation, deportation of the Rakhine elite
 - A new rule: Myanmar-Rakhine-co-administration
 - Geo-political change (Myanmar-British Bengal – a common border at the Naf River)
- **Administrative integration and economic exploitation (1795-1810)**
 - Royal administrative enquiries - census
 - Exploitative system, tax overburden and forced labor
 - Forced conscription and rice deliveries for war campaigns
 - Myanmar migration to Rakhine
- **Resistance, exodus and revolt (1787-1815)**
 - Increasing rejection of Myanmar rule – the complicit elite turns against new rulers
 - Massive migrations to Southeast Bengal and Rakhine settlements in Ramu area
 - British settlement policy and the foundation of Cox' Bazaar
 - Chin Byan's invasions and the border conflicts
- **Central control and economic transition (1815-1825)**
 - Myanmar rule never seriously challenged
 - Development of the *Am* trade road : Upper Myanmar – Rakhine – Bengal ports

Policy of integration of Rakhine into Myanmar



- How to make the conquest durable and Myanmar rule effective?
- Suppressing the monarchy and the **supporting infrastructure of Rakhine kingship**
 - Deportation of King Thamada and the court
 - Deportation of the sons of three previous Rakhine kings, princesses and eunuchs
 - Deportation of the *ponnas* and their support staff
 - Deportation of leading *sayadaws* from Mrauk U monasteries
- Incorporation of the genealogy of Rakhine kings of « Mahavihika » into the *Konbaungzet* chronicle
- Leading role of Rakhine *ponna*: become elite ritual masters at Bodawphaya's court
- Appointment of Abisha Hussein as head of Myanmar Muslim community
- Flow of Myanmar settlers to newly conquered Rakhine (various motives)
- Reorganisation of administration
 - Census enquiries (*sittan*)
 - Administrative failures: over-stated population numbers, fiscal oppression, harassment

Religious integration of Rakhine



- The early history of Buddhism in Rakhine
 - Foundational account of Buddha's visit in Rakhine
 - Vesali period: presence of Buddhism and Brahmanical Hinduism
 - Pagan period (Myanmar)/ Pala period (Bengal): exchanges? contacts?
- Buddhism during the Mrauk-U period
 - Constitution of the sangha (*aranyavasi/gamavasi* competition, 17th c.)
 - Monastic exchanges and/ or rivalry with Pegu and Ava (?)
 - Textual tradition (missions to Sri Lanka/Kandy)
- *Sasana* and *sangha* after 1785
 - King Bodawphaya's *sasana-pyu* mission: re-ordination, building of new ordination halls, standardization of monastic behaviour
 - ✦ Ashin Candamalankara (1931) critical of royal interference with the *sangha*
 - ✦ Legitimacy of the Myanmar king through religious reform movement
 - ✦ Teaching of Rakhine monks in Upper Myanmar (Mid-19th c. Ashin Samedha, mission in Sittway and among the Baruas of SE Bengal)
 - Missions of Buddhist conversion sent to Khami ethnic group
 - Works of merit of Myanmar governors: religious foundations in Yanbyé and Mrauk U
 - ✦ (example: Nanda Pakyan's repair of *Parabaw Phaya* in 1786)

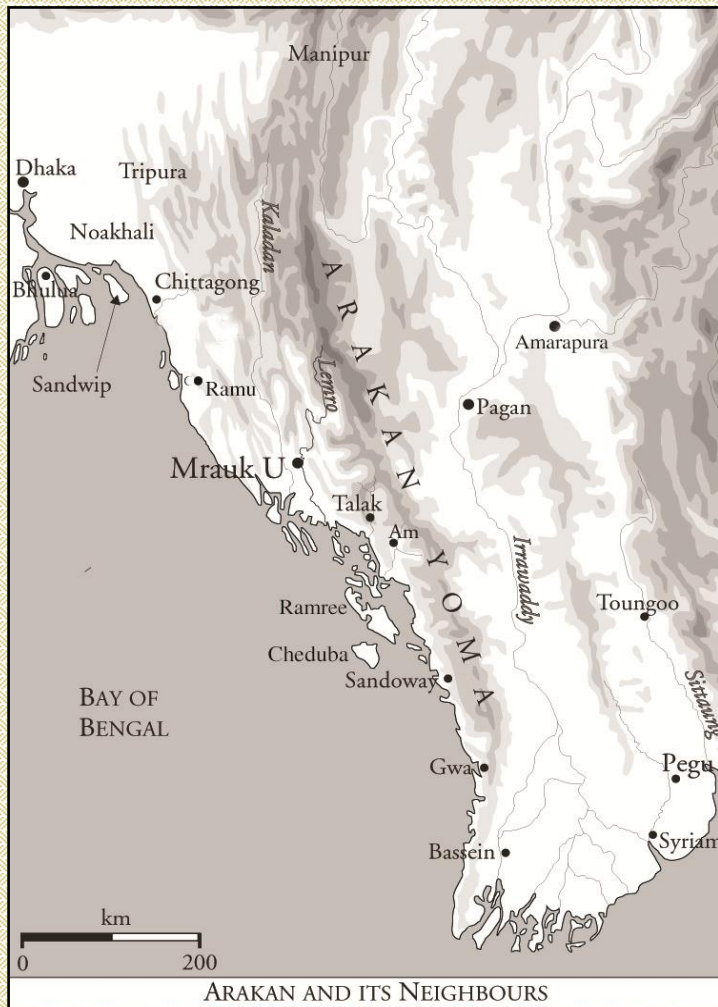
Contrasting facets of Bodawphaya's rule



- Conscripted support for royal construction projects and the war campaigns against Ayutthaya and Siam
 - Forced labor
 - Rice provisions
- From autarcy to the exploitation of Rakhine's resources
 - Manpower and rice production
 - Construction of Mingun Pathodawgyi pagoda and Mahananda lake
- King's interest in Rakhine's ancient past and traditions
 - The deportation of the Mahamuni, "invited" to the capital
 - Consultation of Rakhine *Tipitaka* texts
 - The collection of historical materials: *Dhanyawadi Ayedawpon (Mahapinyakyaw's Shyaukhton)* and *Mahamuni Thamaing*
 - Ancient authority: the case of the *ponnas*: a new elite of ritual masters in Amarapura

Trade roads

From backwardness to economic integration



- New lines of communication
Myanmar – Bengal (royal missions to Varanasi/Benares)
- Trade roads: by land and by sea
Talak road
Taungup road
Am road (from Minbu, Sinbyugywan)
Flourishing 1810-1835
Strategic interest during first Anglo-Myanmar war
- Trade goods
Precious stones, textile goods, tobacco, cotton, betel, iron

On the Kaladan River



• © Photo J. Leider



Kaladan valley



Rice plains near Vesali
with the Rakhine Yoma in
the background

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Rakhine settlements in SE Bengal/Chittagong



1789-1795 British officers take a critical stance towards the inroads of the Rakhine who use Chittagong as refuge

1795: extradition of Nga Po Lum – peace and harmony restored

1798-99 Massive migration of people from Rakhine to SE Bengal

- Foundation of Cox' Bazaar

British complacency towards the Rakhine settlers

- ❑ partly for humanitarian reasons
- ❑ partly for economic reasons: increasing agriculture and land revenue

On Chin Byan:

- Ambiguous politics: excessive violence, no political agenda
- Allegedly secret hope of British authorities to see Chin Byan succeed
- Rakhine settlers doubtful of Chin Byan's ventures
- Patriots may rebel, but rebels are not always patriots

Rakhine People's behaviour under overtaxation



“They resorted to every species of fraud and deception, deserted their habitations and erected temporary huts in the most secluded of their forests, fled from circle to circle, from one district to another and at last resorted to gang robbery and murder, the last alternatives of half civilized minds smarting under misrule and oppression.”

Boileau Pemberton to Benson from Calcutta 22 June
1831

British opinions on Chin Byan's campaigns



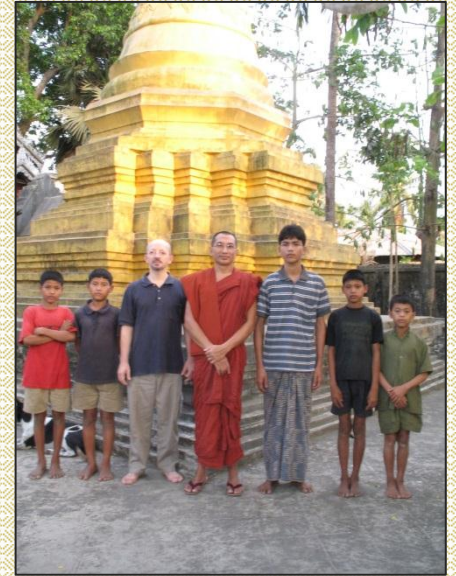
- G. E. Harvey (*History of Burma*, 1925, 282-3):
 - “In 1811, however, the Burmese had just cause of complaint, as Nga Chin Byan, after taking refuge in Chittagong, again broke out in Burmese territory. He made several raids, each time returning into difficult hill country inside British territory; once he overran the whole of Arakan wiping out the Burmese garrisons save at Mrohaung. After this the English washed their hands of him; he had abused their hospitality set on his head a price of Rs. 5,000...”
 - “For seventeen years he had led his people gallantly, the most famous of all insurgents; but he never had a chance because he could rely on the other leaders for nothing save to fail him; out of jealousy, at the critical moment.”

British opinions on Chin Byan's campaigns



- Lord Minto (1812)
 - “A great and serious injury had been sustained for many years by the state of Ava from the lawless conduct of the Mugh refugees, enjoying the protection of the British government. A horde of desperate barbarians infuriated by the recollection of past injuries, inflamed by a desire of conquest and plunder, had committed every species of atrocity, cruelty, and oppression in the province of an ally; The rebels have massacred up to twenty thousand un-offending people, merely because they had submitted to the Burmese authority, and would not then rebel.”
- Captain White (1827):
 - “unceasing warfare, forming themselves into bands of robbers and live by plunder”
 - “most wanton and prodigal effusion of human blood”
 - “a lawless band of robbers and murderers”
 - Quoted from *A Political History of the Extraordinary Events which led to the Burmese War*.

Moishkali, Bangladesh - Rakhine Pagoda in Tek Naf – Poi Hla Phru, Marma Bohmong



© Photo J. Leider

Rakhine's population and demographic change



- Sources
 - Myanmar census (*sittan*): 121,000 houses - most probably overrating the total population
 - Early English sources: estimations, methodology not clear, various sources difficult to adjust
- What was Rakhine's population around 1785?
 - 1828: Akyab: 100,000; Sandoway: 15,000; Cheduba: 12,000
 - 1831: Total population: 174,000
 - 1842: approx. 250,000
- Hypothesis (time of conquest): 250,000-300,000

Conclusion



- **An undemanding conquest and Rakhine divisiveness**
 - ❖ Rakhine character: ‘straight, honest, and not crooked’
 - ❖ Inner divisions: pride stronger than political unity; overbearingness bigger than self-awareness
 - ❖ Conquest satisfies the king’s high-flying ambitions
- **The end of the kingdom and a new chapter of history**
 - ❖ Important political, social, economic and religious consequences
 - ❖ Rakhine persistently aware of a great loss; develop a strengthened sense of identity
 - ❖ Rakhine had little chance to escape British colonization

Aung San Suu Kyi on Rakhine



- “It is interesting to speculate whether the cultural and at times political links which Arakan had forged with Bengal through much of her history had created in her people a more receptive attitude to foreign influences. The Mons who had come under British rule at the same time as the Arakanese, did not seem to have produced as many English-educated people at quite the same speed.”

- IN: *Burma and India Some Aspects of Intellectual Life under Colonialism*. Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1990, p. 31