



Relics, Statues, and Predictions

Interpreting an Apocryphal Sermon of Lord Buddha in Arakan

This article presents an apocryphal Buddhist text that contains a speech of the Buddha listing the relics linked to his former existences in Arakan, as well as prophecies regarding the historical succession of kings. Looking at various aspects such as the geographical distribution of the relics and the typically Buddhist representation of kingship, the author argues that the text can best be understood in the eighteenth-century context of the political decline of the Arakanese kingdom. As this article shows, apocryphal texts have authority because they build on traditional concepts and beliefs and are still a poorly-exploited source of historical enquiry.

KEYWORDS: Arakanese Buddhism—history of Arakan—Buddhist relics—apocryphal Buddhist texts—prophetical literature

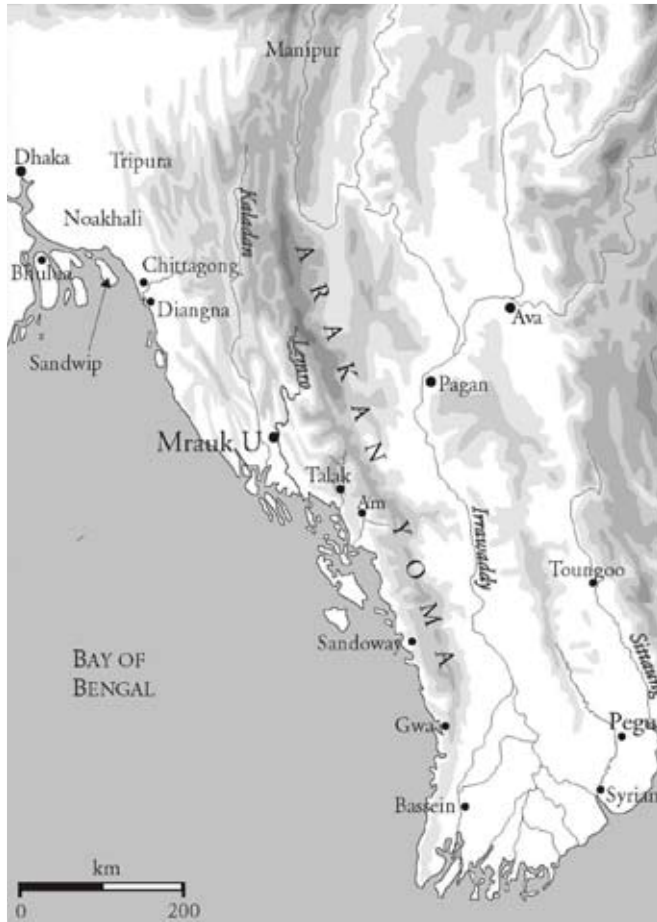
APOCRYPHA are not a lesser kind of Buddhist literature; they are signposts of the adaptation and the localization of Buddhist teaching, thought, and practice. They may not be authentic in the sense that they truly go back to the origins they claim to have, but they are significant and relevant for the audience they address.

Taking the example of a rare anonymous Arakanese *hpayà-thamaing*, I would like to show how an apocryphal text has authority because it is socially and politically meaningful. Bearing in mind that “writing history is not a simple matter of generating non-literary facticity,” this essay is an exercise in “listening for history” in texts hitherto neglected as sources of historical writing (NARAYANA RAO, SHULMAN, and SUBRAHMANYAM 2001). As such, this article attempts to make a contribution to a segment of the religious and political history of Burma (Myanmar).¹

Arakan (now commonly spelled Rakhine or Rakhaing) is today a state in the Union of Myanmar. Until its conquest by the Burmese in 1785, it was for several centuries an independent Buddhist kingdom; its language is a dialect of Burmese. The presence of Buddhism can be traced back to at least the fifth century CE, but little is known in detail about Arakan’s religious and political history before the fifteenth century CE.²

Arakanese historical texts share a common stock of essential myths, pieces of factual information, narrative episodes, and astrological calculations. Over decades and even centuries, they have been formulated and shaped, and reformulated and reshaped, in various textual expressions for various needs. No texts were immutable, no texts were immune to insertions and accretions, no texts have been left unscathed by copyists. The text presented here is of such a composite nature. I assume that it is a mid- to late-eighteenth-century composition built on earlier narratives, but it probably underwent some changes in the nineteenth century (most likely during the British colonial period that started in Arakan in 1825).

Hpayà-thamaing is a Burmese term that could be generally translated as “pagoda history,” that is, the history of the foundation of a pagoda, donations received, refounding, extensions, embellishments, and occasional miracles.³ The *hpayà-thamaing* presented here is of a somewhat different type. It is more concerned with relics and predictions on the kings than with pagodas. From a formal



Map of Arakan and its neighbors. Reproduced with the kind permission of Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

point of view, it presents itself as a dialogue between Lord Buddha and Ananda during their travels to Arakan, and from there to Lower Burma. This happened at the very end of Buddha's earthly career as we follow the Enlightened One (at the end of the text) back to India to the site of his *parinibbāna*.⁴ A major part of the text is formed by a litany of statements made by the Buddha during his former lives in Arakan and predictions about the sites of his relics (infrequently enshrined in pagoda foundations). Besides these, there are statements and predictions on earlier and later generations of kings in Arakan and on the varying fate of the *Sāsana* in Arakanese and Mon cities that are mostly indicated by their classical Pāli names such as Dhañnavati, Dvaravati, Thaton (Sudhammavati), and Pegu (Hamsavati).⁵

When a text like this is of a composite nature, we should first read and analyze its distinct parts as much as possible before discussing the text as a whole. The famous Mahamuni legend (as we find in this *hpaya-thamaing*) can be isolated as a “building stone” inside the historiographic tradition of Arakan as it appears in

many texts of various dates, and in both prose and verse form. On the other hand, the text should be interpreted as a whole, with all its parts included, as a product of a certain period. I will argue that this *hpayà-thamaing* is meaningful in the particular political and social context of the eighteenth century.

From the beginning one sees that texts like this one do not purport to be historical accounts. Nor do they necessarily follow a narrative structure. This makes them challenging for historians, particularly for those who study political and social history. I acknowledge that trying to read them as sources of political and social history has taught me in turn to look differently at the way that people may choose to represent their own history. “History,” as a representation of and as a reflection on the past, is the reply of human cultures to the need to keep a dialogue with the memory of their past. As a social practice, it has come a long way from its mythological beginnings to the methodological standards of a twenty-first-century academic and self-reflective discipline. One may struggle with the fact that texts of a religious nature document a sense of continuity rather than change (“change” that historians are keen to follow). One may question their usefulness in terms of factuality, especially when facts come in the guise of predictions. So be it. If the cultivation and study of the past is not merely an intellectual venture or a political or ideological tool, we may see a text like the *hpayà-thamaing* as an essential source, because in authorized terms, it translates a deeply human endeavor of embedding the unbearable burden of change in soothing categories of time and space and, ultimately, meaning.

In the first section, I will present the manuscript, give a short description of the contents of the text, and situate it in the context of Arakanese Buddhist history. In the second, the analytical section, I will explain how the text brings forth the message that Arakan is a land cherished by the Buddhas. An analysis of the predictions regarding the Arakanese kings will further demonstrate how the succession of Arakanese kings and capitals is integrated into a Buddhist cosmological framework. In the third section, I will suggest a historical and political (rather than religious or anthropological) interpretation, showing that the authority of this apocryphal *hpayà-thamaing* is firmly established by its relevance for an Arakanese audience of the late Mrauk-U period.⁶

LORD BUDDHA’S PREDICTIONS
DURING HIS VISIT TO ARAKAN AND THE MON COUNTRY

The text on which this article is based was kindly put at my disposal by Ashin Rammawadi Pinyasara, an Arakanese monk based in Sittway, the provincial capital of Arakan. The Venerable monk owns two paper versions of the text (hereafter called “version one,” referred to as T BS-1, and “version two,” referred to as T BS-2). Both text versions go back to one single palm leaf manuscript that was in the possession of San Shwe Bu, a local Arakanese scholar still well-known by Burmese historians for a number of articles on Arakanese history that he pub-

lished in the years 1910–1919 and the 1920s in the *Journal of the Burma Research Society*.⁷ Both versions refer in their colophons to a copy of San Shwe Bu’s manuscript made in 1924.⁸ This palm leaf manuscript had four *angas* (an *anga* is a set of eleven leaves) and seven leaves of an eight-lines-per-page text. Version one is a handwritten copy of a shortened and partially summarized text prepared in January 1976 by U Aung Chit⁹ from a forty-five page foolscap paper copy in the hands of the famous Arakanese scholar U Oo Tha Htun. The last part of the text describing Lord Buddha’s sojourn in the Mon country is entirely missing in this version. Version two gives the text of a copy made in 1978 by the Venerable Munidhaja who worked on a handwritten copy of San Shwe Bu’s palm leaf manuscript made by U Kittī. Version two gives both a fuller and generally more correct text. The text of version one is often untrustworthy, misleading, and occasionally meaningless because of its obvious misspellings.¹⁰ While we have generally relied on T BS-2, in a few instances the readings of version one appear to be superior to the ones of version two.

No clear subdivisions were made by the authors of the text as we have it in its present form. For the sake of clarity, the contents can be presented in four parts. The first lines of the text are missing in both versions. The text starts in the middle of a speech from the Lord Buddha to Ananda, perhaps on Selagiri Hill where, according to the legend, the Buddha landed together with five hundred followers when he flew through the air from Majjhimadesa (India) to Arakan. An Arakanese Buddhist would know that King Candasuriya came to receive the Buddha at that place, inviting him to his palace and requesting him before his departure to allow him to make a life-size copy of the Buddha. The text does not mention anything of this until a much later stage. It starts with a long, tedious monologue. This takes about a quarter of the whole text in which the Buddha lists close to two hundred places, all referred to as “mountains,” where he had lived in his former lives in northern Arakan. Each place is associated with one or more former human or animal existences, and the relics of his present human body that would be found at such places after his *parinibbāna*, “predestined relics,” as John STRONG calls them (2004, 37).

A second, longer part alternates short questions from Ananda with extensive answers from the Buddha. An account is given of the encounter of the Buddha with King Candasuriya, followed by the making of the famous statue known as the Mahamuni. The mythical record of Arakan’s earliest dynasties is presented in a summarized form and leads to a number of predictions about Arakan’s capitals and succeeding dynasties in the future. We also find notes on how King Ashoka will take care of the Buddha’s relics, on the meritorious or de-meritorious treatment of the order of Buddhist monks by Arakanese kings, the enshrining of relics, and the foundation of pagodas around Mrauk-U, the capital of Arakan from 1430 to 1785.

A third, smaller part of the text concerns the Buddha’s stay in Dvaravati, a city identified with Thandwe (or Sandoway) in southern Arakan. In it we find similar content: the mythical past of Dvaravati, predictions on Dvaravati’s history that are

tied to statements made earlier on Arakan's kings, and last but not least, the listing of over fifty places where the Buddha lived during his former existences and the relics to be found there after his *parinibbāna*.

A fourth part includes the Buddha's visits to the Mon country, to Thaton where he meets the local king, Siridhammasoka,¹¹ and to Mouttama. Unlike in the description of his stay in Arakan, in this part the reader follows the Buddha during various encounters with hermits who request him to leave some hair to be enshrined. We find a number of predictions on the kingdom of Pegu, and interspersed in the text some further predictions concerning Arakan's kings. The Buddha returns at the end from Thaton to Savatthi from where he starts his last trip to Kusinagara and the site of his *parinibbāna*.

The part of the text that concerns Arakan is remarkable for at least three reasons. First of all, we discover a stunning number of relics; over two hundred are listed for both northern and southern Arakan. There are around ninety pagodas that are mentioned in connection with the enshrinement of these relics.¹² Second, the text is remarkable in the way that it recounts, one could say, the essential "building blocks" of Arakan's dynastic and religious history as well as mythical history, ante *Buddham* and post *Buddham*, through the voice of the Buddha. Arakan's history is thus adorned with the considerable prestige of having been foreseen by the Buddha himself. A third reason is linked to the conception of the historical succession of kings in the context of Buddhist cosmology. While the legacy of the corporeal remains of Buddha underscores his continuous presence, the retelling and foretelling of Arakanese history by the Buddha places the succession of Arakanese dynasties inside a wider framework of ages in which Buddhas appear.

Some general observations need to be made regarding the form and the nature of the text. Its composite character is obvious. The parts concerning Arakan on the one hand, and the Mon country on the other, are sufficiently distinct in their descriptions, suggesting that they were originally different texts.¹³ The prose of the dialogues between the Buddha and Ananda clearly has an oral character that is found, for example, in the repetitious interjection of the name of "Ananda" between sentences, as if begging the attention of the listener. It is also apparent in the formulaic simplicity of the references to past Buddhas and Arakan's mythical past. Some emotion-laden parts of the dialogue even convey a sense of drama and we may imagine that they were read out in front of an audience. As an example, let me cite King Candasuriya's cry of despair when Lord Buddha was about to leave him:

My lord, seeing you in person fills me with enormous joy, seeing you in person fills me with plenty of good intentions. My heart will break and I will die if I will not see you again.

The Exalted One replied:

My king, why would you die from not seeing me anymore?
The Exalted One having gone, me, simple man, I will die.¹⁴

But there is not only formal repetition, but also quite a large amount of content that is repeated and reformulated in a rather disconnected way, giving an incoherent character to the text as a whole.

We find in the predictions uttered by the Buddha the stylistic traits of the prophecies typically found in Arakanese historiography. These prophecies (the *tabaung* often introduced as children's rhymes) go back to an oral tradition of presaging. Historians need to pay attention to them as they concisely shape real events that were interpreted or reinterpreted in a supernatural framework.

CONTINUITY IN THE PRESENCE OF THE BUDDHAS IN ARAKAN

This section is not concerned with the Buddhist practice of venerating relics and particular statues. The text has very little to say about that cult, but emphatically lists two hundred body relics of the Buddha that are said to be spread over Arakan. After learning about the nature of these relics and the places where they were supposedly located, we may reflect on their meaning for the Buddhists in Arakan.

Interestingly, the anonymous author of the *hpayà-thamaing* ignores the traditional account of the distribution of relics after the cremation of the Buddha's remains. His own account starts with the later meritorious action taken by the Indian king, Ashoka. In the text, Buddha tells Ananda:

Ananda, [the parts] of my bones, my skin and my flesh are numerous. [When you ask] why they are numerous, [I will answer that] I lived many lives. King Dhammasoka will put [the parts of] my bones, my skin, and my flesh at the places where I lived in 84,000 reliquaries and *zeidi*.

“Bones, skin, and flesh” is the standard expression used in the text to refer to the Buddha's relics in general. The use of such an expression is surprising and counter-intuitive. It challenges the idea that a cremation would have reduced the Buddha's body to the round, pearl-like remains that relics of holy men are often described to be.¹⁵ Hair and tooth relics are not very prominent among the relics to be found in Arakan.¹⁶ While “hair” is generally put into the category of the “relics of the still-living Buddha” (STRONG 2004, 70), nowhere in the part of the text that concerns Arakan is there any mention that Buddha was requested by a faithful follower to leave behind any hair. As it is not clearly stated that the Buddha left any hair to a devotee during his visit, the hair relics in Arakan should be considered as part of the *parinibbānic* relics. The contrast is striking with the later part of the *hpayà-thamaing* that deals with Lower Burma (or the Mon country), where all the relics that are mentioned are exclusively hair relics given by the Buddha to hermits during his stay there.¹⁷

The full list contains not only a great variety of relics, but an even greater variety of Arakanese terms to refer to them.¹⁸ Sometimes the text boasts anatomic detail; sometimes its terminology is extremely vague.¹⁹ Four different expressions refer to the relatively abundant relics of the cheek or parts of it, though the spelling

of the terms makes a clear differentiation of their meaning difficult. The same is true for terms referring to the hip or the ribs. On the other hand, for terms used for relics of the head (or skull) that top the list of the bodily relics, it is often not clear what part of the head or skull is meant, or with what intention synonymous terms are used—translations such as “top part of the head,” “foremost part of the head,” “forehead,” “base of the skull,” or honorific expressions for the head such as “noble top” sound a bit helpless. There are close to a dozen references for each of the various types of bones—of joints, of the calf, of the arm, of parts of the knee, the eye, the cheek, the chin, the nose—and in a somewhat lower number, we find relics of the testicles, the hands, the eyes, the fingers, and the palate. Many kinds of bodily relics appear only once or a few times. This is the case for all the “soft” body parts such as the lungs, the liver, the stomach, the intestinal tube, the penis, the navel, the tongue, or the Adam’s apple. The Arakanese terms are sometimes different from the corresponding Burmese terms and mostly cannot be found in present-day dictionaries, a fact which makes their identification difficult. In half a dozen cases, even local Arakanese scholars could not identify the bodily parts referred to, so that we are left to speculate on their possible meaning.²⁰ Two relics have to be singled out among the lot, because they cannot be properly classified as bodily parts in the conventional sense: one is a relic of Buddha’s phlegm,²¹ and the other is a relic of the placenta of Buddha’s birth.

For an Arakanese devotee, the message conveyed by this extensive list of 239 relics must have been clear: Arakan is a land cherished by Gotama Buddha as he had lived there many times, and would graciously provide for his continuing presence there through the arrival of relics after his *parinibbāna*. The presence of relics in such a great number powerfully underscores the physical connectedness of Arakan with the Buddha and his teaching.

The brief description of the relics demonstrates how apocryphal, in a word, this *hpaya-thamaing* is, as it seems to have been conceived in an isolated spot and largely disconnected even from the prevalent Pāli tradition. But this is true to a certain degree only. In a few replies to Ananda, for example, that appear later in the text, the Buddha explains that after his *parinibbāna*, two of his eyeteeth would be kept in Sri Lanka, one kept by Indra (in *Tāvātimsa* heaven), and one by a Chinese king, which looks like a borrowing (though a confused one) from the account of the division of the relics as found in the *Dīgha Nikāya*.²²

According to this *hpaya-thamaing*, the corporeal presence of the Buddha in the form of his 239 relics is not limited to a few holy places; it extends over a vast area. The geographical extension of this area cannot be exactly reconstructed.²³ But the directions (“north,” “south,” “east,” “west,” “near that mountain,” and so on) that are given in the text, together with the names of the locations of the relics, show that in the mind of the author, the Buddha had lived in earlier existences all over Arakan. In a first section giving eighty-seven locations of his former existences, it is not said in which direction the Buddha looks when he speaks, but we can assume that the text refers to places around Sirigutta mound where the

Buddha landed with his followers. In a second section, the Buddha looks to the western side of the Kaladan river²⁴ and enumerates seventy locations; in a third section, he looks towards the north, indicating nine locations; then, in a fourth section, he indicates four locations towards the east; and finally, twenty-nine locations towards the south.

A schematic representation of these directions and the approximate locations leads to interesting conclusions. When we analyze their geographic distribution and the clusters that many of them form (there are several sequences of “near that mountain, there is...”), we find that the description matches quite well with Arakan’s topographic outlay and the areas of human occupancy. The graphic representation of the list found in the first section strongly suggests the heartland of the upper Kaladan valley, including the major sites of early and late Arakanese civilization: Dhaññavati, Vesali, and Mrauk-U, (possibly not excluding the Lemro valley cities, though this is less clear). The representation of the seventy sites of the second section shows a distinctly northwestern course which again matches with Arakan’s mountainous and coastal geography and clearly points towards southeastern Bengal.²⁵ There are few locations indicated in the north and the east, which is not surprising as these mountainous areas are not inhabited by the majority of Arakanese Buddhists who live in the plains. The relatively higher number of locations towards the south points to the lower Kaladan and Lemro river valleys and possibly to places further south along the coast as well. This analysis shows that what appears initially as an imaginary list of place names was, in the mind of its compiler, a representation of the civilized or, one may say, “Buddhicized” parts of Arakan. The relics as such do not merely sanctify the land, they mark the territorial appropriation of the land by the Buddha and his teaching and thus define the topography of a fully “Buddhicized” territory. In addition to this religious and supernatural dimension, there is also a down-to-earth political dimension contained in the presence of the relics, as they were spread all over the places where the Arakanese kings had been or were reigning. For our understanding of this *hpayà-thamaing*, it is important to notice this pervasive territorial presence of the relics as it appears as more important than any kind of proper relic veneration. Again, all this is in marked contrast with the part of the text concerning the Mon country in which no such outline of territorial appropriation can be found.

The widespread distribution of the relics also shows how this *hpayà-thamaing* localizes the presence of Buddhism by adapting the “relic” cult to the need to assert the roots of Buddhism in Arakan. At the same time, it links its continuity during the full cycle of five thousand years to the succession of kings who reigned over Arakan.

The relics in the text are presented in connection with the former existences of the Buddha in Arakan. They are divided into 65 human existences and 178 animal existences.²⁶ These multiple existences corroborate the idea that the bodhisatta was attached to the land of Arakan and they thus form an important element in the process of representing the accommodation of Buddhism in Arakan. It is difficult

to comment on these existences, but one should perhaps not shy away from the idea that, in the mind of the author, there was some kind of rationalization of the fact that, for example, most of Buddha's earlier animal existences were as birds (88 birds of various kinds out of 178).²⁷ It is also possible that there is a numerological strategy hidden in the numbers of the various existences as we find in the bas-relief representation of *jataka* animal figures of the sixteenth century in Shitthaung Temple in Mrauk-U.²⁸

Relics, and having former existences in Arakan, were but one way to convey the message that the Buddha cherished Arakan. The most prominent connection between the Buddha and Arakan is the Mahamuni statue, which has been Myanmar's most famous Buddha statue for over two hundred years. This statue was taken away from Arakan after the conquest of the kingdom in 1785 and took up residence in the eponymous pagoda in Amarapura. Scholarly attention to the biography of this statue has generally limited itself to the flowery Burmese accounts and the particular status of the statue in Central Burma.²⁹ For historians of Arakan and Arakanese Buddhists alike, the establishment of the Mahamuni statue in Arakan forms the mythical founding moment of Arakanese Buddhism. According to the legend, when Buddha arrived in Arakan,³⁰ he was invited by King Candasuriya to his palace. At the moment the Enlightened One wanted to leave, the king kindly requested him to let him make a life-size statue. The Buddha gave his consent and a statue was made.³¹ The Buddha blew life into the statue and told his "younger brother" to stay on until the end of the cycle of five thousand years. The statue is said to have received the name of "Mahamuni" or "Candasara."

In our text, the Buddha makes some important statements regarding his "younger brother" Mahamuni. First he explains that the statue must suffer the consequences of a vile act that the Buddha committed in a former life as a king on the island of Cheduba (or Man-aung, off the coast of Arakan).³² This is an extraordinary example of a transfer of demerit as it pertains to a statue said to be life-like. Then the Buddha tells his audience at the court of King Candasuriya:

Seeing all the beings who are worthy to be freed [from the fetters of ignorance], I set them free. There is no reason to come to meet all the people who are not worthy to be freed. For that reason, my younger brother will not exist as I do. He will stay silent.

He also makes it known that his "younger brother" has special powers. While departing for Dvaravati, he states:

Younger brother, after going my way from this country to the next, before long, I will pass into *parinibbāna*. My younger brother, as you are fully formed like me, may you have an exceptional miraculous power, may the *Sāsana* that I have established last forever. Let it be established for men, gods, and Brahmas alike.

According to one version of the Arakanese legend, the statue was later partially broken, a thigh being broken off, and damaged at the back by invading troops, this being interpreted as the effect of the transfer of demerit. The invading troops—not

mentioned by name in the text—are generally said in Arakanese historiography to have been the Pyu and Talaing (Mon) troops of the Pagan king Alaungsithu who tried to carry away the statue. Other versions state that the statue was ruined by the invaders who tried to melt it, or, as this account has it, thrown into a creek and drowned in the sea. But this is just one dramatic episode in the Mahamuni's biography. The statue resurfaces miraculously in the reign of Dasaraja, a famous king whose reign is dated, with some imprecision and on no firm grounds, to the twelfth century.³³ In one statement, the Buddha declares that “King Suriyacanda (=Candasuriya!) will be Dasaraja,” implying a “rebirth” connection between the king who had the statue made, and the king who later found it—magically or by destiny!

One easily sees that the life-story of the Mahamuni not only establishes a particular connection between the teaching of the Buddha and Arakan during this five-thousand-year cycle of existence, but also an emotional tie between the Lord Buddha and the Arakanese court, and by extension all the Arakanese faithful who were favored to live and flourish in the shadow of the eminent statue. The Mahamuni is not the only powerful statue referred to in this *hpayà-thamaing*. Besides Buddha statues made later through the initiative of King Ashoka, the Exalted One also announces the making of a statue by King Koliya, the father of Dasaraja, out of a block of stone named Nandasela. The creation of this statue is linked to the foundation of the city of Parein (or Purin), a capital in the Lemro period (twelfth to fifteenth centuries).

But the arrival of Gotama Buddha and the creation of the Mahamuni should actually not be seen, according to the text, as the foundational acts of establishing the Buddhist *Sāsana* in Arakan. As the Buddha explains several times in his dialogue with Ananda, he did not come to Dhaññavati, the capital of King Candasuriya, to establish the *Sāsana*. There was no need to do so as it had already been established by the former Buddhas of the present era, Gotama's “elder brothers” Kakkusam, Gonagum, and Kassapa.³⁴ This is the reason, says Buddha, why his *Sāsana* will flourish in Arakan. The presence of former Buddhas in the country may thus be considered as the third important element that underscores the continuity of the presence of the *Sāsana* in Arakan.

Our *hpayà-thamaing* contains only a few references to these former Buddhas. It is said that they gave the name of Dhaññavati to the fertile country of Arakan because of its excellent rice. They went to Dvaravati in southern Arakan, too. It is also stated that an Arakanese king had a statue made of Kassapa Buddha in his time, that Kakkusam spent one of his annual monsoon [season] retreats near the later city of Mrauk-U, and that Gonagum delivered an ogre from the fetters of ignorance in a place called Mount Pokkharanandacula. Gotama Buddha himself had lived as a hermit on the western side of the Kaladan River in the time of Kassapa.

In sum, we have seen in this section how the text localizes the Buddhist tradition and its presence in Arakan. The diffusion of the relics defines a particular geographical pattern of religious significance roughly coextending with the land of

the Arakanese kings. Hidden in unknown places or well-known,³⁵ the presence of the relics reveals the Buddha's attachment to Arakan. The relics consecrate Arakan as a repository of the *Sāsana*, as a blessed land where former Buddhas lived and where Gotama Buddha in particular lived many lives. Together with the eminent statue of the Mahamuni, the relics also point to the future, encompassing the full cycle of five thousand years. The Mahamuni will be with you until the end of this cycle: this is the morally comforting message that the Buddha left to his Arakanese audience. But this message was not only telling the Arakanese audience that the legacy of the Buddhas would always be there: it was also creating an appealing framework to integrate local history, a subject we will investigate in the next section.

LOCAL HISTORY AND BUDDHA HISTORY

LOPEZ (2002, 34) notes that “we find in Buddhist literature a rather pronounced reluctance to deal with beginnings or ends.” This must have been a matter of discomfort for those who, like Arakanese kings, were looking beyond the philosophical questions of the finitude or the infinity of *samsāra* for their own place in the evolving order of things. Apocryphal texts like the *hpaya-thamaing* not only perform the localization of Buddhism in a religious sense, they also reply to more mundane requests such as accommodating local history with its dynastic beginnings and breaks.

The text defines, as we have seen above, a map of the continuous presence of the Buddha that appropriates a territory within the line of the Buddhas of the present cosmic cycle (*kappa*). Inside this orthodox cosmological timeframe, the author of the text then embeds the historically constituted eventful time of local kings. In his dialogue with Ananda, the Buddha recalls the essential building blocks of Arakan's mythological past, and he announces the succession of future dynasties and the foundation of new capitals using astrological metaphors for the kings.

Reality as a world of both belief and experience is thus defined with regard to two levels: a cosmological level of Buddha cycles in which Arakan appears as a favored spot; and a local level of royal lines of succession where Arakanese kings are morally bound toward the teachings of the Buddhas. While the representation of the cosmological level conveys a sense of stability, the down-on-earth record of royal lineage expresses instability and even perhaps a sense of unpredictability. It is this hierarchic construction of an emotionally distant, cosmological level, and a local and essentially familiar level, that allows for a sense of historical consciousness and continuity. The link between these two levels is Gotama Buddha himself, as his voice authoritatively tells us of things of the past and things to come.

A cornerstone of Arakan's mythological past is the story of Vasudeva and his brothers, who are generally called the Dasabalika in the Arakanese tradition. This is a local adaptation and development of a part of the account of the “Andhakavenhudasaputta” (a chapter on family genealogy) as found in the Ghatapandita-*jataka*.³⁶

In the Arakanese context, the story accounts for the conquest of Dvaravati by the ten brothers. After the death of the ten brothers, their sister Anñjanadevi fled with a *purroheit* Brahmin to the city-state of Vesali in the Kaladan valley where both were chosen as king and queen by the local people. The localization of the Dasabalika story connects Arakan to an Indian Buddhist background through the adaptation of a Buddhist *jataka* story that allows the Arakanese kings to lay claim to one more connection with mythical Indian royalty.

The references to Arakanese history in the text all appear in Buddha's answers to Ananda's questions. We learn about successions of kings who qualify either as meritorious kings who let the *Sāsana* flourish or as bad kings, who abused the monks, ruined Buddha statues, and are promised to go to hell. Strikingly, the Buddha's successive statements on the kings reveal violent and brutal but nameless kings whose existences come in stark contrast with a land so much favored by the bodhisatta's earlier presence. The Buddha lists several series of kings who are referred to by the weekdays on which they were born or by the names of the animals linked to these particular days of the week.³⁷ To try to identify them with kings mentioned in the chronicles, one would have to know the corresponding weekdays of their birth. The only record of such weekdays is found in Candamala-lankara's *New Chronicle of Rakhaing*, which provides, at the end of the record of each reign of the Mrauk-U dynasty (1404–1785), the days on which the kings were born. A comparison of the data of the *hpayà-thamaing* with the list of Arakanese kings does not lead to any conclusive evidence that allows us to clearly identify a series of kings or particular individuals; just a few dates appear in the text, but some of these were probably tampered with in the nineteenth century.³⁸ Nonetheless it is important to note that they roughly point to the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and we may rightly assume that much of the picture of doom that is alluded to in Buddha's predictions can indeed be made sense of for the late Mrauk-U period.

To be sure, something such as this does not match with the old positivist notion of "history." But "history" it is, because "history" is first of all an intellectual effort to come to terms with one's place in space and time. As such, it is concerned with representing and reconstructing one's past with constant reference to one's present sense of reality, experience, and system of beliefs. Following the way that Michael Aris describes Tibetan historiography, we should be attentive to the "historical mode" of Arakan where "mythical events were remembered and recorded as 'history'" (ARIS 1997, 9–10). Such a representation does not only express a system of mythical beliefs; it must also consolidate a known factual record because the underlying purpose is to connect present and past institutions. For the Arakanese elite, the lists of successions of kings that they knew about in their times were linked to origins that ideally connected their kings with the Sakya clan of Gotama Buddha, and this established a fully coherent time structure in their minds. While the politically eventful is neither absent nor fully present as it is veiled in a metaphoric language or comes in a supernatural guise, the fundamental lack of political

stability is compensated for by the powerful utterances of the Buddha, who is able to foresee the future. In the way that it establishes the origins of dynasties and defines foundational moments in time, such “history” is built on myths whose analysis lies beyond the traditional analytical field of the historian. As for the record of later “historical” kings, they pass a moral evaluation screen and are categorized according to their record of merits. Political history is thus fundamentally reduced to an illustration of the law of moral retribution, as kings are either bound for hell or destined to go to the realm of the gods.³⁹ The issue of political ethics can be briefly illustrated by the following quotation. To Ananda’s question: “Who are upright kings? Who are the kings who are not upright?” the Buddha replies:

Ananda, upright kings are those who make many donations, whose power and glory is great and who are full of energy. Because they honor the *Sāsana*, their power and glory is enormous. It is because they do not ill treat the *Sāsana*, that their power is great. As for kings who are not upright, they are not upright because their donations are inconsequential. They oppress and treat badly my *Sāsana*. That is why their merit is not great and why they have no power.⁴⁰

The Buddha’s utterances thus stress the virtue of generosity and benevolence towards the Sangha. Elsewhere, virtuous kings are once more defined as those who make merit by donations to the Buddhas, the Pacceka Buddhas, and the Sangha; establish statues of the Buddha; observe the five moral precepts; and make the *Sāsana* flourish. These kings may be reborn in the world of the gods.

I have already hinted at the fact that according to this *hpaya-thamaing*, good and virtuous kings in Arakan belonged to the “distant past” rather than to the “more recent past.” The first capitals of Dhaññavati and Vesali, as well as the later capitals of Sambhavak and Parein, are generally connected with the reigns of virtuous, glorious, and powerful kings. On the other hand, about a dozen mentions of abuse of Buddha statues and the oppression of monks can be approximately related to the later Mrauk-U period. The abuse of the monks under such bad kings is compared four times with the mistreatment of the hermit by Vasudeva and his brothers in Dvaravati, as stated in the mythological account mentioned above.⁴¹

One quotation may illustrate the gloomy impression of corruption and decline that pervades the predictions. After announcing the arrival on the throne of a “Wednesday-born man” from the south, the Buddha goes on to say:

Ananda, at that time my monks will be tortured and abused. People will be threatened by knives and spears and they will go to hell. Ananda, the king of that time will have a short life and little power. The country will be destroyed. The people will have short lives, too, and they will perish.... Later the people will slay each other. They will not stop to “eat and drink” gold, silver, and precious stones; in Rakkhapura [Arakan], ten villages will unite to attack a single one. Having attacked it, they will destroy the Buddha statues and “eat” them (= melt the gold and spend it?). They will oppress and abuse the monks and their students.

The analysis of the parts of the text detailing the former lives of Buddha in Arakan, on the one hand, and the overall impression of political decline and moral corruption among the later kings, on the other, leave the reader with an ambivalent picture. Arakan, a land treasured by the Buddhas, appears as a kingdom where the latest rulers lacked the power and even the will to pay respect to the monks and to the Buddha's teaching. This general impression thus raises questions regarding the purpose and the meaning as well as possible interpretations of this *hpayà-thamaing*.

A POLITICAL INTERPRETATION

The *hpayà-thamaing* can be read from an anthropological point of view as a complex expression of local culture. It can also be understood from a religious studies' point of view with regard to the cult of relics and the way that Buddhism was inculturated in Arakan. The interpretation suggested below follows a different course. Looking at this particular *hpayà-thamaing* as an eighteenth-century composition, I argue that it is best understood as politically significant both in terms of its contents (what the text says) and in terms of its existence (the text being a literary product of its time). Recalling the decline of Arakan's kingship in the second half of the eighteenth century, I will try to link the account of relics and predictions in the text to the decades of distress that preceded the Burmese conquest.

The reasons for this preferred interpretation should be clarified. As a broader scholarly interest in Arakanese and Burmese *thaik-sa* (buried treasure) literature and relic accounts has yet to emerge, one is unable to connect this text to an ongoing textual tradition on relics in Arakan, and it would be difficult to extrapolate any aspects of relic veneration in Buddhist Arakan based on this text. I consider that this *hpayà-thamaing* was written at a certain moment to fulfil a particular need that had more to do with the desolate political and social conditions of Arakan than with matters of religious devotion. I will argue in particular that one purpose that sustains the text was a quest for legitimacy on behalf of Arakan's contemporary Buddhist rulers.

LEGITIMACY AND POLITICAL CONTINGENCY

I have already noted that the *hpayà-thamaing* expresses a religiously satisfying message as the long list of places of former existences and relics defines a sacred geography of the Buddha's presence. Moreover, the embedding of Arakan's local genealogy of kings into the macrocosmic sphere of succeeding Buddhas conveys a feeling of collective Arakanese identity, as the gap between these two dimensions is bridged by the person of the omniscient Buddha who himself visited Arakan and foretells the succession of royal dynasties.

These conclusions also make sense politically. The law of retribution that governs the life of kings cannot be dissociated from political reali-

ties. This becomes particularly clear as the vast panorama of Arakan's cycles of kings ends with the description of killings, corruption, and the dereliction of religious duties towards the kings. However, while it is important to stress the link between Buddhist concepts and beliefs and the ideological and political use made of these concepts in the practice of government and in the representation of such practices, we do not find in this text any clear reference to a monarchic ideal. In the case of the Arakanese Buddhist monarchy, it is true that the concept of the *Cakkavatti* king, an ideal often claimed to be representative of Theravāda Buddhist monarchical thought over the centuries,⁴² does not appear in any of the written literary or epigraphic sources.

What can be safely stated is that Buddhism was, in Arakan as elsewhere, a constitutional element of the political system, as it provided a tool of legitimacy to the one who held power. It valued the position of the power holder with reference to his accumulated capital of merit and assigned him, inside the Buddhist value system, a meaningful task of protecting and sustaining the Sangha and insuring the propagation and extension of the Buddhist *Sāsana*. That is why we look at Theravāda Buddhism not only as a religion of ascetic ideals and of popular practices, but also as the representation in Southeast Asian history of a “political system” shaped by each state where it became dominant.⁴³

Besides the law of karma, this fabricated genealogy works as a second tool of legitimacy. The *hpayà-thamaing* states the unique political legitimacy of the Arakanese kings as transmitted in the Arakanese chronicle tradition. Their origins were not only linked to the Sakya (Brm: Saki) clan of Lord Buddha, but also to an exiled Indian Brahmin who became king in Vesali, to an Indian king in exile whose son refounded Dhañāvati and, through their ancestor Marayu, even to the gods themselves.⁴⁴ King Candasuriya is further shown in the text to have been a devoted supporter of the bodhisatta in his former lives.

The Mahamuni statue established another base of legitimacy as it was founded with the express purpose to support “a line of great and prominent kings” and was indeed for several hundred years of Arakanese history the kingdom's paragon and its major tool of political legitimacy. This political legitimacy of the Arakanese kings is further emphasized by the privileged link that the land of Arakan had, not only with Gotama Buddha, but also with the three former Buddhas of the present cosmic age. The original contribution of the *hpayà-thamaing* to this legitimating strategy finally lies in the long list of relics and pagodas.

The quest for legitimating the royal succession is indeed so strong in this text that one gets the impression of an over-legitimizing zeal. In this way, the text is also rather exceptional. Such an extensive and imaginative list of relics in particular is neither found nor referred to in other Arakanese sources.⁴⁵ This quest for legitimacy can best be explained within the context of political disruption in eighteenth-century Arakan when Arakanese princes, local governors, and military chiefs, some of Muslim Indian or Persian descent, others of Mon origin, rivaled each other and competed for the exercise of power. Political instability is reflected

by increasingly brief reigns that were in stark contrast with the glorious past of the former Arakanese dynasties.

The Buddhist credentials of the Arakanese kings are further ennobled by the adaptation of a faintly historical episode that involves King Ashoka. Traditionally, the story is told in connection to a king, Man Saw Mwan, who, in the early fifteenth century, after some twenty years in exile, went out to look for an appropriate site to found a new capital. This new capital, named Mrauk-U, was allegedly founded in 1430.⁴⁶ In the text of the *hpayà-thamaing*, this episode is attributed to Ashoka, the famous Maurya emperor and model king of the Buddhist literary tradition, who learns about the name of the site of Mrauk-U during a visit to Arakan.⁴⁷

The component parts of a legitimizing strategy rejoin what I mentioned previously regarding the way that local history integrates and develops a narrative strain adopted from the Ghatapandita-*jataka*, and forms a web of cultural and literary cross-references that does not essentialize “religion” as the legitimizing institution, but creates a culturally autonomous expression of both religious and political conditions in Arakan.⁴⁸

While they were tools of legitimacy and built prestige, relics were also supernatural sources of protection in an uncertain world. In Western Europe, they assumed their most important role in the period from the ninth to the eleventh centuries. When centralized governments there reasserted themselves in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, the protective role ascribed to the relics began to diminish. The Arakan of the eighteenth century may be described as a kingdom that had been socially and politically weakened. Since the seventeenth century, the number of foreign mercenaries (Portuguese, Indians) in Arakan’s troops had become considerable. More numerous even were the soldiers in the palace guard that were descended from Mon prisoners of war. The number of Bengali slaves in the service of the court was still important up to the second half of the eighteenth century. When the central power of the court was weak or completely broke down—as was the case between 1685 and 1710 as well as after 1774—armed bands of mercenaries and soldiers roamed the countryside and pillaged the villages. Well before the Burmese conquest of 1785, society and the political order were in crisis and Arakanese were fleeing their country for safety abroad. Recalling—perhaps with some nostalgia—the glorious moment of the Buddha’s visit to Arakan and the ongoing presence of his known or even unknown relics on the soil of Arakan, provided some measure of hope and comfort to an Arakanese audience who lived in a world that had lost its political and social balance.

As we have seen, there is, besides the legitimizing discourse, a moral voice that records and reprimands the dereliction of religious duties. In fact, it is impossible to evaluate how much of what is suggested in this *hpayà-thamaing* is factually true as the chronicle literature simply does not tell us anything about the abuse of the monkhood, the lack of donations at places of worship or the destruction of valuable Buddha statues. But however we may evaluate the sketchy portrait of a troubled time, from its own perspective, the *hpayà-thamaing* suggests that such

unworthy and violent kings could not claim any legitimacy consistent with Arakan's claim as a land of the Buddhas.

SOCIAL CRISIS, POLITICAL IDENTITY, AND FRONTIER BUDDHISM:
REFLECTIONS ON THE CONDITIONS OF TEXT PRODUCTION

In the eighteenth century, the Arakanese kingdom was a mere shadow of its former greatness. Its political and economic decline went back to the loss of the port of Chittagong in 1666 and became manifest after the reign of King Candasudhammaraja (1652–1684), when the country entered two decades of chaos and inner political strife. The power of the monarchs recovered somewhat during the reign of King Candavijayaraja (1710–1731), but only one of his successors (Nara Abhayaraja, 1743–1761) could ensure a stable government that was once more strong enough to launch attacks against Bengal and Lower Burma.⁴⁹ In between and after, numerous kings and usurpers took power, emptied the royal treasury, and established Arakan's late reputation as a robber state that encouraged coastal piracy in the Bay of Bengal (LEIDER 1998b). In the ten years before the Burmese conquest, the whole country was divided among local and foreign pretenders bent on fighting each other to take possession of the palace in Mrauk-U.

Against this background of overt political instability, we have shown that our text carries politically meaningful messages as it provides critical arguments concerning the legitimacy of power. Kings had a particular need to justify themselves as there was no ultimate source of legitimacy. Once we shift our approach to a political point of view, it is likely to change our perception of the text as a whole. While a very first reading of what appears essentially as a long list of predictions on relics uttered by the Buddha himself suggested a text of a purely religious nature, a thorough analysis has brought forward a different perception of the *hpayà-thamaing* as a “political” or “historical” text in religious garb rather than a “religious” text with political and historical overtones.

This shift from a religiously-minded field of literary production to a politically-tinged field naturally emphasizes a set of questions that have hitherto received little attention in our investigation. In the preceding section, we have stressed two functions of the *hpayà-thamaing*: on the one hand, it reflects the deteriorating political conditions in the latest period of Arakan's history, as well as the decline of religious standards; on the other hand, it reminds us of a glorious past in which Arakan is extolled as a preferred destination of the Buddhas. We may wonder who framed these messages and who the addressees of such messages were. For whom was this text useful, interesting, and reassuring? And what place does this text take in the context of other texts produced in eighteenth-century Arakan?

As Arakanese history during the later Mrauk-U period is less well documented than earlier periods, the answers suggested here stem from an effort of contextualization, a method that in the case of Arakanese studies has considerable drawbacks as it often relies as much on the art of contriving arguments and hypotheses as on

a poor record of textual and factual evidence. But contextualization is essential and “the scholar as contextualizer must in the end be a myth maker, spinning tales of reason, truth, and history, in virtue of which the actions ... of persons elsewhere and else when may become somehow more intelligible for us than they would have been otherwise” as Matthew KAPSTEIN puts it (2000, 3–4).

Arakan never produced a genre of royal chronicle writing such as we find in Konbaung Burma, or in the Siam of the Chakri dynasty.⁵⁰ One reason for this is that these “classic” chronicles were royally sponsored collective works of the early nineteenth century and that Arakan had disappeared as an independent Buddhist monarchy by 1785. What historians generally refer to as Arakanese “chronicles” (*yazawan*; Pāli: *rājavamsa*) are either late eighteenth- or nineteenth-century works that are in fact not “chronicles” in the usual sense, but twentieth-century motley compilations of historiographic materials. The eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century texts built on two distinct traditions of royal records: (1) an annalistic tradition of royal genealogies with a greatly varying record of detailed information on particular reigns; and (2) a tradition of “wise minister speeches,” the so called *shauk thòn*.⁵¹ The term “tradition” has to be understood as an active process of writing, rewriting, copying, and transmitting texts which lay for centuries in the hands of an elite of highly educated court members. We cannot define an exact profile of this group, whose members fulfilled various functions at the court, such as royal advisors, astrologers, ministers, secretaries, archivists, or readers of letters at the court audiences. The addressees of these men’s writings were other members of the court elite, the king, the princes, ministers, members of the established families who staffed the posts of governors, and military commands not excluding the monastic elite connected to the court. Historiography was an intra-elite discourse. The *hpayà-thamaing* discussed in this article has to be situated in such an intra-elite context.

After the conquest of Arakan, Bodawphaya (or Badon), the Burmese king, sent missions of monks to Arakan to reform local monastic practice. One of these monks, Ashin Kavissarabhi, was posted to Thandwe in southern Arakan (the “Dvaravati” of the *hpayà-thamaing*). Possibly at the request of the court at Amarapura, he collected sources of historical interest, and in 1787 compiled them in a work which is mainly a collection of *shauk thòn*. Most of the manuscript copies of Arakanese texts that are today found in major Burmese libraries such as the National Library, the library of the Myanmar Historical Commission (formerly at Amara Hall) or the Universities Central Library at Yangon University are collections of *shauk thòn* of various lengths.⁵² Looking at the archival record, I have good reason to believe that the *shauk thòn* tradition was of particular importance in Arakan in the late eighteenth century. My basic argument here is that in a period of instability, power competition, and limited resources, only things that were important to the king and the court elite would still be written down and transmitted. If a Burmese monk could not come up with much more than a collection of *shauk thòn* drawn from local libraries in the 1780s and if we, today, can mostly point to palm leaf

manuscripts and published books containing such texts, the *shauk thòn* as a genre must have been particularly important at that time. *Shauk thòn* are practical texts that give advice and they would have proved useful to their elite readers. They contain references to wise sayings often quoted in Pāli and drawn from the *niti* tradition. They are attributed to a genealogy of wise ministers (*pyinnya-shi-amat*) who the counselors of the Arakanese kings in the eighteenth century considered as their ancestors.⁵³ The way they are framed gives them the authority of ancient tradition and established custom. For their readers in a time of trouble, they must have had a touch of secular experience and inherited wisdom. My hypothesis with regard to Arakanese literature is that these *shauk thòn* collections were definitely literary products of the eighteenth century. Their materials—the precedents and cases they contained—may often have been older, but the shape in which they have been brought to us is best explained in the eighteenth-century context of political and social crisis.

One may work out that inside the ruling elite, the ongoing crisis of the Arakanese state raised questions of the legitimacy of the royal incumbents as well as practical questions of how to govern according to established custom. In the midst of breaks in the dynastic succession, of usurpers taking power and weak kings being constantly challenged—a context that we have sketched in the preceding sections—both our *hpayà-thamaing* and the *shauk thòn* served to uphold tradition and continuity in a kingdom that proudly remembered its great past. Unfortunately we know nothing about the author of this *hpayà-thamaing*, the exact date, or the history of the text. But this text in particular may be seen as a reaction by a member of the elite to the political crisis and as the expression of a troubled conscience confronted by a breakdown of the social order.

The interpretation of the text in connection to its political context does not distract from the fact that the *hpayà-thamaing* is still primarily a Buddhist text in the way that it is concerned with the presence of the Buddha, his teachings, and his followers in Arakan. In what it tells its audience, it stresses the Buddhist identity of Arakan and its kings. From the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, Buddhism in Arakan was always in a dominant position as it was the religion of both the elite and the majority of the population, but it was nonetheless in a special situation due to Arakan's frontier position with Muslim India. Arakan's frontier Buddhism was part of the resistance to the political challenge of the sultanate of Bengal and its flourishing Islamic culture and, later on, to the hostile Mughal governors; the phenomena of syncretism remained marginal.⁵⁴ One of the striking features of the Arakanese historiography of the Mrauk-U period is the fact that the military importance of Portuguese mercenaries in the Arakanese fleets is ignored, and that the presence of Muslim ministers and poets at the court in the seventeenth century has been left out.⁵⁵ The same holds true for the pitiless slave trade that contributed a sizeable share to Arakan's prosperity until the eighteenth century. Arakanese historical literature is culturally one-eyed, and narrowly focused on expressing in Buddhist concepts royal genealogies that fully conform

to a Buddhist framework.⁵⁶ One could interpret this self-representation as a rejection of the Other, or as a self-protective strategy of cultural exclusiveness.⁵⁷ One cannot fail to recognize the uncompromisingly conservative nature of this literature. In substance, the staunchly Buddhist identification cannot be separated from the political self-affirmation of the Arakanese.

Keeping this background in mind, it is easier to evaluate the style and the contents of the *hpayà-thamaing*. The prose of the text is unsophisticated, it has weakly developed coherence, and on the whole the text is both confusing and repetitive in the way the dialogue between Buddha and Ananda develops. Earlier, we pointed to the incoherent composition of the text and its oral, unrefined way of expression. The presentation of the relics proceeds in a quasi-mechanical order without a single reference to the virtues of the relics or their magical properties. We find no proper religious discourse that could edify a reader or stimulate his piety, or any eulogizing of the kings with regard to their works of merit (besides King Candasuriya himself). While there are a few examples of monastic corruption, the monks mainly appear as the mute recipients of royal generosity or, just as often, as the victims of torture and abuse by the kings. They are not even presented as the bearers of orthodox religious teachings. Buddhism is thus neither presented as a set of disciplines for ascetics, nor as a source of spiritual guidance for the common people. It is basically the expression of a moral law that regulates the destinies of kings,⁵⁸ and a discourse that identifies Arakan as an unchangeably, intrinsically Buddhist space.⁵⁹

APOCRYPHAL AUTHORITY

The purpose of this article is to show how an apocryphal text that relates the conversation between the Buddha and Ananda during the Buddha's visit to Arakan and Lower Burma establishes its authority. The "authority" at issue here is a moral authority regarding the country's Buddhist roots and its later history. It is in no way concerned with any matter of doctrinal authority concerning the dhamma or the *vinaya*. This allows us to dispense with an evaluation of the text referring to the criteria of textual authenticity established by traditional Buddhist scholarship (LAMOTTE 1949; DAVIDSON 1990). The issue of "moral authority" has to be seen in relation to the audience at which the text was aimed. We have shown that the text can be set in a context of critical social and political conditions that helps us to understand its composition and the meanings conveyed. But was it efficient in terms of its underlying political rhetoric? As an intra-elite discourse, was it credible, convincing, and did it reach its audience?

Answers to these questions can only be approximate. No average Arakanese Buddhist would have ever doubted that Lord Buddha had visited Arakan. But the creative appropriation of the relic cult, the integration of particular *jatakas*, and the biography of King Ashoka are taken to some extremes in the text. The question is how astounding this was for an Arakanese living in a secluded and some-

what forgotten kingdom, in the middle of political trouble and relative insecurity. In the eighteenth century, Arakan, squeezed between the rough seas of the Bay of Bengal and the steep and jungly mountain chains of the Arakan Yoma, was an isolated piece of land, deliberately shutting itself off from Bengal in the west and faced with a culturally akin but hostile Burma in the east. Did anybody raise the obvious point that if the Buddha's body had been cremated, no piece of his flesh could have been recovered to be enshrined as a relic in Arakan? We have stressed several times that this is not a text of subtleties and literary refinement. As the context of its composition was indeed not a time of subtle arguments, it was possibly neither a time for critical voices.

There are some claims to be brought forward to argue that the *hpayà-thamaing* could establish its authority in the eyes and ears of its audience. By historicizing the text and connecting it to an eighteenth century local context, we have been able to emphasize that, despite its puzzling lack of formal and literary qualities, the text produces a consistent and meaningful discourse. It firmly builds on the common knowledge of an Arakanese about his country's historical past, with its legends and myths, and on the moral education provided by its Buddhist culture. Anything suggested or hinted at in this local context could be confidently embraced by a local public. In Arakan's "chronicle" literature, we never find mention of Buddha statements regarding the Mrauk-U period kings as predictions, and the interpretation of signs is generally ascribed to wise ministers. There is a clear attempt in the *hpayà-thamaing* to endow its contents with a higher degree of authority by ascribing them to the Buddha himself, whose omniscience overruled doubts. The predictions of the Buddha cannot, in fact, raise any legitimate objection despite the absence of a narrative that would account for historical contingency. The adoption and development of *jataka* stories in an Arakanese context form part of the process of accommodation of Buddhism that we refer to as "localization." Localization also provided an unquestioned environment where social and political change threatening the world view of the members of a community could gain a coherent explanation and be integrated in the larger mental framework. While the text is decidedly a local text that catered to local needs, its non-contradiction with the canonical tradition and Buddhist ethics further ensured its acceptability and corroborated its authority.

NOTES

* I am grateful to Peter Skilling, Justin McDaniel, Hiroko Kawanami, and Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière for their critical comments on early drafts of this article. In 2005 Kyaw Minn Htin computerized the hand-written copies of the manuscripts and contributed several critical remarks on geographical terms and textual references in Arakanese literature to Ashoka's legendary stay in Arakan. I owe thanks to Pat McCormick for reading and helping me to improve the final version.

1. The use of the classic and recently officialized name of the country "Myanmar" is now increasingly accepted among international scholars as well as media in Southeast Asia when referring to the contemporary state. Nonetheless I consider the use of "Burma" acceptable

when we talk about the country's history before independence. For the reader's convenience, I prefer "Arakan" to the official but awkward spelling "Rakhine."

2. For that reason, it is still difficult to ascertain the origins and the chronology in Arakan of the form of Buddhism that referred itself to the Sinhalese Mahavihara. We may reasonably assume that the history of Theravāda Buddhism in Arakan followed a similar course to what we know on Burma's early monastic history, and it may go back to religious developments of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

3. Strictly speaking, the term could also be translated as "Buddha history." In Arakanese, *phra samaing*.

4. Burmanized Pāli form: *parineikban*.

5. The analysis and interpretation in this essay will essentially deal with the part of the text that concerns Arakan.

6. The Mrauk-U period can be divided into three parts: early (1430–1530), middle (1530–1684), and late (1684–1785). The middle part, a period of territorial expansion and economic prosperity, can be labeled as the "golden age" or the "great century" of the Arakanese kingdom.

7. His papers were republished in SAN SHWE BU 1998.

8. His name as indicated at the beginning of the text is followed by his function as "archaeological officer." As far as we know he was an "honorary archaeological officer" in the early 1920s and supervised some of the restorative work at the Shitthaung Pagoda and at Mahamuni Temple.

9. The text is shortened in the way that long repetitive formulations are cut down to more simple expressions. Longer accounts regarding Arakan's mythical past were summarized by Aung Chit who repeatedly refers his reader to the original full version.

10. Ashin Pinyasara had his text copied in February 1995. Incredibly, he did not copy the text himself, but had the work done apparently by some of the orphan boys that he takes care of in Sittway. This may explain a great number, but possibly not all, of the spelling mistakes found in the text whose formulations may occasionally appear as opaque and unfamiliar to a modern reader.

11. According to the text, he was later reborn as Ashoka, the Maurya emperor.

12. None of the pagodas mentioned in the text are located in the city of Mrauk-U. The commonly available guides and descriptions of pagodas in Arakan mention, besides the site of Dhaññavati (Mahamuni temple), a selection of old pagodas in Mrauk-U and the three historic pagodas of Sandoway (Thandway), the Nan-daw ("Rib-relic"), the San-daw ("Hair-relic") and the Am-daw ("Molar-tooth-relic"). See TET HTUN NI 1987; SHITTHAUNG Gopaka 1994; and MYA AUNG 2005. A few more pagodas are listed in *Amended List of Ancient Monuments 1960* and the gazetteers of Akyab and Sandoway (see TYDD 1962; SMART 1917). The question of which pagodas in the text could possibly be identified with known pagodas still requires further investigation.

13. There are both inconsistencies and striking differences in the descriptions. One example may suffice: the Buddha lands with five hundred followers in Arakan and later he moves on with them to Pegu. But at the moment that he goes from Pegu to Mouttama and Thaton, the text suddenly mentions an entourage of twenty thousand monks.

14. The Buddha then goes on to tell the king that the *Sāsana* has been established in Arakan by the former Buddhas and that it has been presaged that a statue should be made of him to ensure the continuity of the *Sāsana* in Arakan for five thousand years. Such a formulation is found in none of the other Mahamuni accounts, though the nineteenth century Burmese renderings of the Mahamuni legend adopt a particularly flowery and baroque style.

15. One can exclude an interpretation of the relics indicated in the *hpaya-thamaing* as

being relics linked to those former animal or human existences listed and not to the existence of Gotama Buddha himself. First of all, the text does not tell us so. Second, if one admits that the relics pertain to those earlier existences and not to the pre-*parinibbānic* existence, one runs into much more confusion. How could a relic of the whorl on the forehead of the Buddha be reasonably linked to a former existence as a deer, or a relic of the upper arm or the crease of the eyelid linked to a former existence as a parrot, and so on?

16. There are fourteen hair relics that are variously mentioned as “hair,” “hair from the ear,” “hair on the cheek,” “hair curl,” and “beard.” There are two references to molar tooth relics.

17. On his way from Mouttama to Thaton, hermits asked the Buddha to allow them to keep some hair of the Exalted One. The names of the pagodas where hair relics were kept are also mentioned: Kyak Pulin, Pa Kyak Maw, Laung Pwin (or Kyak Phalapu), Dagon, Kyak Tayat (or: Kyaik Dèyat) Kyak Lapo, Kyak Me, Kyak Trot, Kyak Rò Mwe, Thet Thamo, Seit Nay, Thauk Pati. These appellations require further investigation.

18. Abdomen (2); Adam’s apple (1); ankle (1); arm (11); bone (33); breast (2); calf (13); cheek (16); chin (3); ear (5); elbow (5); eye (6); finger (6); flesh (9); foot (1); hair (14); hand (3); head (7); head skull (14); hip (7); intestine (2); joints (finger, knee, vertebra) (20); kneecap (4); lips (1); liver (4); lung (1); marrow (1); navel (2); neck (3); nose (7); palate (7); penis (2); phlegm (1); placenta (1); shoulder (2); skin (2); spinal cord (2); spleen (1); stomach (8); testicles (4); toe (2); tongue (2); tooth (2). This simplified list of the 239 relics has been made on purely pragmatic grounds to reduce the plethora of expressions used in the text. Under “bone” were classified all terms that included the term “bone.” Other terms also refer to bone parts, such as our classificatory “head skull” that includes more specific terms such as “cranial suture,” for example. “Arm” includes upper and lower arm, right or left. “Eye” includes “eyelid” and “crease in the eyelid,” while the “eye cave” was put under “bone.” The most frequent of the “joint” relics is the “back part of the knee joint,” not to be confused with the patella or kneecap.

19. There are, for example, three relics of the crease of the eyelids and four relics of the tip of the nose. On the other hand, there are six relics which merely refer to the “flesh,” the “flesh of the back,” or the “flesh of the breast.”

20. The linguistic problems raised by the list are intricate and will have to be discussed in a separate article.

21. This is not an orthodox relic if we accept that the Buddha lacked, as it is said, bile, pus, and phlegm (LOPEZ 2002, 46).

22. See TRAINOR (1997, 121) for quotations of and references to the lists of relics as found in Pāli Theravāda literature. The appearance of the Chinese king (*tnyok mǎn:*) is not too surprising as this is an interpretation of “Gandhāra” (although not found in this text), a country that the Arakanese and Burmese chronicle tradition has generally identified with China. Elsewhere, the *hpayà-thamaing* establishes a much more surprising link between the Chinese king and Arakanese royal genealogy.

23. The Pāli names of the mountains such as Candacula, Candakita, Candamagha, Candamaghacula, Candameghagiri, Candamukkhi, Candanasa, Candapiti, Candasara, and Candasula do not provide any clue to an exact location. I was unable to do any fieldwork in Arakan to further investigate this matter, but the toponyms mystified my Arakanese correspondents in Yangon as much as myself. Their extremely fluctuating spelling in the two textual versions also conveys the impression that these geographic terms were very unfamiliar to the copyists. I have already hinted at the problem of identifying the pagodas in the text with still existing pagodas.

24. Buddha turns to the western side and smiles, thus inviting Ananda’s standard question: “Why, my Lord, are you smiling?” followed by Buddha’s next extensive reply.

25. The port city of Chittagong and the areas south of Chittagong were under firm control of the Arakanese kings between about 1580 and 1666, the year of the Mughal conquest.

26. Human existences (with number of occurrences in parentheses) are: archer (3); astrologer (1); carpenter (1); chopping-knife maker (1); craftsman (3); fisherman (2); gardener (4); glass-pearl seller (1); goldsmith (2); harp player (1); hermit (5); Hindu (3); horse keeper (2); jeweller (1); king (2); mat-maker (3); oil seller (1); poor man (1); potter (3); *punna* [Brahmin] (15); rich man (2); soldier (1); turner (3); weaver (1); wood collector (3).

The following list of the animal existences (with the number of occurrences in parentheses) uses simplified categories: bear (5); bird (88); buffalo (2); bull (1); chameleon (2); cow (1); deer (21); elephant (2); fish (3); frog (1); gaur (2); guinea pig (3); horse (2); lion (1); lizard (5); mole (1); monkey (5); pangolin (1); pig (6); porcupine (2); rabbit (6); rhinoceros (1); seal (2); snake (14); yak (1). Some terms remain undetermined. Sub-groups, occasionally indicated species, and various proper names are not mentioned here for the sake of clearness.

The total number of relics does not correspond with the added number of human and animal existences, because there are a few cases where a couple of relics are linked to a single existence or where a particular existence is not linked to the later appearance of a relic.

27. One can raise an objection to the usefulness of taking seriously an imaginary and creative list of existences. But it is only by sifting through it that it may become clear if it is a futile exercise or a way to reveal some kind of evidence. The high number of “deer” (that is, “deer,” “sambur deer,” or “muntjac”) existences is striking. It does not simply remind us of the prominence of the deer as a typical local animal. It recalls to an Arakanese reader “Indamaru” or “Indanila,” the female deer who bore Marayu, the mythical semi-divine founder of the city of Dhaññavati and acclaimed ancestor of its dynasty.

28. The numbers of animal existences of the bodhisatta which did not end in violent death can be used to form a magical square. The demonstration regarding the numbers of various animals represented on the bas reliefs of the Shitthaung Pagoda has been made by the Burmese mathematician Sein Win. Two unpublished articles of Sein Win in Burmese dating from 1996 and 2002 and one in English are in my hands (SEIN WIN 2003).

29. SCHOBER (1989, 43–46) draws on FORCHHAMMER (1891); SCHOBER 1997; TUN SHWE KHAING 1996; CHAN HTWAN OUNG 1912 (an Arakanese author); PHASUKA (1967) who, despite the title of his work (New Chronicle of Dhaññavati), deals mostly with the *Mahamuni* story; and different versions of the Mahamuni account are discussed by CANDAMALANKARA, in the first volume of his *Rakhaing yazawin-thit kyam*, the standard compilation of Arakanese historiography (1931–1932, 247–67). Oddly enough, this Arakanese monk largely based his own account on a Burmese version, probably a nineteenth-century text, judging that “it had been written by trustworthy monks” (!). The transfer of the Mahamuni story from Arakan to Burma is an unexplored chapter of religious history and a study of the older manuscript versions of the legend is still awaiting scholarly zeal. An interesting starting point would be palm leaf manuscript 1244 of the University Historical Research Centre at Yangon University, a Mahamuni-*thamaing* written in 1148 (1786 CE), a year after the Burmese conquest.

30. Accounts vary: either he was invited by King Candasuriya, or the king merely heard about his arrival when the Buddha was already in the country. A typical discussion in CANDAMALANKARA (1931–1932, 248) concerns the possibility of King Candasuriya knowing about Buddha’s existence in India, considering the distance between Arakan and Bengal/India, and so on.

31. The accounts vary. In the text, the king first appealed to one thousand Arakanese sculptors who were unable to fulfil the task and requested Indra and the Brahmas to help them. In other accounts, it is said that the statue was cast with gold and precious stones collected by the king.

32. The text says that he set fire to the house of a widow. According to another account

(cf. FORCHHAMMER 1891, 5, and SCHÖBER 1989, 45), he “broke the thighbone of a gardener and sliced off a piece of flesh from the back of a young prince.”

33. Alaungsithu’s long reign began around 1113 or 1114 CE and lasted until at least 1168 (for a discussion of the regnal dates, see FRASCH 1996, 102–106). The nineteenth-century *Glass Palace Chronicle* dates the attack against Arakan to 1118; an earlier campaign against Macchagiri (identified with Arakan) is dated to 1096 (FRASCH 1996, 105, fn. (#)119). These dates do not match with the dates associated with the reign of Dasaraja (see below). An invasion of Arakan by the Pagan king is not unlikely, but it can as yet not be based on any hard evidence. Oral legends that I traced in Salin and Sinphyugyun during fieldwork in 2003 seem to confirm the expedition. The text says that King Dasaraja took the statue out of the Sirima creek and put it on Mount Aggatañu (or Katañu). Candamalalankara presents the story with the usual array of slight variants (CANDAMALALANKARA 1931–1932, vol. 1: 328–33). He gives the dates of Dasaraja as 1123–1139 CE. PHAYRE (1883) and SAN SHWE BU (1998, 24–34) have 1153–1165 CE.

34. They are the first three Buddhas of the *bhadrakalpa*: Kanakamuni/Konagamana, Krakucchanda/Kakusandha, and Kasyapa/Kassapa. The spelling follows the text of the *hpayà-thamaing*.

35. In one statement, Buddha says: “In famous places, people will venerate my bones, my skin, and my teeth. In unknown places, they will lie hidden.”

36. A *jataka* is a story of one of the over five hundred former lives of Gautama Buddha. Other references to *jakatas* in the text are linked to Buddha’s explanations regarding former lives and relics in Arakan, but they are without any direct connection to Arakan’s early history of kings. These *jakatas* are Maha-ummaga *jataka*, Mudulakkhana *jataka*, and Vidhurapandita *jataka*.

37. Monday–Tiger; Tuesday–Lion; Wednesday–Elephant; Thursday–Mouse; Friday–Guinea pig; Saturday–Nagá; Sunday–Galun/Garuda.

38. In version two of the *hpayà-thamaing*, a particular period of mutual killing is ascribed to the period from Sakkaraj (Burmese era) 1146 to 1187, corresponding with the period of forty years of Burmese administration that followed the conquest in 1785 CE. The dates that have been tampered with originally read 1046 and 1077 (1684–1745 CE), two dates that allow for a very different interpretation of this cryptic text.

39. The lack of clear identification in this text relates to the general problem of writing the history of Arakan. One needs to remember that the exact chronology of Arakanese reigns before the middle of the seventeenth century is still a problematic issue. We have no clue on what earlier evidence the dates given in the early nineteenth-century versions of Arakanese chronicle accounts were built. What we may think of as earlier Arakanese historical accounts found in palm leaf manuscripts contain either no dates at all, or a few dates that are often in contradiction with dates in more recent chronicles, or are fully contradicted by a chronology based on non-Arakanese sources. The weekdays, on which the Arakanese kings between 1404 and 1785 were born, were important for astrological purposes. But we do not know who would have made a systematic record of these weekdays, where such a record would have been written down, and how it would have been transmitted. As Arakanese chronicle writing of the nineteenth and twentieth century cannot boast a continuous narrative or even a systematic outline of royal successions in Arakan, in this particular case we have no reason to put more faith in the chronicles than in the indications found in the *hpayà-thamaing*.

40. This is a translation of a part of the anonymous undated text on which the whole paper is based. The text is a manuscript that the author computerized from a handwritten copy of an original palm leaf manuscript. Pages and original leaf pagination are unknown.

41. In the Ghatapandita-*jataka*, the name of the hermit is Kanhadipayana. In the Arakanese version, his name is not given. He is the one who later told the brothers how to take possession of the “flying” city of Dvaravati.

42. Strong has shown how this ideal was accommodated as a “compromise of the mythic ideal” in texts like the Ashokavadana because “the *cakravartin* myth presented Buddhists with the problem of a rather inflexible ideal of kingship [and] the figure of the *Cakkavatti* was, as Melford Spiro has pointed out, too ideal, too “mythical” for actual historical Buddhist kings to be identified with it” (STRONG 1983, 49). In a similar way, Chutintaranond has explored the confrontation of the ideal and the political reality in the case of the Siamese monarchy (CHUTINTARANOND 1995). Gombrich has called the ideal of the *Cakkavatti* world ruler an “institutionalized fantasy” (GOMBRICH 1988, 82), and Lingat labelled it “un terme flatteur sans portée aucune sur l’idée qu’on peut se faire du rôle du roi” (Lingat quoted by Eric Meyer in LINGAT 1989, 66). Yashpal incidentally thinks that “the thirty-two marks of a superman ... must have made him look like a monster” (YASHPAL 1999, 154).

How important is the presence or the absence of the *Cakkavatti* ideal to appreciate the Theravāda Buddhist monarchy? Historically, this “ideal” (which is actually a twin ideal as it cannot be separated from the bodhisatta concept) has been prominent in Southeast Asia since the Pagan kings, and its “pervasive significance” has been emphasized for fifteenth century Lanna (SWEARER and PREMCHIT 1978, 20) and so on, but the absence or presence of the *Cakkavatti* ideal does not reveal much about the political nature and practice of the Theravāda Buddhist monarchy. The shared concepts of the monarchy in Siam and Burma suggest an identical system. But this similarity is particularly strong and impressive in the nineteenth century and this explains the impact of TAMBIAH’s study (1976) as he stresses the importance of the *Cakkavatti* concept at that time.

With regard to earlier times and the study of a lesser known polity such as Arakan, it is important to keep in mind that political and institutional realities were complex and diverse. AYE KYAW, in his research on “Thai-Burmese Institutions in the Nineteenth Century” concludes that because the “ideological concepts which supported the institutions of the monarchy” were the same, “there was no difference between the two systems of kingship” (1978, 326–30); then he goes on to list the many differences in administrative structure and practice between Thailand and Burma! Earlier in his study, he states, accurately and more clearly, that “despite strong similarities between the concept of kingship in Burma and Thailand, there were differences and the ascendancy of one concept of kingship over another, in general, varied in accordance with the character, likes, and dislikes of an individual king” (1978, 59).

43. See the chapter on the “issues in the study of Theravāda Buddhist Culture in Thailand” in HAYASHI (2003, 11).

44. The mythic kings of Vesali and Dvaravati are said to be descendants of the Saki clan; after the death of the ten brothers who conquered Dvaravati, the surviving Brahmin and the princess Añjanadevi became king and queen in Vesali; later, Marayu, a god reborn as a human king at the request of Indra, founded Dhaññavati and pacified the country (according to some traditions five thousand years before the birth of Buddha Gotama); being a “corrective for political disorder” (to use an expression of TAMBIAH’s, 1976), his biography bears traits of King Mahasamata and the *Cakkavatti* ideal: the father of Marayu was a king of Kapilavastu who had come to live as a hermit in Arakan, and his mother was a deer; later, Dhaññavati was abandoned. One thousand three hundred years before Buddha Gotama, Kamraja-kri, one of the two sons of an Indian king who migrated to northern Burma (founding the fabled Tagaung), married three princesses in the fifty-seventh generation after Marayu and reigned once more in Dhaññavati. The next important king in line is Candasuriya who lived in the time of Buddha Gotama.

45. In Candamalalankara, one finds a much shorter list of twenty-three places of former lives of Lord Buddha in Arakan with the relics and the names of the pagodas where they were enshrined (CANDAMALALANKARA 1931–1932, vol. 1, 250–56). Relics as regalia and symbols of legitimate kingship have been commented upon extensively in the literature; see for example Strong and Trainor quoted passim in this article, and TAMBIAH (1976, 44).

46. At the site of the future capital, the king met two women who, while fishing at two

different places, called on each other with reference to the spot where they had been looking for fish, one in the north (*mrauk*) and the other one at Wasè (the name of a quarter in the later city of Mrauk-U) south of the palace. Another equally well-known legend relates to a curious interpretation of the name of the city as *myauk* (monkey, instead of *mrauk* meaning north) and *ù* (egg), explaining it by the fact that a monkey had been cohabiting there with a peahen.

47. The legendary visit of King Ashoka to Arakan is also mentioned in SAN BAW U (1923, 102). According to San Baw U's source, Ashoka came to worship the Mahamuni.

48. This is how I would reply, with regard to this text and its Arakanese context, to Anne Blackburn's criticism of the way that the analysis of "the relations between religious and political institutions in terms of the former's legitimizing relation to the latter" has become "customary" as it "essentializes 'religion' and 'politics' in ways that run counter to evidence of historical and contemporary religious communities" (BLACKBURN 2001, 90, fn. 18).

49. For the chronicle record of this king, see CANDAMALALANKARA 1931-1932, 260-66.

50. In the case of Burma, chronicle writing could be described as roughly homogeneous, though current research in fact points to the composite character of the chronicles and multiple authorships.

51. The best known Arakanese "chronicle," the *Dhaññavati Ayedawpon*, is fully indebted to the *shauk thòn* tradition. It is essentially an anthology of questions asked by kings (going back to the mythical king Candasuriya) to their wise ministers, and their answers. The subjects discussed cover legal, moral, administrative, and political issues.

52. Among the manuscripts, titles such as *Yazawin* (royal chronicle) or *A-ye-daw-pon/A-ye-pon* (record of royal affairs) can often be found; they are misleading, as the content may be quite different from what the title suggests. The "classical" text is *Kawisarabhisuripawara* 1881 (later re-edited, for example in *Myanma-min-mya Ayedawpon*, Rangoon 1967) which can be checked against the excellent palm leaf manuscript version of the Yangon National Library, Bernard *pe* (collection) 1730. The standard edition of the *Shauk thòn* is HAMSAWATI 1964. A great number of the *shauk thòn* can be found in U PANDI (1910) or CANDAMALALANKARA (1931-1932, vol. 2), in connection with the reign of King Min Phalaung (1571-1593).

53. Such a genealogy of ministers is found at the end of the *Min Rajagri Satam*; see LEIDER 2004a.

54. The question of the continuity and the purity of the Buddhist teachings is different from the question of the cultural impact of Islamic culture. There is no contradiction between the conservatism of the monkhood and the continuity of religious beliefs on the one hand, and the fact that Arakanese governors of Chittagong and some Arakanese kings adopted Islamic titles on their bi- and trilingual coins or the fact that, as some sources suggest, the court was influenced by the prestigious culture of Bengal.

55. For a recent account of the Bengali Muslim cultural presence at the court of Arakan, see BHATTACHARYA (2002) and new research done by Thibaut D'HUBERT on the literary work of Alaol (forthcoming). Questions regarding the Islamic impact on the kings are discussed in LEIDER (1998a).

56. One may argue that this is also largely the case for Burmese and Thai chronicles and the argument could probably be extended to a more general investigation in cultural self-representation.

57. The documentary basis to build a wider argument concerning this is slim. There is a single comparison of Muslims with monkeys in the *Dhaññavati Ayedawpon*; a faintly anti-Burmese stance could be deduced from accusations that monastic corruption was imported from Pagan; there are several references that hit at the Mon kings, but all this is very little to demonstrate any latent hostility or figure out a show of pre-colonial communalism. Bhat-

tacharya suggests that intra-cultural relations at the Arakanese court in the middle of the seventeenth century were smooth (BHATTACHARYA 2002).

58. However, the dimension of ethical principles is not developed very much. Mention is made a couple of times of the *pañcasila*, while not a single mention is made of the ten duties of the *dhammarāja*.

59. In the succession of virtuous and non-virtuous kings, one also finds the “decline-and-revival” paradigm typical of Burmese religious chronicling of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In her study on Sri Lankan monastic culture of the eighteenth century, BLACKBURN has shown that we need to historicize this paradigm as it “is not evidence of essential continuity with the Lankan Theravada” (2001, 76, also 82, fn. 11).

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