

The Lord of the Elephant: Interpreting the Islamicate Epigraphic, Numismatic, and Literary Material from the Mrauk U Period of Arakan (ca. 1430–1784)

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The kingdom of Arakan constituted a frontier region in which several literary languages were used in a variety of official documents.¹ The contrasting interpretations of the Perso-Arabic titles of Buddhist kings that are found in inscriptions and literary sources invite us to revisit this corpus of texts and try to provide some comprehensive account of the evolution of the significance of those idioms and the rhetoric they entail.² In the multilingual context of Arakan, languages are hardly representative of parallel, self-contained cultural

1 Thibaut d'Hubert, "Pirates, Poets, and Merchants: Bengali Language and Literature in Seventeenth-Century Mrauk-U," in *Culture and Circulation: Literature in Motion in Early Modern India*, ed. Thomas de Bruijn and Allison Busch, vol. 46, Brill's Indological Library (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 53–7.

2 For a survey of the previous scholarship on the interpretation of the Perso-Arabic titles of Arakanese kings, see Jacques P. Leider, "These Buddhist Kings with Muslim Names: A Discussion on the Muslim Influence in the Mrauk-U Period," in *Études birmanes en hommage à Denise Bernot*, ed. Pierre Pichard and François Robinne, vol. 9, Études thématiques (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1998), 186–96. Further references on the topic are provided in this article.

domains; rather they complete one another by assuming specific functions within the framework of the complex literate environment of the kingdom's upper social strata. On the other hand, one should not overlook the fact that each language addresses specific socio-textual communities that are the targets of such public utterances. Our recently improved understanding of premodern society in Arakan—and of the rhetoric of the texts produced during the Mrauk U period (ca. 1430–1784)—allows for a recontextualization of epigraphic evidence.³

Epigraphic texts are usually considered the most solid tools with which to reconstruct the history of a polity, but they are also the most difficult sources to interpret because the texts are often lacking any context. Until rather recently, studies on the political and cultural history of Arakan were very partial. Historians looked at the polity from exclusive perspectives that hardly questioned the rhetoric of the dominant archive they used, whether this was constituted of European accounts in Dutch, Portuguese, French, or English; Arakanese chronicles; Persian historical and cosmographical texts; or Bengali poems.⁴

The multilingual aspect of the sources thus appeared to be an obstacle, rather than a potentially fruitful means to the production of comprehensive and coherent accounts of the period. However, through a close observation of the dynamics of multilingualism, one can transform this “obstacle” into a key with which to access the contents of the messages con-

3 The following article provides an updated overview of Arakan's political, economic, and cultural history during the Mrauk U period: Thibaut d'Hubert and Jacques P. Leider, “Traders and Poets at the Mrauk U Court: On Commerce and Cultural Links in Seventeenth-Century Arakan,” in *Pelagic Passageways: Dynamic Flows in the Northern Bay of Bengal World before the Appearance of Nation States*, ed. Rila Mukherjee (New Delhi: Primus Books, 2011), 345–79.

4 See the discussion on Arakan's historiography in Jacques P. Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan, Birmanie: son histoire politique entre le début du XVe et la fin du XVIIe siècle* (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2004), 5–12, especially 6–7.

veyed by the available sources.⁵ In the present case, we will see that the messages of texts can be purposely ambiguous and, most important, that they may not exclusively reflect the agenda of the central authority. I therefore intend to re-contextualize those inscriptions, paying attention to some of their formal features in order to identify a set of textual variations linked to the multicultural environment of Arakan—variations that have likely impacted the reception of the message conveyed by this textual material.

This endeavor extends beyond the chronological development of the rhetoric of the texts present on Arakanese coins ranging from the mid-fifteenth century to 1635, for I will also attempt to show how we might fit together the scattered evidence of the formation of a local Islamicate idiom in Arakan's Mrauk U period.⁶ I am using a corpus of coins minted in Chittagong, Ramu, and Mrauk U as a thread leading to the study of other written sources in Persian and Bengali that

5 For a recent reflection on the methodological issues surrounding literary multilingualism in South Asia, see Francesca Orsini, "How to Do Multilingual Literary History? Lessons from Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century North India," *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 49, no. 2 (June 1, 2012): 225–46.

6 Here I understand the term "Islamicate" as it was used by P. Wagoner: "First Islamicization refers to a political strategy, by means of which indigenous elites attempt to enhance their political status and authority through participation in the more "universal" culture of Islam. Second, this participation is effected through the adoption of certain Islamic cultural forms and practices, which—given the political nature of the process—largely pertain to the broad sphere of secular culture, as opposed to the narrower domain of formal religion." See " 'Sultan among Hindu Kings': Dress, Titles, and the Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no. 4 (November 1, 1996): 853–5. In the case of Arakan and other polities around the Bay of Bengal, Sanjay Subrahmanyam spoke of "Persianization," a notion that largely overlaps with Wagoner's Islamicization. In the present article, either of these terms would be relevant. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Persianization and 'Mercantilism' in Bay of Bengal History, 1400-1700," in *Explorations in Connected History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 45–79.

convey information on the Muslim cultural history of the region during this period.⁷

My aim is to read those sources in a connected way that also pays attention to the mechanisms of the idiom fashioned by Arakan's Muslims working in the Buddhist king's administration. By shifting focus from a religious reading of the languages and formulas found in those texts—a reading that is often superficial—to a context-sensitive interpretation of the material, I will try to determine how these texts were used at different moments and for sometimes unexpected purposes.⁸

The Gradual Involvement of the Central Power in Chittagong and the Development of an Arakanese Islamicate Idiom

Considering the blurred nature of later accounts of the origin of the Muslim presence in Arakan, the earliest substantial body of material that connects any Arakanese regime with Islamic culture consists of coins bearing Arabic inscriptions and Persian titles.⁹ Thanks to the survey provided by Michael Mitchiner, it is possible to follow the evolution of the style and textual content of coins from ca. 1459 up to the fall of Chittagong at the hand of the Mughal army in 1666.¹⁰

7 For a general overview of Islamic literature in Arakan, see Thibaut d'Hubert, "Arākān aur janūb-i mashriqī Bangāla-desh mẽ musulmānō kī tahdhīb aur zabānē," *Ma'ārif* 194 (2014): 265–88.

8 By "religious reading," I mean an interpretation that would, for instance, see a statement of religious belonging in the mere use of a language (e.g. Arabic = Islam; Sanskrit = Hinduism) or symbols (e.g. *kalima* = Islam; "white elephant" = Buddhism). The idea is simply to approach those texts as utterances that were invested with various meanings according to the contexts in which they were used and received.

9 For a previous discussion on the Islamicate titles of Arakanese kings, see Leider, "These Buddhist Kings with Muslim names," 189–96.

10 Michael Mitchiner, *The Land of Water: Coinage and History of Bangladesh and Later Arakan, Circa 300BC to the Present Day* (London: Hawkins Publications, 2000), 103–42; Michael Robinson and Lewis A. Shaw, *The Coins and*

Some important facts emerge from the study of those coins. With the exception of one series struck for the occasion of Sirisudhammarāja's late coronation ceremony in 1635, all the coins were minted in Chittagong and in Ramu, the southern urban center of the Arakanese western province.¹¹ The other crucial point is that within the kingdom, there was no monetary economy during the period when those coins were produced.¹² Therefore, these were trade coins intended for transactions with foreign merchants.

One can safely argue that this production was a local one and that its coins bore messages aimed at trading networks outside the kingdom. Mitchiner highlights the earlier role of

Banknotes of Burma (Manchester, England: M. Robinson and L.A. Shaw, 1980); Aung San Tha, *Arakanese Coins*, ed. Michael Robinson, trans. Aye Set (Sale, Cheshire, England: M. Robinson, 1982). About the fall of Chittagong and its impact on Arakanese economic and political history, see Stephan van Galen, "Arakan at the Turn of the First Millennium of the Arakanese Era," in *The Maritime Frontier of Burma : Exploring Political, Cultural, and Commercial Interaction in the Indian Ocean World, 1200–1800*, ed. Jos Gommans and Jacques P. Leider (Amsterdam; Leiden: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen; KITLV Press, 2002).

11 Mitchiner, *The Land of Water*, no. 342.

12 "Arakan, itself, still had a non-monetary economy and no coins had been struck in the homeland. The earlier Arakanese coinage struck at Ramu (south of Chittagong district) had come to an end when Min Bin was expelled from Chittagong district in 1533. Coinage was struck at Chittagong, dated AH 949 (1542), during the Arakanese occupation by Min Bin. This was issued by his local governor Chandila Raza (Thandala Shah)" (ibid., 127). On the scope of the circulation of coins minted in Chittagong and the very local nature of coin production—if not necessarily of their subsequent use—in this region, see John Deyell, "Monetary and Financial Webs: The Regional and International Influence of Pre-Modern Bengali Coinage," in *Pelagic Passageways: The Northern Bay of Bengal before Colonialism*, ed. Rila Mukherjee (Delhi: Primus Books, 2011), 294–6; John Deyell, "The Trade Coinage of Chittagong Region in the Mid-Sixteenth Century," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh* 40, no. 2 (1995): 207–35. Deyell actually focuses on a series of "transitional" monolingual coins and suggests that their production may not have been sanctioned by the Arakanese authorities. For a study of the coins struck by governors in Chittagong during the Mrauk U period, see Vasant Chowdhury, "The Arakani Governors of Chittagong and Their Coins," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh* 42, no. 2 (1997): 145–62.

Chittagong as a long-distance trade port and the fact that it was a mint town of the Bengali sultanate.¹³ The production of coins was therefore at least partly dependent on the local tradition, and this dependence can be seen in the physical features of the coins, as well as in their linguistic and cultural components.¹⁴ To me, these features indicate that the Arakanese kings themselves had little to do with the form this monetary activity took, and that their political personas were thus translated into a local political, religious, and economic idiom.¹⁵

We might add a few important nuances to these observations. The coins can be grouped into several series corresponding to various periods of the Arakanese rule in the region. Consequently, the style of the coins and the messages that they convey display various degrees of involvement with centralized royal propaganda.

Bengali Sultanate Coins as Models for the Local Mint in Chittagong (ca. 1449–1533)

The earliest series of coins that cover the period from ca. 1449 to 1533 is monolingual, and the texts agree closely with the standards of Islamic coin inscriptions.¹⁶ The *kalima*—the Muslim profession of faith—is here always present, along with (1) a mention of the king using his honorific title as a ruler, (2) his *kunya*, or nickname, (3) his proper name, and (4)

13 Mitchiner, *The Land of Water*, 103–06; 117–21.

14 *Ibid.*, 103. As indicated by Mitchiner, the first coins minted in Chittagong under Arakanese rule still bore the name of Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd Shāh (1433–59), the first sultan of the restored Iliyās Shāhī dynasty (1433–86) (*ibid.*, 107, nos. 236–7).

15 Deyell points to the fact that, generally speaking, in terms of the coins' design and contents of the inscriptions, conservatism is the rule rather than the exception. "Monetary and Financial Webs," 297.

16 Besides Mitchiner's survey, the following work provides a detailed study of coins from Bengal: Abdul Karim, *Corpus of the Muslim Coins of Bengal (down to A.D. 1538)* (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1960). For a recent work on the political history of the Bengal Sultanate mainly based on numismatic evidence, see Syed Ejaz Hussain, *The Bengal Sultanate: Politics, Economy and Coins, A.D. 1205–1576* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2003).

his patronymic affiliation. Here is an example of an inscription found on monolingual coins of the early series:

lā ilāha illā allāh muḥammad rasūl allāh

⁽¹⁾*al-sulṭān al-mu‘azzam tāj al-dunyā wa al-dīn* ⁽²⁾*abū al-faṭḥ*

⁽³⁾*kalima* ⁽⁴⁾*bin ‘alī-shāh*¹⁷

“There is no god but God. Muḥammad is the messenger of God.

⁽¹⁾The exalted Sultan, crown of the world and religion, ⁽²⁾the victorious ⁽³⁾Kalima¹⁸ ⁽⁴⁾son of ‘Alī Shāh.”

But even in this very conventional early series, one can already find the beginning of a specific adjustment to the Arakanese context. Note the inclusion of the seemingly Persian title *ṣāhib-i fil* in a coin minted in the name of Dūlyā (Do-lyā, 1481–91):

⁽⁴⁾*al-sulṭān bin al-sulṭān* ^(1a)*tāj al-dunyā wa al-dīn* ⁽²⁾*abū al-naṣr*

⁽⁵⁾*ṣāhib-i fil* ⁽³⁾*dūlyā* ^(1b)*muḥaffar shāh al-sulṭān*¹⁹

“⁽⁴⁾The Sultan son of Sultan, ^(1a)crown of the world and religion, ⁽²⁾the protector, ⁽⁵⁾the lord of the elephant, ⁽³⁾Dūlyā, ^(1b)the victorious king and sovereign.”

The title “lord of the elephant” hints at a regional nomenclature typical of Southeast Asian Buddhist kings. White (that is, albino) elephants were an important element of the royal paraphernalia of Southeast Asian kings. The symbol invokes the white elephant as a powerful ornament of Buddhist kingship in Southeast Asia. White elephants are associated with *cakkavatti* kings, represent the prosperity of a monarch and his kingdom, and may even suggest further parallels between a king and Sakka, the king of the gods whose mount is the white elephant Erāvaṇa.²⁰ The mention of the elephant in

17 Mitchiner, *The Land of Water*, 107, no. 238.

18 “Kalima” could also be read “Kalama” as suggested by the form of the name found in Arakanese manuscript sources. It is the name of the ruler otherwise known as Bha-co-phrū (1459–81). See Leider, “These Buddhist Kings with Muslim Names,” 207.

19 Mitchiner, *The Land of Water*, 107, no. 239.

20 About a possible representation of the king of Arakan as Indra mounted on Airāvata, see Marie Gatellier, “Le temple Shitthaung à Myohaung,

Arakanese royal titles seems to appear during the Mrauk U period, and travelers and chroniclers who wrote about Arakan refer to it with notable regularity.²¹ It thus became one of the major symbols of Arakanese power viewed from the outside. Of course, one cannot assume that these external observers properly understood the Buddhist mythological meaning of the white elephant; the door was thus left open to various interpretations of the title that were informed by other cultural associations between political power and the figure of the elephant. I will return below to one possible interpretation of the first Islamicate formulation of this title.

The composition and calligraphic style of this first series are also rather peculiar. Compared to earlier and contemporary coins from the Bengali sultanate, these coins are very crude. They lack the typical pointed circle on their edges, nor do they feature a layout of the text within frames—something we will

dépositaire des traditions de l'Arakan," *Arts asiatiques* 48, no. 1 (1993): 121; Stephan van Galen, "Arakan and Bengal: The Rise and Decline of the Mrauk U Kingdom (Burma) from the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Century A.D." (Leiden University, 2008), 36. For a comparative discussion on elephants and kingship in Southeast Asia, see Thomas R. Trautmann, *Elephants and Kings: An Environmental History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 261–97.

21 In the *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, the abundance of elephants in Arakan is mentioned, but the white elephant per se is associated with the king of Pegu (*fil wa piyāda-yi farāwān dārad wa safīd fil nīz padīd āyad*). The *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, ed. Jadunath Sarkar, trans. Henry Blochmann, *Bibliotheca Indica*, vol. 2, 2d ed. (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1927): 132; compare with Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Muzaffar Alam, "Southeast Asia as Seen from Mughal India: Tahir Muhammad's 'Immaculate Garden' (ca. 1600)," *Archipel* 70, no. 1 (2005): 220, 223. The Dutch surgeon Wouter Schouten (1638–1704) relates: "Le Roi d'Aracan s'attribue la qualité de Roi de l'Eléphant blanc: Cet éléphant avait été ravi par les armes du Roi de Pegu, & le Roi d'Aracan l'a enlevé par la même voie." Gautier Schouten, *Voyage de Gautier Schouten aux Indes orientales. Commencé l'an 1658 et fini l'an 1665* (Amsterdam: Pierre Mortier, 1708), 249. About early references to white elephants in Arakanese chronicles, see Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan, Birmanie*, 264–5. Regarding white elephants as part of later Burmese paraphernalia, see Jacques P. Leider, "A Kingship by Merit and Cosmic Investiture: An Investigation into King Alaungmintaya's Self-Representation," *Journal of Burma Studies* 15, no. 2 (2011): 165–87.

see in subsequently minted coins.²² The calligraphy is also quite unusual and unsophisticated. The letters are square but distinct from other angular calligraphic styles current in the Muslim world. So even if, as Mitchiner suggests, Arakanese mints in Chittagong continue an older tradition, these coins evince the relative newness of the enterprise and the lack of craftsmanship in its execution. In later series, the design and calligraphy show more overtly their being modeled upon previous or contemporary patterns used in Bengal.

The Indigenization of Coin Inscriptions (ca. 1533–80)

In subsequent periods, the coins bore either the name of the king or the local governor. Governors were themselves local Muslims at first; then, in order to achieve closer control over the region, governors were members of the royal family. The status of the governorship of Chittagong grew in prestige and was acknowledged by the central authority through the Arakanese title “lord of the west” (Arakanese: *anok bhurañ* / Bengali: *anak phorā*).²³

22 For instance, one can compare the Ramu series with previous Ḥusayn Shāhī coins in Mitchiner, *The Land of Water*, 101–2, nos. 229–35. Deyell underlines the importance of the repetition of the patterns of the Ḥusaynī coins in kingdoms surrounding Bengal throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. John Deyell “Monetary and Financial Webs,” 29.

23 Mitchiner, *The Land of Water*, nos. 311, 312, 313. “Sam Twè et Chittagong semblent avoir été normalement sous la haute autorité d’un membre de la famille royale : le prince héritier ou un autre fils du roi, un frère du roi ou un oncle. [...] A l’époque de Mañ: Phaloñ: et Mañ: Rājā Krī:, le gouverneur de Chittagong portait même un titre particulier : roi de l’ouest (*anok bhurañ*), un titre attesté par les sources non arakanaises avec des graphies variables (*Anik Poran*, *Anik Frank*, *Anaporan*). *Le gouverneur de Chittagong avait, comme nous l’avons dit, le droit de battre monnaie, privilège rarissime étant donné qu’il n’était pas un seigneur souverain.*” Leider, *Le royaume d’Arakan, Birmanie*, 385. Actually, the very practice of minting coins in Arakan seems to have originated from the continuation of the long-distance trade activities of Chittagong, and it is only later that coins started to be minted in the capital city. It is noteworthy that one of the only Arakanese terms that made its way into

In coins, which only gradually gave way to unconventional local terms and nomenclature, it is under the governorship of Thāndala Shāh—who was himself the son of a former governor of Chittagong (Mahābinyān, 1531–33 in the coins)²⁴—that non-Arabic, non-Persian elements came to be introduced into the Islamicate frame of the inscription. The text reads:

⁽¹⁾*bārīd* (*mubārīz*?) *al-dunyā wa al-dīn* ⁽²⁾*abū al-muzaffar* ⁽³⁾*thāndala shāh* ⁽⁴⁾*l-sulṭān bin sir mahābinyān* ⁽⁶⁾*khallada mulkahu wa sulṭānahu*²⁵

⁽¹⁾(Hero?) of the world and of religion, ⁽²⁾the victorious, ⁽³⁾Thāndala Shāh, ⁽⁴⁾the sulṭān son of the noble Mahābinyān, ⁽⁶⁾may He perpetuate his reign and authority."

The gradual development of multilingualism on the coins is clearly concomitant with the central power's gradual increase in control over activities in Chittagong. Here, it is important

the vocabulary of the Bengali poets of the kingdom was *phrā* (*pharā/porā*), which means "lord" and can be applied to both a worldly ruler or the Buddha: "Hindus say he is like Yudhiṣṭhira, as brave as Vikramāditya, Maghs (i.e., Arakanese) say he is as wise as Phorā (i.e., Buddha)" (*hindu bale yudhiṣṭhira | vikramāditya vira | maghe bale phorā hena jñāna* |) Ālōl, "Sayphulmuluk Badiujjāmāl," Ms. no. 185 / ā 32, (maghi 1232/ca 1871), f. 3b, Bāmlā Ekāḍemī Saṃgr̥hīta, Bangla Academy, Dhaka.). On the context of this praise, see Thibaut d'Hubert and Jacques P. Leider, "Traders and Poets in Mrauk-U: On Commerce and Cultural Links in Seventeenth Century Arakan," 345–79.

24 Mitchiner, *The Land of Water*, 114, nos. 263–6.

25 Ibid., 115, no. 263. I could not determine the meaning of the term *bārīd* in this context. The term *mubārīz* appears in the name of a governor of Chittagong of a later period: Mubārīz Shāh (1062/1652; see coins nos. 348–9). The epithet is not present in the lists provided by Abdul Karim and Yusuf Siddiq in their surveys of coin and stone inscriptions. On the other hand, the word *bārīd* (*bārid*?) is present in the equally enigmatic name of a Bengali author of the mid-sixteenth century, Śā'bārid Khān (sometime written Sābirid Khān), who belonged to the milieu of local dignitaries under Arakanese rule—see Śā'bārid Khān, *Śā'bārid Khāner granthāvalī*, ed. Ahmed Sharif (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1966). Karim, *Corpus of the Muslim Coins of Bengal*, (down to A. D. 1538), 187–90; Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq, *Rihla ma'a al-nuqūsh al-kitābiyya al-islāmiyya fī bilād al-Banghāl: dirāsa tarīkhiyya haḍārīyya* (Damascus: Dār al-fikr, 2004), 58–89.

to mention that in the sixteenth century, a local, linguistically composite nomenclature had begun to emerge in the administrative elite milieu of Chittagong. Titles such as *mundāra*, *vardhamānī chegā*, and *khōyājā-giri* testify to the development of a Muslim-Arakanese administration in Chittagong, which in that period already sported a distinct regional idiom. Bengali Muslims who formerly served the Ḥusayn Shāhī governor joined the Arakanese administration, and in the process it seems that a new local nomenclature was created.²⁶

The only substantial Persian inscription available to us today was found in Mrauk U, and it also shows that as early as 1495, a language reflecting the composite nature of the society was used in official documents. The inscription is bilingual in Arakanese and Persian; the Persian side is slightly more readable and less damaged than that which bears the Arakanese text. A.B.M. Habibullah established (and published in 1966) a tentative transcription of the Persian side based on an unclear picture of the inscription.²⁷ Along with Jacques Leider and Muzaffar Alam, I have tried to provide a more complete reading of the Persian text and compare it with the Arakanese side when possible.

The non-standard nature of the text itself and its unusual vocabulary complicate our task.²⁸ The name of the Buddhist king Ran Oñ appears in its Islamicate form: Nāṣir Shāh (Arak. Nasisā), son of Maṣṣūr Shāh. He ruled from approximately 1493 to 1495.²⁹ The inscription records the donation of a

26 Śā'bārid Khān, *Śā'bārid Khāner granthāvalī*, ed. Ahmed Sharif (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1966): *cha-ṭha*. The terms listed here are mostly unintelligible (except for *khōyājā-giri* = Persian *khwāja* "a man of distinction" + Arakanese *kriḥ* "great") and were not used in subsequent periods.

27 A.B.M. Habibullah, "Two Inscriptions from Arakan," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan* 11, no. 1 (1966): 121–4.

28 See the appendix for the text and the translation of this inscription.

29 On the subject of accounts of his reign in Arakanese chronicles, see Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan, Birmanie*, 75. The chronicles relate that he was a careless king who spent his time with his dancers. He was eventually murdered after a short reign. (The chronicles mention a reign of six months between 1493–94, but on the basis of the present inscription, he must have ruled at least until June 1495.)

portion of land to an individual named Kāshā'ī Faqīr (Arak. Kāci Pokki). A list of witnesses bearing the title *sir pātar* (= Skt *śrī pātra*) is provided, and there is a mention of an imam of the mosque who endorsed with his signature the testimonies of two of the witnesses. The *qāḍī* (i.e., Islamic judge) 'Aṭā Malik Naṣīr recorded the grant and signed it.

The absence of any preliminary invocation suggests that the king who ordered the grant to be inscribed was not a Muslim ruler. This text carved in a stone can hardly be considered a proper "royal inscription." Generally speaking, it does not reproduce the usual format of other inscriptions found in Bengal, which are themselves modeled after very conventional patterns spread throughout the Muslim world.³⁰ The very recourse to Persian—and not Arabic, the predominant language in the inscriptions of the Bengali Sultanate—point to the peculiar nature of this engraved text. The calligraphy is crude and presents features of cursory handwriting untypical of epigraphic texts of the period more likely to be found in texts written on paper. I think it is fair to assume that the engraving was commissioned by the beneficiaries of the royal order (*farmān*), not by the king himself, and that it reproduces the text that was written on the document.³¹

30 For a general overview of the topic in English, see Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq, "An Epigraphical Journey to an Eastern Islamic Land," *Muqarnas* 7 (January 1, 1990): 83–108.

31 Although we know that Arakanese kings had a Persian chancery and exchanged letters in Persian with merchants and Mughal governors, very few documents can be located in collections around the world today. For instance, two letters addressed to a merchant from the Coromandel Coast are found in the Sloane collection of the British Library (Sloane 3259–60). In his description of the letters dated from 1090/1679, which I have not consulted, Rieu indicates that one of the letters (Sloane 3259) "is written in a very barbarous Persian." Charles Rieu, *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1876), 405–6. These documents are also briefly discussed in Galen, "Arakan and Bengal," 211. Letters are also reproduced in Mughal chronicles, but these were most likely edited by the chroniclers. See Syed Hasan Askari, "The Mughal-Magh Relations Down to the Time of Islām Khān Mashhadi," in *Indian History Congress. Proceedings*

It is not easy to define the ethnic and religious affiliations of the individuals involved in this transaction. Despite the use of Persian, there is no Arabic invocation (as we typically find in epigraphic records of the same period in neighboring Bengal). The witnesses may have been either Hindu or Buddhist, or Muslims who bore local names.³² The recipient of the grant is probably Muslim (the term *faqīr*, appended to his name, may just indicate that he was a pious, humble man, not necessarily a Muslim), and a *qāḍī* (Islamic judge) recorded the entire transaction. The mention of the imam of the mosque seems to refer more clearly to a Muslim religious authority. The witnesses whose names are introduced by the honorific title *sir pātar* are certainly dignitaries at the service of the king.³³ It is noteworthy that a *qāḍī*, a figure that we also see in the Bengali poet Ālāol's (fl. 1651–71) milieu, was mediating in affairs internal to the Muslim community and the local administration.³⁴ This inscription shows that the constitution of a local, composite Arakanese society was already well underway in the last decade of the fifteenth century.

of the Twenty Second Session 1959 Gauhati, ed. George Moraes, V.G. Hatalkar, and V.D. Rao (Bombay: Bombay University Press, 1960), 201–13; the content of these letters is discussed in Subrahmanyam, "Persianization and 'Mercantilism' in Bay of Bengal History, 1400–1700," 46–8.

32 Bearing a non-Arabic or Persian name was rather common for Muslims in this region and is still often encountered today. For instance, Ālāol's first patron, who was praised for his Arabian origins (he was a *sayyid*), went by the Indic name Māgan Ṭhākur.

33 For a discussion on Arakanese, Indic, and Persian titles in Arakan's courtly milieu in the mid-seventeenth century, see Thibaut d'Hubert, "Histoire culturelle et poétique de la traduction. Ālāol et la tradition littéraire bengali au XVII^e siècle à Mrauk-U, capitale du royaume d'Arakan" (École Pratique des Hautes Études, 2010), 100–9.

34 *Ibid.*, 212. For a brief overview of Ālāol's life and works, see Thibaut d'Hubert, "Ālāol," ed. Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE* (Leiden: Brill Online, 2013).

Multilingual Coins, Political Centralism, and Courtly Culture in Mrauk U (ca. 1580–1635)

The first multilingual coins date from the 1580s and were minted in Chittagong. At this point the white complexion of the elephant is also introduced into the royal title:³⁵

Arakanese: *chan phrū myā syhan*
 Arabic: *ṣāhib al-fil al-abyaḍ al-kathīr*
 Sanskrit: *dhavala-bahu-gajeśvara*
 “Lord of many white elephants”

It is in 1612, under the reign of Maṅḥ Khamoṅ (a.k.a. Ḥusayn Shāh) (1612–22), that we first find what would become the most frequently encountered title under the pen of Bengali Muslim authors:

Arabic: *ṣāhib al-fil al-abyaḍ wa al-aḥmar* “Lord of the white and the red elephants”
 Sanskrit: *dhavala-lohita-gajeśvara* (1612) / *dhavalārūṇa-gajeśvara* (1619)³⁶

The multilingual coins first appear in association with royal figures—not governors—and extend until the reign of Sīrisudhammarāja (1622–38), who in 1635 (the year of his late coronation) minted the first coins in Mrauk U, which also happened to be the last multilingual coins bearing the name of an Arakanese king.³⁷ From then until the Mughal conquest of 1666, governors in Chittagong minted crude and stylisti-

35 Mitchiner, *The Land of Water*, 131, no. 308. The transcriptions and translation of the Arakanese title were revised by D.C. Lammerts from Mitchiner (*ibid.*). It is noteworthy that among the three versions of the title, only the Arakanese seems grammatically correct. In the Arabic version, *al-fil al-abyaḍ al-kathīr* should be plural (instead it is singular). The expected order of the words in the Sanskrit compound is: *bahu-dhaval-gajeśvara*. The Sanskrit *dhavala-bahu-* reproduces the word order of either the Arabic or the Arakanese (i.e. “white–many”). These mistakes clearly show that the Arabic and Sanskrit versions were translated from the Arakanese.

36 *Ibid.*, 136, nos. 335–6.

37 For example, Sawhla (1586–95) and Islām Shāh (1595–97) were governors who minted multilingual coins. *Ibid.*, 132; 134, nos. 311–3 and 318–20.

cally plain trilingual and bilingual (Arakanese/Sanskrit or Arakanese/Arabic) coins.³⁸

Bengali literature began to flourish in Dhaññavatī precisely at the moment when the names of Arakanese kings stopped appearing on the coins minted in Chittagong.³⁹ I see this shift in the communication strategy of the Arakanese rulers as a consequence of the dynastic break that occurred with Narapati's accession to the throne in 1638.⁴⁰ In brief: Narapati turned to Buddhist institutions and built for himself the image of a pious king, but also tightened his relationship with the Bengali-speaking elites who were in charge of trade and the army.⁴¹ Culturally speaking, this policy produced the composite courtly culture depicted by Daulat Kājī (*fl.* 1622–38) and Ālāol, in which Sanskrit literacy provided a shared episteme and became the cultural idiom through which courtly values would be expressed.⁴²

The move away from the official Islamicate nomenclature is acknowledged by Ālāol, who refers to the former dynasty with the expression *salima-rājāra vaṃśa* ("the line of Salīm Shāh")—Salīm Shāh being the name of Mañḥ Rājā Kṛīḥ (1593–1612) used on coins (nos. 314–8) and by Manrique for Sīrisudhammarājā.⁴³ When praising the ruling king, Ālāol always uses a highly Sanskritized language and employs various forms of the title "lord of the white and the red elephants." But this Sanskritized courtly culture would last only one decade, namely, until the crisis of 1661 that surrounded

38 Ibid., 138–9, nos. 344–52.

39 Dhaññavatī ("The-land-rich-with-grains") is the traditional name of the region surrounding the capital Mrauk U.

40 Leider, *Le Royaume d'Arakan, Birmanie*, 265–85; Stephan van Galen, "Arakan and Bengal, the Rise and Decline of the Mrauk-U Kingdom (Burma) from the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Century A.D." (Leiden University, 2008), 145–61; 166–74.

41 Thibaut d'Hubert, "Histoire culturelle et poétique de la traduction," 293–4.

42 Thibaut d'Hubert, "Pirates, Poets, and Merchants," 64–71.

43 Ālāol, *Padmāvati*, ed. Debnath Bandyopadhyay (Kolkata: Paścimavaṅga Rājya Pustaka Parṣat, 2002), 10; Leider, "These Buddhist Kings with Muslim Names," 211.

the arrival of Shāh Shujā' in Arakan. This upheaval was followed by a withdrawal of Bengali Muslims from the close circle of the king, and there was a decrease in the recourse to Sanskrit literary culture in the Bengali texts produced by Ālāol.

On one hand, these royal trilingual inscriptions (ca. 1580–1635) point to a moment of maximal involvement in the production of coins and the inauguration of a multilingual culture in courtly milieus. On the other hand, they also mark the beginning of a crystallization process for religious identities that would characterize the collapse of this very courtly environment.⁴⁴

The Many Readings of a Title: “The Lord of the Elephant”

In the last part of this article, I will indulge in some speculations about why the elephant's white complexion is not mentioned in the earliest series of coins. The term *ṣāḥib-i fil*, or its Arabic form *ṣāḥib al-fil*, is associated with another figure in the Islamic tradition: the Yemenite Christian king Abraha, who led a campaign to destroy the Kaaba in Mecca.⁴⁵ The episode is mentioned in the Quran (105) and related in commentarial and narrative literature.⁴⁶ It is therefore probable that the title was voluntarily abridged in order to add this second layer of meaning to the message conveyed by the coin.

44 d'Hubert, “Pirates, Poets, and Merchants,” 62–3.

45 A.F.L. Beeston, “Al-Fil,” ed. P. Bearman et al., *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online), accessed August 28, 2014, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.proxy.uchicago.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-fi-l-SIM_2368; Uri Rubin, “Abraha,” ed. Gudrun Krämer et al., *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE* (Brill Online), accessed August 28, 2014, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.proxy.uchicago.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/abraha-COM_22605.

46 The term is lexicalized in Steingass: *ṣāḥibi fil*; Dihkhuda quotes a verse by Rūmī mentioning Abraha and his elephant, thus indicating the quasi-proverbial reference of this figure and the likelihood of the intentional analogy made between the Arakanese and the Yemenite King. ‘Ali Akbar Dihkhuda, “Ṣāḥib-i fil,” *Lughatnāma-yi Dihkhudā* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tihrān, 2002). Also s.v. “Ṣāḥib” in Francis Joseph Steingass, *A*

It could have been a way for the Muslim local authorities, who were under the sway of the Arakanese ruler, to acknowledge the fact that they were at the service of a non-Muslim king. The distance from the seat of the political and administrative rule would thus have been manifested through subtle, rhetorical means.

This practice of paying due respect to the ruler—despite his different religious affiliation—by associating his name with a non-Muslim or pre-Islamic ruler is not uncommon in the corpus under scrutiny. For instance, about 150 years later, the poet Ālāol would praise the king of Arakan by using Solomonic images and, in the following example, by comparing him to the Sasanian king Anusherwan (496–579):⁴⁷

satta-dharma-avatāra : dvitiya nāhika āra : *nyāe jena naesoroyāna* |⁴⁸

“The incarnation of the just *dharma*, he is unequaled, in justice like Anusherwan.”

In both cases, the creator of the text—be it the person in charge of choosing the words of the inscription or the Bengali Muslim poet a century and a half later—is careful not to configure a rapprochement between a Buddhist king and an Islamic royal figure. Also noteworthy is the fact that Abraha is not a positive figure but a threat to Islam.⁴⁹ The choice to

Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary Including the Arabic Words and Phrases to Be Met with in Persian Literature, Being Johnson and Richardson’s Persian, Arabic, and English Dictionary Rev., Enl., and Entirely Reconstructed (London: Allen, 1892).

47 The wisdom and justice of Anusherwan was proverbial, and any child would have at least crossed this royal figure when reading the *Gulistān*, a text universally studied for primary education in the Persianate World. See the *hikāyats* 17, 31, and 37 in Sa’dī, *The Gulistan (Rose Garden) of Sa’di: Bilingual English and Persian Edition with Vocabulary*, trans. W.M. Thackston (Bethesda, Md.: Ibex Publishers, 2008).

48 Ālāol, “Sayphulmuluk Badiujjāmāl,” f. 3a.

49 *a-lam tara kayfa fa’ala rabbuka bi-aṣḥābi l-fil’* “Have you not seen how your lord has dealt with the People of the Elephant?” (Q 105.1) Irfan Shahid, “People of the Elephant,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Brill Online, 2014).

abridge the Arakanese title suggests that relations between the Arakanese ruler and the Muslim elite of the recently conquered region of Chittagong were still ambivalent. We may also recall that the title was completed when, in the 1580s, “white” was added to “lord of the elephant.”⁵⁰ Since the governors of Chittagong also used the title *sulṭān*, a precise characterization of the king’s own title was crucial. However, Ālāol paints an unambiguously positive image of the Buddhist king—one that would deeply impact the political imaginary of Bengali Muslim literature in Chittagong, even after the Mughal conquest of 1666.

To the two Sanskrit versions inscribed on the coins (*dhavalalohita-gaṇeśvara* in 1612 and *dhavalārūṇa-gaṇeśvara* in 1619), Ālāol, in 1651, adds another variant: *śveta-rakta-mātaṅga-īśvara*. One is invited to notice the slightly more elaborate synonyms employed by the Bengali poet who turned to the lexical resources of the Sanskrit language to coin his version of the Arakanese royal title and further characterize his eulogy.

Interestingly, the poet Daulat Ujīr Bāhrām Khān, who was Ālāol’s near contemporary and who wrote a version of the love story of Lailī and Majnūn under the governorship of Niẓām Shāh (ca. 1645) in Chittagong, used the same title to praise the governor.⁵¹ After a brief account of the history of his family (who was in the service of Bengal’s sultan before working for the Arakanese), Bāhrām Khān refers to the governor in the following way:

anukrame vaṃśa katha : gañīlenta ei mata : gaureṛa adhīna
haila dūra |

50 Actually “The lord of the white elephant” could also be interpreted from the perspective of Persian literary accounts of the pre-Islamic past. The slaying of the “white elephant” (*fil-i safīd*) by Rustam when he was still a child would also come to the mind of the Persianate reader. In that case, the association would be with the figure of a mighty warrior. J.T.P. de Bruijn, “Rustam,” ed. P. Bearman et al., *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online, 2007), http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.proxy.uchicago.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/rustam-COM_0944.

51 Chowdhury, “The Arakani Governors of Chittagong and Their Coins,” 152–3; Mitchiner, *The Land of Water*, 139, no. 347.

cāṭigrāma adhipati : hailenta mahāmāti : nṛpati nejāma śāhā sura ||

ekaśata chatra-dhārī : sabhānera adhikārī : *dhavala-arūṇa-gajeśvara* |⁵²

“The lineage continued thus, and the rule of Gauṛ (i.e. the Bengali Sultanate) came to an end.

The very wise king Nejām Śāhā (i.e. Nizām Shāh) became the ruler of Chittagong.

He rules over a hundred vassals (lit. “bearers of parasols”), he is *the lord of the white and the red elephants!*”

It seems that for the Bengali-speaking Muslims of the kingdom during this period, the title of “lord of the white and the red elephants” had become synonymous with political power. One can assume that coins played some role in the spread of this nomenclature at the regional level.

That the title is used even later, in the first half of the eighteenth century, tends to confirm this inference. *Nasle Osmān Islāmābād* (“The lineage of ‘Uthmān in Islāmābād [i.e. Chittagong],” ca. 1713–19), a fictitious narrative genealogy of a *zamīndār* (landholder) of Chittagong written by his brother, Mohāmmad Ujīr Ālī, relates the story of the arrival of Pīr Badr, the patron saint of Chittagong. The poet relies on Ālāol’s verses from the poem *Padmāvātī* both in praising the local *zamīndār* and when introducing the king of Baghdad. He even uses the Arakanese title “lord of the white and the red elephants” to introduce the latter figure:

52 Bāhrām Khān, *Lāyli-Majnu*, ed. Ahmed Sharif (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1957), 87. In the introduction to the edition of the poem, Sharif provides a lengthy discussion in which he tries to date the composition of the text based on the little information given by the poet in his prologue. After many conjectures, he reaches the early dates of ca. 1543–53 (ibid., 17). V. Chowdhury proposes ca. 1645 as a possible date for the governorship of Nizām Shāh. The use of the complete title, which includes both the white and the red elephants, supports this later date. The Arakanese chronicles date the recourse to this title to 1624, after a red elephant was offered to the king, and the earliest instance of the title on coins to 1612 (no. 335). Leider, *Le royaume d’Arakan, Birmanie*, 264–5.

hema-gr̥he ratna-khāṭa : śuddha-śuvarṇyera pāṭa : śretarakta-mātaṅga-iśvara |⁵³

"In a golden mansion there is a platform set with jewels, a throne made of pure gold; he is the lord of the white and the red elephants!"

The irony is that in this story, the original bearer of the title—the king of Arakan—is the infidel opponent of the saint Pīr Badr.

The early history of the production of coins in the Mrauk U period shows that central power relied largely on the local tradition. This reliance emerges both in the shapes of the coins as well as in the messages that they convey. I have tried to show that a certain distance from the interests of the king and the courtly milieu of Mrauk U also comes through in the partial rendering of the Arakanese Buddhist title that creates the possibility of an alternative and Islamic reading. These features of the coins highlight the probability that official documents may have expressed views that were more closely linked to the preoccupations of the local Chittagongian Muslim elite than to royal propaganda.

If the early monolingual coins evince continuity between the Bengali sultanate period and the new Arakanese rule, then the choice of minting multilingual coins can be viewed as a reproduction of a model that had been set by Afghan rulers.⁵⁴ Fostering Indic literacy in the realms of *belles lettres* and the chancellery was a defining characteristic of the period of Afghan rule in North India.⁵⁵ In Bengal, bilingual coins that bore Devanāgarī inscriptions alongside Arabic ones were minted in the sixteenth century.⁵⁶

53 Mohāmmad Ujīr Ālī, "Nasle Osmān Islāmābād vā Śāhnāmā" (Ms. no. 253, n.d.), 53, Abdul Karim "Sāhityaviśārad," Dhaka University Library.

54 Raziuddin Aquil, "Salvaging a Fractured Past: Reflections on Norms of Governance and Afghan-Rajput Relations in North India in the Late Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries," *Studies in History* 20, no. 1 (January 1, 2004): 1–29; Deyell, "Monetary and Financial Webs," 282.

55 Nile Green, "Tribe, Diaspora, and Sainthood in Afghan History," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 67, no. 1 (February 1, 2008): 171–211.

56 The Devanāgarī inscriptions of the Sūrīs (1538–64) and Karrānīs (1564–75) are not as elaborate as the ones in Bengali script in Arakanese

As members of the royal family began to handle the administration of Chittagong, the central power grew increasingly involved with producing coins and fashioning the messages that those coins bore. It is noteworthy that multilingual coins, without completely losing the Islamic formulas, essentially translated into Arabic a very typical Arakanese title—"the lord of the white and the red elephants." The formulaic elements of the inscriptions can therefore be seen as text used to frame and highlight the evocation of the Arakanese title.

A close observation of the evolution of those inscriptions shows that they were gradually becoming part of a localized Islamicate idiom. The bilingual Persian-Arakanese inscription from Mrauk U serves as an early marker of the fashioning of this idiom. During the seventeenth century, the circulation of the coins—as well as the diffusion of courtly poems produced in Mrauk U—contributed to the spread of Arakanese nomenclature in Sanskritic garb among Bengali Muslims. In the eighteenth century, Ālāol was remembered as the author who established poetic standards for panegyric in the regional language.⁵⁷ Poets imitated his style and reused his formulas, including the title of the Arakanese king, in different contexts. Thus, for Bengali Muslims in Chittagong, the title "lord of the white and the red elephants" became a generic term to express the idea of political authority. The *kalima* adorns the name of a Buddhist king, the white and the red elephants enhance the might of a Muslim governor—no a-priori religious-linguistic association could help us properly interpret such utterances produced in the polyvocal context of the frontier region of southeastern Bengal and Arakan.

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coins, and they usually just give the name of the ruler preceded by *śrī śrī*, Mitchiner, *The Land of Water*, 112–3, nos. 258; 261.

57 D'Hubert, "Histoire culturelle et poétique de la traduction," 47.

of the Persian inscription given in the appendix, and Christian Lammerts, Arlo Griffiths, and the anonymous reviewer for their insightful comments and suggestions on various aspects of my text. I must also thank Nell Hawley for spotting the Gallicisms and fixing the barbarisms of my initial draft.

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Appendix 1

*Text and translation of the inscription A. 39 (Warittaung Phaya inscription, 1495).*⁵⁸

The text of this inscription was established using two pictures taken at the Mrauk U museum as well as a rubbing provided by Jacques Leider. In 1966 A.B.M. Habibullah published a tentative transcription and translation of this inscription, along with another fragmentary inscription also dated 900/1495, which does not seem to be extant.⁵⁹

I added all the punctuation marks, highlighted proper names, and unclear passages are surrounded by asterisks*. I also added the *idāfas* in the Persian text and the vocalization in Arabic phrases. In the translation, italicized passages are in Arabic in the original. The readings of non-Perso-Arabic proper names are tentative.

1. فرمان کامگار همایون اعلیٰ کارال *حا*⁶⁰ کاشائی فقیر با پسران خود. *سالکی*
2. سلطان ناصر ابن منصور شاه - خَلْدُ مُلْكُهُ - *متذاکر* کرده: اگر فرما<ید> شهود *یکحرفی* نبشته بدهند.
3. *با تعلق* نگریان اخلاص عموم فرمان صادر شد که نبشته بدهند: پسران ایشان هر چه باشند کسی ایشان همه را بازپرس نکند.
4. بمراد خود هر جا که خواهد بزود بیابد⁶¹ کسی تعلق ندارد. اگر کسی ایشان همه را تشویش بنماید، خر را
5. بسر شهود و سگ را بسر شهود بحضور جماعت کبیر گردید. وکیل سر مانک و هویا مانک، جفوی رانک، جیان

58 The reference is from Kyaw Minn Htin and Jacques Leider's forthcoming survey of the epigraphic material from Arakan. A board placed in front of the Arakanese face indicates that the stone bearing the inscription comes "From Tharatoak Waritthaung Pagoda."

59 Habibullah, "Two Inscriptions from Arakan."

60 Habibullah (*ibid.*, 123) suggests that it should be read <خا>.

61 Since the previous and following sentences are in the plural, we should have: خواهند بزود بیابند.

6. **جکی نالیرانک، ایشان همه نیشتند. باتر از نگریان<ن> با بی سگری، یکی دیگر هنوان سر باتر، دیگر بجویر سر باتر، کالو باتر، کمادین**

7. **باتر، رانکایر سر باتر، کوکایر مهتر، بحضور ایشان همه نیک نیشته شده. *روکشی* امام مسجد شهود دو نگریان تحریر این**

8. **خط نیشته اند. قاضی عطا ملک نصیر یَحَطُّه. هر کرا این سخن بگرداند هر دو جهان بی ایمان باشد فی تاریخ نوزدهم ماه رمضان سنة تسع مائة.**

(1) The powerful great royal decree of the humble **Kārāl *Ḥā (Khān?)* Kāshā'ī** and his sons. **Sālikī**

(2) **Sulṭān Nāṣir, son of Maṣṣūr Shāh**, may He perpetuate his reign, reminded that if he orders it, a **final**⁶² testimony will be produced in written form.

(3) **Regarding** the citizens who are sincere towards all⁶³ the order was issued that it be written [that] none should question further his⁶⁴ sons, whoever they may be.

(4) He should immediately obtain any place that he wants, [and] none may claim it.⁶⁵ If someone troubles them, according to the abovementioned [royal] testimony, he will be considered an ass.

(5) and a dog in front of the entire society. **Wakīl Sir Mānik** and **Hūyā Mānik, Jafwī Rānk, Jiyān**

(6) **Jakī Nāyirānk**, all of them wrote. One *pātar* among the citizens (*nagariyān*) with **Bisakrī**, another one **Halwān Sir pātar**, another **Bajwīr Sir Pātar, Kālū, Kamādīn**

62 We understand *yak-ḥarfī* (lit. "of one word") as something definitive and unambiguous.

63 *ikhlaš-i 'umūm* (lit. "sincerity towards all") may also qualify *farmān* ("order").

64 Here the plural pronoun *ishān* may be used as an honorific form.

65 The text is elliptic here. Lit. "None has a relation to it."

- (7) **Pātar, Rānkāyir Sir Pātar, Kūkāyir** the great (*mihtar*), in their presence everything was properly written. The **RWKShī** imam of the mosque has certified the testimony of two citizens (*nagariyān*).
- (8) *Signature of the qāḍī 'Aṭā Malik Naṣīr*. If anyone changes these words, he will lose faith in both worlds. On the date of the nineteenth of the month of Ramḍān, *year nine hundred* (= June 13, 1495 AD).

Persian face of bilingual Persian-Arkanese inscription in the Mrauk U Museum, photograph ©Arlo Griffiths.

