

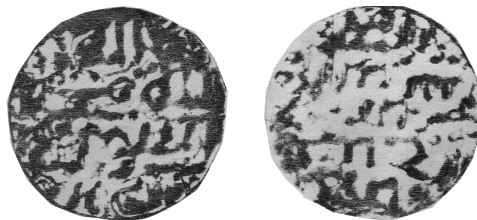
The Muslim Buddhist Kings of Arakan

“Thereafter it is common for the kings, though Buddhist to use Mahomedan designations in addition to their own names, and even to issue medallions bearing the Kalima, the Mahomedan confession of faith, in Persian script; doubtless at first, about this time, the kings had these medallions struck for them in Bengal, but later they struck their own.”¹ G.E.Harvey.

Narameikhla (1404-34) was the first Muslim Buddhist king of Arakan and he was the first Arakanese king of Myauk-U dynasty who kept Muslim name as vassal of Bengal in accordance with the agreement reached between Sultan Jalaluddin Mohammed Nasiruddin Nazir Shah of Bengal and Narameikhla. When he was ousted by Minkhaung (1401-22) of Ava, he ran away to Bengal where he took shelter with her independent ruler Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah (1390-1410) of Gaur where he served Azam Shah with distinction in the field. After many years in exile he was given an army to regain his throne in 1428. Although his Muslim commander at first betrayed and imprisoned him he was ultimately reinstated in 1430.²

When he was in Bengal he observed the Muslim greatness and he studied Islam and was graduated in his Muslim studies and turned away from what was Buddhist and familiar to what was Muslim and foreign and accepted Islam under the Muslim name of Samoom Sulaiman Shah.³ From his reign the Muslim Sultanate of Bengal became influential in Arakan and a good cultural relation between Bengal and Arakan was established, and “ from this time Bengali was accepted at the Arakan court as the chief cultural language, mainly because many of the high officials of Arakan came from Chittagong and the other neighbouring territories whose mother-tongue was Bengali.”⁴ He left Arakan as a wicked and evil man, but he returned from Bengal with a reformed character.

He wanted to make Arakan a prosperous and powerful country. So in 1433 he moved the capital to Myauk-U as it was a lucky site in defense of foreign aggression and Laungkyet was ill-fated by turmoil of foreign incursions.⁵ Narameikhla and his successors continued to use Muslim titles as signs of vassal of Bengal Sultans.



Coin of Narameikhla (Samoom Sulaiman Shah) 1404-1434

1. G.E.Harvey; History of Burma, p.140.

2. Ibid, p.139.

3. Genocide in Burma against the Muslims of Arakan. Rohingya's Outcry and demands, p.31.

4. Sukumar Sen; History of Bengali literature, p.149.

5. Harvey; History of Burma, p.140.

1434 Naranu (Minkhari) 1434-59 Naramekhla's brother and successor ascended the throne with the Muslim title of Ali Khan, during whose reign Arakan was free from the attack of the Burmese and the Talaings who were his dangerous neighbours. His coins bearing the Kalima and his Muslim name are still found in Arakan. In 1437 he peacefully took possession of Sandoway, the southern kingdom of Arakan " at the request of its reigning queen who found it too difficult to manage it because of the ceaseless quarrel between her two sons each of whom aspired to the Kingdom after her death".⁶ Sandoway was separated by the great struggle between the Burmese and the Talaings who tried to gain control over Arakan since 1406 when Naramekhla was deposed and ran away to Bengal. In 1453 he tied up in friendship with the Burmese King of Ava.



Coin of Naranu (Minkhari)Ali Khan 1434-1459

In 1459 Naranu (Ali Khan) was succeeded by his son Basawpyu (1459-82). At that time in Gaur Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah's son and successor Ruknuddin Barbak Shah (1459-75)⁷ peacefully succeeded his father and struck a coin bearing Kalima in Persian scripts and sent it to Basawpyu as a sign of his suzerainty over Arakan. His Muslim name was Kalima Shah. The Bengal coins and Rasti Khan's inscription of 878 A.H. (1459 A.D.) indicate that Chittagong was under Bengal Kings.⁸ In 1473 Sultan Barbak Shah erected a mosque in Chittagong.⁹ So it is not true that Basawpyu occupied Chittagong.

Sultan Barbak Shah was one of the greatest conquerors among the early independent sultans of Bengal. As he was a powerful and genius ruler he would not give up any territories which his predecessors had full control. Although in the history of Arakan Basawpyu was remarked with one of the powerful rulers of his country he might not be equal to Barbak Shah in strength. So we can say that Basawpyu could never extend his authority up to Chittagong which was then under the effective control of the Bengal Sultans.¹⁰ Benefiting from trade with Bengal and Malacca Arakan became a prosperous and powerful land while Ava became powerless to interfere in Arakan.

Although Basawpyu was a powerful king as stated in Arakanese history he was killed in a rebellion conducted by his son Dausha (Dan Uga) in 1482, which ascended the throne and reigned the country for ten years. As he got a white elephant he was known as Sinpyushin Dausha the lord of white elephant. His Muslim name was Maukbul Shah (1482-92).



Coin of Basawpyu (Kalima Shah) 1459-1482

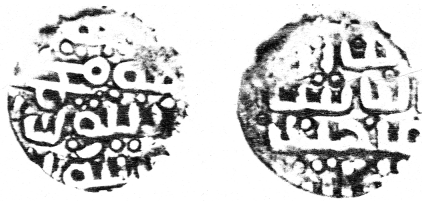
6. U San Shwe Bu; A brief note on the old capitals of Arakan:

7. R.C. Majumdar; The Delhi Sultanate, p.213.

8. Ibid, p.213. Jadunath Sarkar; Mugs and Firinghis in Bengal, Parbashi, Part XXII, Vol:II, No.5, February, 1923.

9. Parbashi, Part XXII, Vol: II, No.5, February, 1923.

10. Dr. S.B.Qanungo; A History of Chittagong, P.151.Dr.Md: Yunus, A History of Arakan, Past and Present, p.p.36, 37+38.



Coin of Dan Uga (Dausha) Maukbul Shah 1482-1492

Then Ba Saw Nyo (1492-94) son of Minkhari became king in 1492 with the Muslim title Mohammad Shah. He was killed by Ngaswe in 1494.



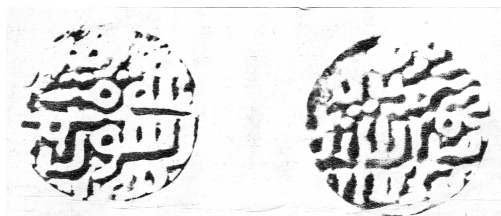
Coin of Basaw Nyo (Mohammad Shah) 1492-1494

After the death of Basaw Nyo Minyan Aung(1494-1494) son of Sinpyushin Dausha was placed on the throne of Myauk-U at the age of nine with the Muslim designation Noorallah Shah in 1494. He ruled the country for six months. He died in a rebellion conducted by his uncle Salingathu.



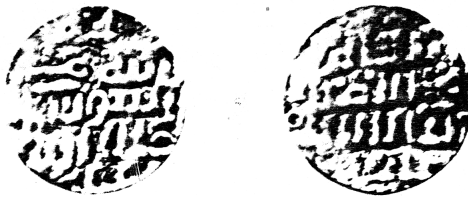
Coin of Min Yan Aung (Noorallah Shah) 1494-1494

After killing Minyan Aung in 1494 Salingathu(1494-1501) set on the throne of Arakan with the Muslim title Shaik Abdullah Shah. He kept the palace guards so that others could not kill him. He died in 1501.



Coin of Salingathu (Shaik Abdullah Shah) 1494-1501

After his death his son and successor Minyaza (1501-13) ascended the throne in 1501 with the Muslim name Ili Shah. He was a luxurious king. Every year he went to Sandoway to catch elephants. The country became desolated. He built his capital in Vaisali saying that Myauk-U was ill-fated by the turmoil of foreign aggressions. When the Thets revolted in the country he ran away from the palace of Vaisali.



Coin of Minyaza (Ili Shah) 1501-1513

When Minyaza ran away from the palace his son Gazapadi put down the rebellion of the Thets. Then the ministers raised Gazapadi to the throne of Vaisali with the Muslim title Iliyas Shah (1513-15). Gazapadi moved the capital from Vaisali to Myauk-U again in 1513. He was killed by the general Zundat in 1515 as he was an immoralist and womanizer.



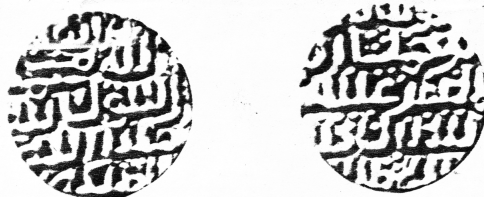
Coin of Gazapadi (Iliyas Shah) 1513-1515

After the death of Gazapadi the ministers put Minsaw-U on the throne with the Muslim designation Jalal Shah in 1515. Minsaw-U (1515-1515) was the brother of Salingathu. He was an old man and died within six months.



Coin of Minsaw U (Jalal Shah) 1515-1515

When Minsaw-U died the ministers placed Thazada, the governor of Rambree, son of Dausha on the throne of Myauk-U in 1515 with the Muslim title Ali Shah (1515-21).



Coin of Thazada (Ali Shah) 1515-1521

After the death of Thazada his brother Minkhaungyaza ascended the throne in 1521. He was killed by Minbin in 1531. His Muslim name was El Shah Azad. He was not mentioned in some of the Arakanese chronicles. His coin was not yet found in the country.

For nearly fifty years from 1482 to 1531 the Arakan country was in disorder and nine kings ascended the throne of Arakan. They were weak kings and during their reigns nothing much noteworthy was recorded except the propagation of Islam by missionaries. During the rule of Jalal Shah (Minsaw-U) three missionaries, Kadir, Musa and Hanu Meah came from Bengal to Arakan to propagate Islam. They built mosques in many places from where daily they preached Islam due to which Muslims increased day by day and so Islam spread throughout the country. Kadir built a mosque in Bandarpara while other preachers also built mosques in other places. They continued their preaching of Islam.¹¹

Arakan's contact with Bengal where Islamic civilization was paramount brought the country's great age.¹² The Arakanese kings had forsaken their old ideas. They had to learn the history of Islam and Muslim rulers of India and westwards beyond who were Mongolian Muslims while the rulers of Further India including Arakan and Burma were Mongolian Buddhists, and they detected the fundamental differences regarding war and greatness of the Muslims and the Buddhists.¹³ Buddhism by its doctrine of ahimsa had made the rulers of Further India peace loving and unwarlike and for them war was wrong which only happened incidentally, and for the Muslim rulers it was the preoccupation of land as a Muslim is taught to believe that every country to which he came to live permanently is his country because it is the land and the country of his God.

The Muslims were united by their religion of Islam which was simple, manly and soldierly, and taught that all members of it regardless of race and rank were brothers. Anyone who accepted Islam, no matter whether he was a slave or a nobleman could rise to the highest rank. The Muslims believed in the religion of Islam, the outlook of which on social and political questions was very different from that of the other religions. With them they brought a well-defined religion, and a highly developed civilization. Indeed it was an avowed principle with them to maintain their purity and to establish them in lands to which they came to live permanently.

It took the Arakanese more than one hundred years from 1430 to 1546 to learn the doctrine from the Muslims.¹⁴ For that hundred years Arakan remained feudatory to Bengal, paid tribute to the Sultans of Gaur and learnt history and politics, and they became proficient in their Muslim studies during the reign of Minbin (1531-53).¹⁵ In those hundred years "the court of Arakan had accepted some of the manners and customs of the Bengali court. Bengali poetry and Bengali dance and music became highly popular in the cultured section of Arakan society"¹⁶ and in that period of Vassalage Islam developed with startling rapidity and became a strong force in the whole life of the people whom it influenced and it was "a period of Muslim domination in Arakan"¹⁷

The Muslim brought a more definite and advanced culture and a civilization based on the teachings of Islam which the Arakanese failed to absorb. The Islamic atmosphere prevailing in Arakan in those days were naturally influenced by the Muslims from Bengal Sultanate. They established more mosques with Madrasahs attached to them for the promotion of learning. The Madrasahs became centres of Muslim cultural influence in Arakan and Persian and Arabic were taught in Madrasahs¹⁸ which were the severe schools of morality and conduct.

11. U Tha Tun Aung; Rakhine Maha Razawindaw Gyi (The Great of History of Arakan), pp.40+41.

12. The 50th Anniversary Publication No.2 of BRSJ, p.491.

13. Ibid, p.491

14. Ibid, pp.491+494. A brief note on the old capitals of Arakan.

15. Ibid, pp.491+494. Islamic Review, April, 1966. p.27.

16. History of Bengali literature, p.150.

17. U Ba Shin; The Coming of Islam to Burma Down to 1700 A.D. , History Congress, 1961, New Delhi.

18. Burma Muslims, p.113.

In 1531 when Minbin son of Minyaza was ascending the throne a three men delegation headed by Abdul Kadir was sent to Arakan by the Bengal Sultan Abu Muzaffar Nasrat Shah (1518-32) to witness and observe his coronation and to give the medallion¹⁹ bearing Kalima, the Muslim formula of faith and his Muslim name Jafar Shah or Zabauk Shah as pronounced by the Arakanese in Arabic language. With this delegation several missionaries came and preached Islam due to which a number of Arakanese became Muslims. Seeing the danger of Islamic missionary works the Arakanese Ministers and specially Shinge Saya U Myawar raised complaints to King Minbin who withdrew all facilities from the missionaries when Arakan regained its full political independence after the occupation of Chittagong in 1546.²⁰ So we can definitely say that whenever the Arakanese kings of the first Myauk-U dynasty were ascending the throne delegations and missionaries came to Arakan from Bengal Sultanate while Arakan was vassal of Bengal.²¹

The coin given by Nasarf Shah of Bengal to Minbin at the time of his coronation bearing the Kalima together with his Muslim name Jafar Shah was not found today in Arakan. But the coin issued on the commemoration of his successful invasion of Bengal which brought Chittagong to his possession are still found in Arakan. One side of the coin bears the Persian Scripts, Sultan Chatgam Mubarak, the king of the prosperous Chittagong as the influence of Persian literature did not cease. Another side of this coin bears his Arakanese name in Burmese legend. It styled him Sultan. So Arakan had turned into a Sultanate. The court was shaped on Gaur and Delhi.



Coin of Min Bin (Sultan Jafar Shah) 1531-53

From the rule of Naramekhla the Arakanese kings apparently used Muslim titles in addition to their own names²² as conferred on them by the Sultans of Bengal, and they even issued medallions and coins bearing Kalima, the Muslim confession of faith in Arabic words as an acknowledgement of Arakan's vassal to Bengal.²³ In addition to Kalima a short prayer "May Allah perpetuate his kingdom" was inscribed in Arabic on some of the medallions and coins of Arakan. They kept Muslim ministers in the interest of good administration.²⁴ At first it was an obligation upon the Arakanese kings to strike coins and medallions with Kalima and their Muslim names in Persian character as vassals, but they afterwards continued this custom although they regained their independence in 1546 when Chittahong was occupied by Minbin (1531-53) after whom the practice of assuming Muslim titles together with their own names and issuing coins bearing Persian and Nagri letters became common for the Arakanese kings of the second period of Myauk-U dynasty (1546-1638) who were no longer under the suzerainty of the Muslim Kings of Bengal. They kept Muslim titles not because they were imposed on them by the Sultans of Bengal, but because they wanted to style themselves as Sultans, and they wanted to show that Chittagong with Muslim population was in their possession and there were Muslim officers and ministers in their court who also influenced the kings to keep Muslim names for the satisfaction of their Muslim subjects.

19. A short History of Arakan, pp.54+55.

20. The great history of Arakan, pp.40+41.

21. A short History of Arakan, pp.54+55

22. Harvey: History of Burma, p.140. D.G.E.Hall, Burma, pp.32+58. Anil Chandra Benarji; The Eastern Frontier of British India 1784- 1826. p.49. A History of Burma, p.98. A History of South East Asia, p.368. A brief note on the old capitals of Arakan.

23. Ibid, p.140. Ibid, pp.32+58. Ibid, p.49.

24. The coming of Islam to Burma Down to 1700 A.D.

The Muslim ministers chose the best Muslim titles for the Arakanese kings. However it is not found that the Arakanese kings of the third period of the Myauk-U dynasty (1638-1784) kept Muslim names although Chittagong with a large Muslim population was in their possession till 1666 when it was finally annexed by the Moghuls.

Narameikhla and his successors who were vassals of Bengal actually professed the religion of Islam though they did not practice it openly due to political reasons,²⁵ and Harvey termed them "the Muslim Buddhist kings of Arakan"²⁶ which means they were Muslims, and kings of Buddhist Arakan.

25. U Maung Ko Gaffary; *The Rohingyas of Arakan*, RUMSA, Annual Magazine, 1957-58, p.48.

26. Sir Wolseley Haig, *The Cambridge History of India*, Vol:IV, p.477.