

DYNASTIC HISTORY OF RAKHINE

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation deals with the Rakhine Dynasties, which flourished from their very beginning long before the first millennium to their end in 1785 when Amarapura annexed Mrauk-U, the last dynasty of Rakhine. Rakhine State today forms the westernmost region of Myanmar. Though a tiny mountainous region today, Rakhine State once took pride of having its own kings and dynasties. Throughout their history, Rakhine people founded their cities with kings and dynasties to rule them. Their first dynasty Danyawady was founded by Marayu, an Indo-Chakkama prince in what a chronicle claims 3325 BC. His line had fifty-four kings excluding usurpers. Then the second dynasty was established by Kammarajar in 1507 BC. His line enjoyed an interrupted period of 987 years on the same location where the first was built. The son of the last king of Kammaraja's line was Thiri Razar, whose son Sanda Thuria set up his own dynasty in the same city in 580 BC. Sanda Thuria is reputed to have introduced Buddhism to Rakhineland in the lifetime of the Lord Buddha. His line was known as Thuria Dynasty. In the early first millennium, Taing Chandra, the son of the last Thuria, built Vesali, founding his own dynasty of Chandra. The Chandras turned their city into a splendid one, making their kingdom strong and prosperous. Vesali Dyansty reached its apex in 6th century AD. Then it became weak due to disunity among its nobles. In 776, Pyu invaded and sacked it. After Shan inroads in 793, Vesali fell. The Vesali Dyansty was immediately followed by the Laymyo Dynasty with both good kings and bad ones on the throne. Some kings were incompetent and some nobles grew in power and seized the throne. Revolts were common mostly to overthrow the bad kings to replace them with ones of royal. The dynasty

reached its height under Min Hti, who died towards the end of fourteenth century. With his death, the dynasty entered an age of turmoil. In 1406, it collapsed after the invasion of Innwa. Twenty-four years later, Saw Mon built Mrauk-U, which soon grew in strength and wealth under King Khari and his son Ba Saw Phru. Rakhine regained Chittagong and had good relations with Innwa in the east. Mrauk-U Dynasty saw its golden age of over one century ushered in by Min Bin in 1531. The Rakhine civilization reached its zenith at the turn of the seventeenth century under King Razar Gri, the grandson of Min Bin. After two more kings, the throne was seized by a usurper in 1638. With this Mrauk-U entered a period of decline. The fatal blow came in the west when Rakhine lost Chittagong to its western and powerful neighbour, Mughul of India in 1666. With reduced revenue due to loss of Chittagong, the kingdom soon suffered a period of instability from 1685 to 1710. King Sanda Vizaya, a talented general, came to the throne and tried his best to revive the glory of Mrauk-U dynasty but only to be killed by his greedy son-in-law. More confusion came and contests for the throne became popular among nobles. Amid natural calamities and unrests, Mrauk-U saw more kings on its throne until its last king, Maha Thammada, was taken captive after a powerful invasion by Amarapura in 1784. With this ended the last dynasty of Rakhine in 1785.

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