A 14th Century Malay Code of Laws
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CONTENTS

List of Tables vii
List of Figures viii
Abbreviations ix
Preface xi
About the Contributors xv

1. Pusaka: Kerinci Manuscripts 1
   Uli Kozok
   Conservation 4
   Script and Writing Media 6
   Correspondence between Script, Text, and Writing Medium 9

2. Kerinci and the Ancient History of Jambi 17
   John Miksic
   Archaeological Remains in Jambi 43

3. Tanjung Tanah Manuscript TK 214 50
   Uli Kozok, with contributions by Waruno Mahdi
   Discovery 50
   Dating the Manuscript 52
   Title of the Document 57
   Physical Properties of the Manuscript 58
   Transliteration and Normalized Transcription 64
   Translation 74
   Commentary 79
   Wordlist 110
   The Kerinci Text 129
   Conclusions 143
4. Script and Language of the Tanjung Tanah Manuscript 162
   Waruno Mahdi
   The Script 163
   Post-consonantal Vowels 167
   TTM's Phonology 175
   Particular Features of the Morphophonology 187
   Some Aspects of the Morphosyntax 197
   Some Particularities of the Vocabulary 210
   Conclusions 214

5. Tanjung Tanah Manuscript TK 215 221
   Uli Kozok, with contributions by Eric van Reijn
   Diplomatic Transliteration of TK 215 236
   Critical Transliteration 242
   Concordance of TK 214 and TK 215 and a Translation of TK 215 245

6. Sanskrit in a Distant Land: The Sanskritized Sections 281
   Thomas M. Hunter
   A Note on Methodology: Tatsama and Tadbhava 283
   Chronological Setting: The Aspect of Form 288
   Setting of the Convocation; Eulogy of the Reigning Monarch 300
   Introduction to the Code of Law: Exhortation to the District Officials 311
   Closing of the Convocation; Role of the Scribe; Location of the Convocation 321
   Mantra Praising the Reigning Monarch 323
   The Saluka Dipati, or Sloka of the Dipati 333
   Malay Gloss of the Saluka Dipati 336
   The Author, His Cohort and His Royal Patron 342
   Conclusions 353
   Directions for Further Study 359

Bibliography 380

Index 397
LIST OF TABLES

1.1 Script and Writing Media 9
3.1 Accelerator Mass Spectrometry Result 53
3.2 Javanese Weights 107
3.3 Monetary Fines and Replacement in Multiple Quantities 109
3.4 The Diacritic ‘i’ in Two Scripts 140
4.1 Comparison of the Script of the Tanjung Tanah Manuscript with that of Other Early Malay Sources 165
4.2 Distribution of Variant Spellings of Tabil “Tael” in Pages of TTms 178
4.3 Words Spelled with a Keret (ṛ) in TTms 185
4.4 The Morphology of the Verb in the Malay of the Tanjung Tanah Manuscript compared with that in Old Malay (OM) and modern Standard Malay (SM) 199
4.5 Cardinal Numbers in Old Malay, in the Tanjung Tanah Manuscript, and in Modern Indonesian Malay 207
5.1 Fines for the Theft of a Chicken in TK 214 and TK 215 264
LIST OF FIGURES

1 Kenduri Sko — Receiving the Guests, Tanjung Tanah, May 2008 xiii
1.1 Medium in Trance 3
2.1 Jambi — The Batang Hari and Its Tributaries 18
2.2 Archaeological Sites in West Sumatra and Jambi 46
3.1 Radiocarbon Calibration Report 54
3.2 Pages 21 and 22 showing the Binding Threads 59
5.1 TK 214 (bottom left), TK 215 (top left) and some Javanese Lontar Manuscripts 222
6.1 Line 4 of TTms 02 298
6.2 Enlarged Section of Line 4 299
ABBREVIATIONS

AN    Austronesian language
KBBI  Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (Alwi; Sugono 2001)
Kec.   Kecamatan (district)
Mal   Malay
OJ    Old Javanese
OJED  Old Javanese-English Dictionary (Zoetmulder; Robson 1982)
OM    Old Malay
SM    Standard Malay
Skt   Sanskrit
UUM   Undang-Undang Melaka (Liaw 1976)
This book is dedicated to a manuscript of a Malay legal code, the Nitisarasamuccaya (Compendium of the Essence of Policy), that I saw for the first time in 2002 in a village on the shore of Lake Kerinci, and which later turned out to be the oldest extant Malay manuscript dating back to the fourteenth century.

I still fondly remember my first visit to Kerinci in 1999. My colleague from the University of Auckland, Drs Eric van Reijn, introduced me to Sutan Kari, a prominent figure and member of the local parliament of the regency of Kerinci. Upon my arrival at the bus station of Sungai Penuh, a small town, which is also the capital of the Kerinci regency, 260 kilometres south of Padang, I was picked up by the late Sutan Kari who, on the same morning, introduced me to Fauzi Siin, the bupati (regent) of Kerinci. When I explained to the bupati that I was planning to research the indigenous Kerinci script, he instantly offered me assistance by providing me with a car, and by taking care of my accommodation during my two-week stay in Kerinci.

Sutan Kari and his close friend Amir Gusti continued to assist me during my four subsequent visits to Kerinci between 2000 and 2004. As respected community leaders they were of invaluable help, and it was through them that I was able to gain access to the sacred heirlooms (pusaka) of Kerinci that until today continue to play an important part in the spiritual life of the people.

Iskandar Zakaria is one of the few people of Kerinci who is able to read manuscripts in both the Arabic-Malay as well as in the Kerinci script. The local artist, renowned for creating a monumental piece of religious art — the Koran written on one huge piece of cloth almost two kilometres long that took eight years to complete — became another member of our small team and regularly accompanied us on our journeys to the villages to document the sacred heirlooms of Kerinci.
At the end of my visit in 2002 during which I had seen quite a few manuscripts on paper, horn, and bamboo, I wondered whether the people of Kerinci ever had utilized tree bark as a writing material. This is something I expected as both the Batak in the North as well as the people of Rejang, Bengkulu, Serawai, Lampung etc. in the South have a tradition of using the inner bark (bast) of a certain tree, which they then cut into smaller size and fold accordion-wise to be placed between two wooden covers. As it later turned out, bark books of this kind are extremely rare in Kerinci, but Sutan Kari told me that he knew of at least one book written on bark paper in a collection in the village of Tanjung Tanah. In the afternoon of the same day, we arrived in Tanjung Tanah and luckily the caretaker of the manuscript was at home and allowed me to take a few photographs.

It was only a few weeks later that I had time to study the photographs and compare them with the notes of the Dutch scholar Petrus Voorhoeve, who in 1942 visited Kerinci in his position as the taalambtetaar (language official) for Sumatra where he was able to document a large number of manuscripts kept by the people as “sacred heirlooms”. The Tanjung Tanah manuscript was listed as no. 214 in his unpublished Tambo Kerintji (Voorhoeve 1941), and in a later publication, Voorhoeve (1970, p. 384) correctly identifies the text as “a Malay version of the book of laws Sarasamuccaya”. I soon realized that TK 214 must be of considerable age, most likely the thirteenth or fourteenth century as the kingdom of Dharmasraya mentioned in the manuscript only seems to have existed for roughly 200 years. In late 2002 for the first time, I publicly announced in an email to several colleagues my assumption that TK 214 may be the oldest extant Malay manuscript, and the only Malay manuscript in a pre-Arab-Malay script. The response was mixed and my arguments were apparently not strong enough to convince most of my colleagues. I then decided to re-visit Tanjung Tanah to ask the owners to allow me to further study the manuscript and to provide me with a small sample for radiocarbon dating which they generously allowed.

During my second visit, the owners also showed me another manuscript (listed in Voorhoeve’s Tambo Kerintji as TK 215) written in Jawi (Arab-Malay) letters. Apparently this was also a legal code, but at first sight it did not bear any resemblance to the legal code of the fourteenth century as the introductory sections were completely different. Once beyond the introduction it turned out that, to our surprise, this manuscript, which probably dates to the seventeenth century, is essentially a copy of the fourteenth-century legal code. TK 215 is discussed in Chapter 5.
The result from the Rafter Radiocarbon Laboratory in Wellington that I received in late 2003 confirmed that the age of the manuscript indeed exceeded 600 years. I then contacted colleagues in the field of Indonesian and Malay philology and linguistics, and together we agreed that the manuscript should be translated as a group effort as no single individual would have the capability to translate a manuscript written in an ancient Malay dialect for which no other sources exist. Subsequently, a one-week translation workshop in December 2004 was organized by the Yayasan Pernaskahan Nusantara with financial support from the Ambassador’s Fund for Cultural Presentation that we received from the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta. The workshop was attended by Dr Achadiati Ikram, Drs Hasan Djafar, Karl Anderbeck, Dr Ninie Susanti Y., Dr Romo Kuntara Wirayamartana, Dr Thomas Hunter, Waruno Mahdi, and myself. The translation team was assisted by Amyrna Leandra, Dra. Dwi Woro Mastuti, Professor Dr Edi Sedyawati, Made Suparta, Dra. Mujizah, Munawar Holil, Yamin, and Dr Titik Pudjiastuti. Dr K.A. Adelaar was unable to attend the workshop but assisted us via email in our attempt to translate the manuscript.

Two participants of the workshop, the linguist Waruno Mahdi and the Sanskritist and Old Javanist Dr Thomas Hunter continued to work on the manuscript and eventually contributed several chapters to this volume. We were also fortunate to secure the agreement of Dr John Miksic from the National University of Singapore to contribute a chapter about the early history of the wider Jambi area.

I am indebted to Jan van der Putten from the National University of Singapore, and Drs Eric van Reijn (Auckland) for their contributions to the chapter on TK 215.

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Uli Kozok
ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

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**Uli Kozok**: born in Hildesheim, Germany, 1959; studied at the University of Hamburg (MA 1989, Ph.D. 1994), Universitas Sumatra Utara (Indonesia) and Leiden University (the Netherlands). He was a Senior Lecturer at the University of Auckland (New Zealand) during 1994–2001, and Professor in Indonesian Studies at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa from 2001–present. His research interests include insular Southeast Asian paleography, Sumatran philology, and the early history of Indonesia.

**John N. Miksic**: born in Rochester, New York, 1946. He graduated from Honeoye Central School, New York, obtained his BA from Dartmouth College, MA at Ohio University, and Ph.D. at Cornell University for archaeological research in North Sumatra. He worked as a rural development advisor in Bengkulu and taught archaeology at Gadjah Mada University, then moved to Singapore in 1987. He has received awards from Singapore and Indonesia for his contributions to the
study of Southeast Asian culture. He serves on the board of the Center for Khmer Studies. He has published books on ancient Javanese gold artifacts and the Buddhist monument of Borobudur. His current research includes a translation of a Malay manuscript from Maluku, and the archaeology of ancient ports and cities in Southeast Asia. Currently, he is Associate Professor in Southeast Asian Studies, National University of Singapore.

**Waruno Mahdi**: born in Bogor, Indonesia, 1943; joined his father, a diplomat, stationed in Singapore (1946–48), Bangkok (1948–50), Beijing (1951–54), Bogor (1954–56), Moscow (1956–60); completed middle school in Russia (1960), and studied chemical engineering in Moscow (1960–65). After the 1965 military coup in Indonesia, he joined the opposition and his passport was declared non-valid. He was banned by the Soviet government to Voronezh, where he was employed as a post-graduate assistant at the Chemical Faculty, Voronezh University (1969–70), and as a chemical engineer at a Voronezh synthetic rubber factory (1970–76). He did autodidactic study of linguistics and worked on Malagasy morphophonology (1972–76). In February 1977, he managed to move legally to West Berlin without valid passport. Here, he worked part-time as a technical assistant at the Fritz Haber Institute (1978–present). He published his work on Malagasy (1988), and continued independent linguistic research on Austronesian historical linguistics, Southeast Asian comparative linguistics, history of Indonesian Malay in culture-historical perspective, published another book and numerous peer-reviewed articles.

**Eric van Reijn**: born in Jakarta, Indonesia, 1940 — just before the War reached Java. He moved to the Netherlands in 1946 and came back to Indonesia in 1948, before finally settling in the Netherlands in 1953. After finishing secondary school in Tilburg, he studied General History and then Indonesian Studies (including Arabic and Sanskrit) at Leiden University, the Netherlands (1959–69). He took up a lecturing position at the Universiti Kebangsaan in Kuala Lumpur from 1971 to 1974, and taught as a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Asian Languages at the University of Auckland (New Zealand) from 1974
to 2002. His fieldwork was mainly in Kerinci, Sumatra (1972 and 1976) recording and translating a folktale, the *Sijaro Panta*. He also studied Islamic Thought and published a translation of five epistles of the *Sincere Brethren of Basra* in 1995.
Figure 1
Kenduri Sko — Receiving the Guests, Tanjung Tanah, May 2008

Source: Photo taken by Uli Kozok.