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## PUSAKA Kerinci Manuscripts

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One can safely say that the Tanjung Tanah manuscript TK 214, originally written in Dharmasraya, some 250 kilometres from Kerinci, owes its existence to the people of Kerinci who safeguarded the manuscript for almost 700 years as one of their sacred heirlooms. It is for this very reason that we find it not only appropriate but necessary to discuss the circumstances that led to the survival of the manuscript and to introduce the amazing collection of manuscripts spread over dozens of villages in the residency of Kerinci.

The tradition of keeping sacred heirlooms is not limited to the people of Kerinci but is widespread in the Indonesian archipelago. Although Islam is now universally embraced as the only religion of the Kerinci people, pre-Islamic customs often survived or were reshaped or reinterpreted to be coherent with Islamic beliefs. A unique blend of *adat* (customs) and *agama* (religion) is indeed characteristic of the Indonesian society as a whole. The pre-Islamic religion of at least most parts of western Indonesia was characterized by a syncretism of ancestor worshipping with Hindu-Buddhist and animist elements. This set of beliefs did not automatically vanish with the introduction of Islam, and is especially evident in the veneration for the forefathers that still holds a high place among many Muslim Indonesians. The sacred heirlooms called *pusaka* are a living manifestation of the glory of the ancestors, and were especially important for the traditional ruling elite for whom they served as a concrete symbol of authority, legitimacy, lineage, and succession.

In Kerinci, *pusaka* are mainly found within the traditional ruling lineages and are in the possession of the *depati*. Although leadership is always a matter of the male domain, the title itself is, together with the *pusaka* items that are innately linked with the *depati*-ship, inherited through the female line from mother to daughter. Ideally, it is the eldest daughter of the present *depati* who inherits the *pusaka*, and whose husband succeeds his father-in-law as the new *depati*. There are, however, also other considerations such as the capability of the candidate for the *depati*-ship, and it is not uncommon that the *pusaka* are entrusted to a younger daughter, or another member of the lineage.

The *pusaka* play a major role in the inaugural ceremony for a new *depati*. The ceremony where a new chief is sworn in is known as *kenduri sko*, literally a “feast for the *pusaka*”. The *kenduri sko* is a major event and lasts for several days. This is the only opportunity when the *pusaka* are taken down from the attic and are publicly displayed. The process wherein the box containing the *pusaka* is carefully lifted from the attic is sometimes supervised by a female medium called *dayang-dayang*. She can communicate directly with the ancestors and has the power to call off the ceremony in the event that the ancestors feel that the ceremony has not been properly conducted. I experienced this personally when during a *kenduri sko* in 2003, the medium suddenly fell into trance. The ceremony had to be called off because, as the ancestors revealed to the medium in trance, certain requirements relating to the ceremony had not been properly fulfilled. As a result, I had to cancel my plans to read the manuscripts that were part of the *pusaka* that we had hoped to retrieve from the loft of the house.

Manuscripts are commonly, but not always, included in the collections of sacred heirlooms, although there is no *pusaka* collection that consists of manuscripts only. The range of *pusaka* items kept by the people of Kerinci is almost unlimited. The most common items are those that relate to power, including flags, swords, daggers, lances, kris, and shields, while others, such as Chinese porcelain, pieces of cloth and other textiles, and handwritten copies of the Al-Qur’an might display the wealth and authority of the ancestral owner.

A complete tusk that I saw in one collection might also have constituted an item displaying the wealth and authority of the owner. There is, however, no standard for what kind of item may become a sacred heirloom. *Pusaka* collection often also include seemingly profane items such as ancient wigs and even relatively modern items such as French language newspaper clippings, or a t-shirt with a printed text in English that must have had some sort of symbolic or sentimental value for its original owners.



**Figure 1.1**

**Medium in Trance**

Source: Photo taken by Uli Kozok.

While some *pusaka* items such as calabashes, shields, swords and daggers, or bamboo and buffalo- and goat-horn manuscripts incised with the Kerinci *incung* script were likely to be produced locally, many other artefacts were clearly of foreign origin. The majority of paper manuscripts were written in the Jawi script, and most of those were originally produced outside of Kerinci, in Jambi or Indrapura. These were typically letters written on behalf of the rulers with certain messages intended for the *depati*, the rulers of Kerinci. The foreign provenance is in most cases evident by the use of the ruler's seal and, of course, the name or title of the ruler or his representative.

In almost every collection, one can find at least some pieces of European, usually Dutch, ceramics, and occasionally also Chinese ceramics and other objects of foreign provenance. The apparent preference for foreign products can partly be explained by the particular status of Kerinci whose leaders, the *depati*, received gifts from the lowland rulers, the Sultans of Jambi or Indrapura, comprising pieces of cloth, daggers, and other royal regalia. Some of the foreign objects may have come to Kerinci as gifts of such kind while others may have been obtained by ways of trade and barter. The relative abundance of foreign products in *pusaka* collections may also be explained by the reverence paid to foreign objects in general. Items associated with civilizations that were held in high esteem were commonly believed to possess great spiritual qualities.

During several visits to Kerinci between 1999 and 2010, I found to my surprise that most of the manuscripts that were documented by Voorhoeve in 1941 are still held in the possession of the original owners though some manuscripts had vanished as a result of fire, or were destroyed in the frequent earthquakes that hit the region. The last severe earthquake took place in October 1995 when more than 4,000 houses were destroyed and another 5,000 damaged. Because the *pusaka* manuscripts are not in the possession of a single person, and especially since they are regarded as sacred, the number of manuscripts and other *pusaka* items that have been sold or stolen is relatively few.

## CONSERVATION

The hitherto known oldest extant Malay manuscripts, two letters in Jawi script from Sultan Abu Hayat of Ternate to the King of Portugal, bearing the dates 1521 and 1522,<sup>1</sup> survived almost five centuries. This was because they were kept in the secure environment of the Torre do Tombo National

Archive, Lisbon, well protected against hazards such as fires, floods, or volcanic eruptions, and were not exposed to the tropical environment, where heat and humidity can cause organic materials to decay rapidly, and where insects and micro-organisms can destroy organic substances easily. Human beings must also be counted as potential enemies as manuscripts can be stolen or damaged by improper treatment. The fact that there are very few manuscripts predating the seventeenth century is usually explained by the tropical climate where manuscripts are “essentially disposable items to be preserved more by copying than by physical conservation” (Feinstein 1996). Manuscripts were at times even intentionally destroyed when they were perceived as a threat to the teachings of Christianity or Islam. During the Padri War in the Mandailing region of northern Sumatra, large numbers of manuscripts became victims of religious zealots in the first half of the nineteenth century. Shortly after the Padri War, a German missionary society set up a base in Mandailing spreading the gospel into the neighbouring districts of Toba and Silindung. Here the German missionaries continued the campaign of the Wahhabi Padri warriors to target books “that were ripe [...] to be doomed to fire” (Meerwaldt 1922, p. 295).

How then is it possible that the TK 214 could survive for almost 700 years in a small village in the interior of Sumatra?

The people of the Sumatran regency Kerinci in the province of Jambi are renowned for having fine collections of sacred heirlooms that are passed down from generation to generation. These *pusaka* are kept in the loft of their houses and seldom see the light of day. Not more than once or twice in a generation are these *pusaka* items publicly displayed during *kenduri sko*. As heirlooms from their ancestors, these items continue to play an important role in the lives of the people. They are inalienable objects of immense spiritual wealth and eagerly guarded because they are believed to protect the community. These items are not owned by an individual, but are the possession of the whole lineage, and are passed down the maternal line. The special treatment these objects are given as sacred heirloom can at least partly explain why the Tanjung Tanah manuscript has survived the centuries.

Kahlenberg gives a plausible explanation for the surprisingly long survival of textiles from Sulawesi: “The large equatorial island of Sulawesi may have the world’s least suitable climate for the preservation of textiles, but due to their customary placement above a hearth, these cloths have been smoked, sometimes for centuries, and thus preserved from the ravages

of insects, rodents and high humidity” (Kahlenberg 2003, p. 86). She adds that these *pusaka* textiles — some of them radiocarbon dated to the thirteenth century — were “displayed mainly at the funeral of clan leaders. They may have seen the light of day only a few times in a century” (ibid.). The textiles from Sulawesi show that *pusaka* items can indeed survive for centuries as long as they are sufficiently protected. It is interesting to note that the *pusaka* of the Toraja and the Kerinci were stored under very similar conditions. Kerinci *pusaka* are typically wrapped in cloth and kept in large wooden chests. These chests are then stored in the attic of the house. TK 214 was wrapped in cloth and stored in a relatively small wooden box. It was placed together with some other *pusaka* items comprising an ancient poncho-like shirt, a long piece of cloth, and another relatively similar legal code written on paper in Jawi script (TK 215) that will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5. This wooden box was then stored in an earthenware pot and a similar earthenware bowl was used as the lid. The pot was kept in a cardboard box and stored in the loft of the owner’s house. The various layers effectively protected the contents of the pot from the damaging effects of light and the abrupt changes in temperature, while the loft with its relatively high temperature during daytime ensured a relatively low level of humidity. Tanjung Tanah is located at an altitude of approximately 800 metres with relatively low temperatures averaging 20°C at night and 27°C at daytime. Apart from these relative positive factors, the material of the book, *daluang*, is also known to possess relatively good conservational properties. The bark paper when not been treated with rice starch, which is likely to attract insects, can last for several hundred years (Timothy Behrend, personal communication).

## SCRIPT AND WRITING MEDIA

The *Tambo Kerintji* contains a total number of 261 Kerinci manuscripts of which 258 belong to 83 private collections in Kerinci. The three remaining transliterated manuscripts (TK 259, 260, and 261) belonged to the museum of the Koninklijk Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen, which has now become the National Museum of Indonesia, before they were transferred to the manuscript collection of the National Library. For the purpose of the following analysis, I have excluded 21 of the 261 manuscripts for several reasons: some of the manuscripts listed in the *Tambo Kerintji* were not actually seen by Voorhoeve so no data of these exists (TK 76, 253); other manuscripts comprise sheets of paper that only contain the imprint of a seal without

actual handwriting (TK 46, 83, 210, 233, 247); some are almost completely illegible (TK 47, 48, 51, 52, 53, 71, 72, 255, 256); while others only contain magical drawings (TK 166). When Voorhoeve catalogued the Kerinci manuscripts, he used a fairly general definition of what constitutes a manuscript — namely any item containing any kind of writing. Thus he included a silver seal (TK 29), a piece of cloth with “Javanese” writing that could no longer be deciphered (TK 225), French language newspaper clippings (TK 82), and even a shirt with an English language imprint (TK 89)! These “manuscripts” are obviously not relevant for our purpose here and have not been taken into consideration. The total number of relevant manuscripts is hence 240. The manuscripts are, regardless of their actual provenance, referred to as “Kerinci manuscripts” since this is the place where they are presently held.

The majority of the Kerinci manuscripts are written on five kinds of writing media, namely bamboo, bark, palm leaf, paper, and horn, and using three different scripts, i.e. the Kerinci *surat incung* script, the Arabic-Malay Jawi script, and a script that Voorhoeve not always quite accurately called “Old Javanese”. Voorhoeve sometimes refers to the Arabic-Malay Jawi script as “Arabic characters” (Voorhoeve 1970), but in the *Tambo Kerintji* (Voorhoeve 1941), ten manuscripts are said to be in “Arabic script” (TK 33, 61, 91, 209, 239, 240, 241, 244, 245, 258). These ten manuscripts that usually consist of a short prayer, or a religious formula in Arabic language, are often accompanied by magical drawings. I assume that these documents are said to be in “Arabic script” because the language used is Arabic, and not Malay. Especially in short manuscripts, it can be difficult differentiating between the two closely related scripts. For this reason I have subsumed all references to “Arabic script” under Jawi.

Four manuscripts are atypical since they were written on uncommon media in the Kerinci manuscript tradition. These are our Tanjung Tanah manuscript on *daluang* paper (TK 214), a genealogy of the *depati* of Saliman written on bone (TK 119), an apparently recent, but unspecified, Jawi text written with ink on leather (TK 178), and a very short, and not quite clear text written in Kerinci script on “tapak gajah” (TK 191). Tapak Gajah (Merremia [=Convolvulus] nymphaeifolia Hall.f.) is a medicinal plant, but it is unclear how it can be used as a writing medium. Unfortunately I did not have the opportunity to see this manuscript myself. *Daluang* manuscripts are well known in Java, and bone manuscripts are frequently found in collections of Batak manuscripts, but leather is rarely used as a writing medium.<sup>2</sup>

The most commonly used scripts are the Kerinci *surat incung* script and the Arab-Malay Jawi script. A much smaller number of texts exclusively written on palm leaf and *daluang* are written in a script that in the TK is consistently called “Jawa Lama” (Old Javanese). However, in a later article Voorhoeve is more cautious about this assumption:

I was wrong in calling all the Javanese scripts in Kerintji documents “Old Javanese”. Schrieke had already remarked in 1929 that the Javanese writing found in Kerintji belongs to two different types. An older type is used in the Tanjung Tanah Code of Laws (no. 160) and in the Hiang Book of Incantations (no. 136), both clearly pre-Islamic texts; the script may be a link between Old Javanese and rëntjong writing (Voorhoeve 1970, p. 389).

Voorhoeve also distanced himself from his previous assumption that all these manuscripts are “Old Javanese”. Some are apparently of much younger age:

The *lontar* letters sent by the Jambi court to the *depati-s* in Kerintji are rare specimens of ancient Javanese royal letters written on narrow strip of *lontar* leaf that was rolled when it was still supple and sealed with a clay seal. [...] Dr Poerbatjaraka deciphered some sentences and found that some of the texts are in Javanese, and some in a mixture of Malay and Javanese, though the script is Javanese. [...] Dr Th. Pigeaud estimates that the date of the Javanese script at mid-18th century or somewhat later, i.e. the same period in which most of the piagams in Arabic characters were written (ibid., pp. 388–89).

Although Voorhoeve does not specify which *lontar* manuscripts he refers to, there is little doubt that the manuscripts in question are TK 217–222 — only briefly described in the *Tambo Kerintji* as “six letters on Old Javanese script on *lontar* leaf, some are in Malay, others in Javanese. The transliteration has not yet been completed (Dr Poerbatjarakan in Batavia is working on them).”<sup>3</sup>

These manuscripts show that some manuscripts are bilingual, and there are also three manuscripts containing text in two different scripts. Two paper manuscripts written in *surat incung* begin with the Arabic prayer *bismi-llāhi r-rahmāni r-rahīm* (in the name of God, the merciful and compassionate) written in Jawi script (TK 61 and 258).<sup>4</sup> The only other manuscript that contains texts in two different scripts is TK 214.



## CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN SCRIPT, TEXT, AND WRITING MEDIUM

As is evident from Table 1.1 (where the Tanjung Tanah manuscript TK 214 is excluded), there is a strong correspondence between script and writing medium. All bamboo and the overwhelming majority of horn manuscripts are inscribed with the *incung* script, while the majority of bark and paper manuscripts are written in Jawi script, and most palm-leaf manuscripts use the Javanese script.<sup>5</sup>

Similar to the Batak manuscript tradition of North Sumatra (Kozok 2000), the Kerinci manuscripts also show a strong correspondence between the message and the medium. This is most evident as far as the bamboo manuscripts are concerned and there are surprising parallels between Batak and Kerinci bamboo manuscripts.

### Bamboo

Bamboo is the writing medium for only about 15 per cent of Kerinci manuscripts, but if those manuscripts that were not produced in Kerinci (i.e. most paper manuscripts) are excluded, the percentage is considerably higher.

All 34 Kerinci manuscripts written on bamboo internodes are inscribed with the Kerinci script and in most cases, the text is a kind of love lament.

**Table 1.1**  
**Script and Writing Media**

	Surat Incung	Jawi	Javanese	Total Media
Bamboo	34	0	0	34
Horn	81	1	0	82
Paper	10	89	0	97
Bark	3	8	0	11
Palm leaf	3	0	10	13
Bone	1	0	0	1
Other	1	1	0	2
Total	133	92	10	240

Before the invention of paper, the Chinese already used bamboo as a writing media as early as the fifth century BC. We do not know when bamboo was first used in Sumatra, but it may have been from the time of the earliest written records. Creese also argues for a very early date for the use of *lontar* — another popular writing medium before the introduction of paper. An eleventh-century inscription from North Bali, for example, “explicitly states that the villagers wished to have their charter transferred from palm leaf to copper inscription in order to preserve it for posterity” (Creese 1996).

Compared with the other writing materials, bamboo has a number of advantages in that it is readily available, easy to write on, and does not require any kind of complicated processing. The main disadvantage of bamboo is that it is relatively heavy and not easy to handle especially for composing long documents. It is likely for this reason that bamboo was never a popular writing medium in Java and Bali where *lontar* (*Borassus flabellifer*), which prefers a slightly arid climate unlike that of equatorial Sumatra, was available.

Once paper became available, the use of bamboo and palm leaves declined, but did not cease immediately: “Although paper was apparently known in Bali, palm leaves were used for both lengthy creative works and day to day administration” (ibid. 39). In the more remote parts of the archipelago, notably in the Sumatran highlands and in parts of the Philippines, bamboo was extensively used as a writing medium well into the twentieth century. One reason for the persistence of bamboo might be that in some areas, paper only became readily available after the penetration of European colonial rule and in other places, this only happened in the first decade of the twentieth century.

That argument is, however, not entirely convincing given that bamboo was still used at a time when paper was already available, especially for the composition of love poetry by several ethnic groups, including the Karo Batak of North Sumatra, the Mangyans of the Philippines, and the Lampung of southern Sumatra (Kozok 2000; Postma 1972). Many Kerinci bamboo manuscripts use the Arabic opening formula *bismi-llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm*, commonly shortened to *basamilah* or *basumamilah*. Islam became widespread in Kerinci during the nineteenth century when paper was commonly available.

Love poetry, which apparently played an important part in courtship rituals, is known by the Mandailing as *andung*, and by the Lampung as *bandung*. The similar terminology is most likely not a coincidence but strengthens the hypotheses of an ancient cultural strain of love poetry

written on bamboo that reaches all the way from the highlands of North Sumatra to the Kerinci and Lampung of southern Sumatra, and the Mangyan of Mindanao in the Philippines. Among all these people, bamboo was the preferred medium for writing love poetry — and the Kerinci apparently used bamboo just for composing love laments only! A closer comparison with the Batak laments shows more parallels between the courtship poetry of the two people. Both Kerinci and Mandailing Batak bamboo manuscripts can vary in length between one and five internodes and are often ornamented, especially around the nodes. The ornaments and also the letters are engraved into the bamboo with the point of a knife and blackened with soot. The Mandailing love lament tradition also gives us a clue why bamboo is the preferred medium. Mandailing laments usually begin with an opening formula where the bamboo is personified and where the writer apologizes that he has to end the life of the bamboo. The following example is from a lament on a kind of bamboo called *riman* or *leman* from the collection of the Museum for Anthropology in Leiden, Catalogue No. 370–2824 (Kozok 2000).

I pe da anggi bulu aor riman  
 ulang ko mardabu-dabu holso di badan simanare on  
 dibaen na sundat ko magodang maginjang  
 ko dioloi ama inamu sirumondop udan dohot alogo simarangin-angin.  
 Ia mardabu-dabu siluluton pe ho anggi bulu aor riman  
 tu Toba Silindung Julu ho mardabu-dabu silungunon  
 di Na Mora Pande Bosi i do ho mardabu-dabu silungunon  
 i do na pajadi-jadi situlison

This is why, brother *riman* Bamboo,  
 you should not curse me.  
 You will not grow lush and tall  
 because your mother and your father, the rain and the wind, did not  
 love you.  
 If you want to curse, brother *leman* bamboo,  
 direct your curse to the Toba land, the upper Silindung valley  
 swear at King Blacksmith  
 for he is the one that turned you into a writing bamboo.

In animist societies every living object is believed to be animated. This is especially true for bamboo that has human-like qualities in that it produces a creaky, moaning sound when the stems rub each other. The personified bamboo that is killed by the knife (King Blacksmith) becomes

the place where “I can leave behind, bequeath my suffering” (*Hupatom pang hupai but do ma jolo na dangol ni simanarengku i*). The writer hence uses the bamboo — the animated writing media — to ward off his own pain and suffering and to transfer his misery to the bamboo through the magic power of the script.

This excursus to the related Batak tradition of love laments written on bamboo might help us to understand the apparent correlation between the message and the media in the Kerinci manuscript tradition. The media (bamboo) is so closely connected with the message (love poetry) that the writers of Kerinci love laments continued to use bamboo even at a time when paper was widely available. Some pieces of love poetry on bamboo segments end abruptly, for which I had no explanation until I found out later that in some cases only the beginning of the love lament was incised on the bamboo and that the text was then continued on a piece of paper. In the collections these two pieces that belong together have usually become separated, but originally the continuation of the lament was rolled up and the sheet, or sheets, of paper were kept within the bamboo node. However often the bamboo had vanished and only the paper part, inscribed with a love lament without beginning, was kept in the collection (see further down under “Paper”).

## Horn

Marshall McLuhan’s (1964) famous expression that the medium is the message also holds true for the Kerinci horn manuscripts. Manuscripts on buffalo, occasionally also on goat horn, are most representative of the Kerinci manuscript tradition, where horn constitutes the most frequent writing media for manuscripts in *incung* script — the only exception is TK 211, a *piagam* (charter) of the collection of *depati* Sirah Bumi Putih of the Dusun Cupak, which is inscribed with a text in Jawi script on buffalo horn. In the case of horn manuscripts, the relation between the (writing) medium and the message is most evident. The overwhelming majority of horn manuscripts are genealogical texts (*tambo*). The genealogies typically begin with the opening formula “Ini surat tutur tamba ninik...” (This is the story of the genealogy of ancestor... [followed by the name]). It is interesting to note that frequently the origin of the ancestor is traced back to Bumi Minangkabau, sometimes also spelled Banang Kabau (TK 11, 25, 38) or Binang Kabau (TK 35). Only about 10 per cent of the horn inscriptions show Islamic influence so it can be concluded that most horn manuscripts were written before the mid-nineteenth century. On the other hand, if

there are a considerable number of horn inscriptions showing Islamic influence (typically by using the opening formula *bismi-llāh* “in the name of God”), why then are they written on horn and not on paper since paper is intrinsically connected with the arrival of Islam? It is, of course, possible that at the time when the manuscripts were written, paper was still rare and expensive. However, there is also another possible, and much more likely, interpretation. Westenenk reports that

when in former times a dispute broke out between districts, a ritual meal was held on top of the Bukit Tinjau Laut (Sea View Mountain) to settle the dispute by means of a written agreement inscribed into both horns of the buffalo slaughtered for the feast. Each party received one horn, where also the district borders were determined (Westenenk 1922, p. 96).<sup>6</sup>

Here, the relationship between the medium (a pair of buffalo horns) and the message (two copies of a contract) is all too obvious.

Many *tambo* make ample reference to topographical details including forests and rivers, and the borders of the district founded by the ancestors are often described in detail. Thus it can be concluded that these horns symbolized agreements reached by the ancestors concerning territorial boundaries. The symbolic character of the horns is also evident from the fact that horn by itself is not a very suitable writing medium when compared to bamboo. Bamboo is certainly easier to obtain, and the script, which is usually blackened with soot, is much more easily read than the script incised on the already dark horns.

## Paper

Although paper manuscripts are usually written in Jawi script, there are also ten paper manuscripts written in *incung* script (TK 36, 61, 64, 65, 95, 96, 186, 238, 250, 258). TK 36 is an unusual case in that it actually consists of two manuscripts, a bamboo and a paper manuscripts, that apparently belong together. The paper manuscript was rolled up and inserted into the bamboo segment. As both manuscripts belong to the same genre, i.e. love poetry, it is likely that the paper manuscript is a continuation of the incomplete text on the bamboo. The paper scroll is unfortunately in poor condition and in most parts illegible, but it seems evident that the writer ran out of space and decided to continue to write on paper. If we accept the proposition that the paper manuscript is a continuation of the text on the bamboo, then we have clear evidence that the horn was

used as the primary writing medium because of its symbolic character. Our theory is also supported by the other paper manuscripts. With the exception of TK 96 where it is impossible to ascertain the genre because the letters have become illegible, all the other paper manuscripts in *incung* script are paper scrolls inscribed with love laments, and it is quite evident that they, as in the case with TK 36, were associated with a bamboo manuscript.

The vast majority of paper manuscripts are written in Jawi script, and most of them were not written in Kerinci, but sent by the lowland (*ilir*) rulers, usually the Sultan of Jambi, to their subjects in Kerinci. These letters are important historical documents as they fall into the period between 1727 and 1833 when there was little Dutch involvement in Jambi, and hence very few Dutch sources exist during this period. As is evident from the many letters sent to Kerinci in the second half of the eighteenth century, this was apparently a time when Jambi tried to exercise strong influence in Kerinci.

Besides letters and royal charters (*piagam*) dealing mainly with territorial disputes, the *Tambo Kerintji* also contains two legal codes (*undang-undang*) (TK 165, 215), a few genealogies (*tambo*) (TK 8, 41, 50, 133,<sup>7</sup> 143, 223), one text of religious nature (TK 144), a letter from the Sultan of Indrapura with a request to the *depati* of Simpan Bumi to trade ivory, bee's wax, ropes, and "plenty of gold", in exchange for a variety of cloths (TK 183) and some texts of protective magic with magical drawings (TK 239–241). The oldest of the sixteen dated manuscripts is TK 23, a royal charter issued by Pangeran Suria Karta Negara to the *depati* Payung Negari in Sungai Penuh, which dates to AH 1100 (1689 CE), followed by a similar charter (TK 22) by the same sender and to the same addressee dating to AH 1116 (AD 1704). The most recent dated paper manuscript is TK 44, a *piagam* issued by Pangeran Citra Puspa Jaya to *depati* Sungai Laga in AH 1234 (1819 CE).

The majority of dated manuscripts fall into the eighteenth century, their number reaching a peak after the departure of the Dutch from Jambi in 1770 during the reign of Pangeran Temenggung Mangku Negara, Sultan of Jambi. Nine dated manuscripts date to the eighteenth century with the majority of those (seven) dating into the latter half of the century (1776–1794 CE), while five dated manuscripts date to the nineteenth century. Although the remaining paper manuscripts do not bear any date, many of them can still be dated by corroborating the names that occur in these manuscripts with those in dated manuscripts. Pangeran Temenggung Mangku Negara, for instance, who has issued three

manuscripts dated between 1792 and 1776, is also mentioned in seventeen other manuscripts.<sup>8</sup>

## Bark

Unfortunately I was unable to personally view a bark manuscript, and the notes in the *Tambo Kerintji* are not very exhaustive as far as the physical appearance of the bark manuscripts is concerned. Eight of the twelve bark manuscripts are in Jawi script, two of them, TK 75 and 77, are religious texts of considerable length (about 1,000 words), while TK 100 and 101 are relatively short texts. No transliteration is available for TK 78, and TK 157, 158, and 209 were in such poor condition when Voorhoeve saw them that he did not attempt to transliterate them. TK 76 is a divinatory text (*ketika*), but the script in which it was written is not mentioned and the manuscript was also not transliterated. TK 120, 164, and 236 are written in *surat incung* but it is almost impossible to make sense of the text.

## Palm Leaf

It is interesting to note that the ten manuscripts written in “Old Javanese” are all written on palm leaf — with TK 214 being the only exception. The palm-leaf manuscripts that I saw were written in a script that appears to be considerably younger than Old Javanese. They were written on the leaves of the *lontar* palm (*Borassus flabellifer*), which does not grow in Central Sumatra, and not on the much thinner leaves of the *nipah* palm which is available in abundance along the lowland rivers of Sumatra. The *lontar* palm grows best in warm and dry areas with 500–900 mm average annual rainfall. In Sumatra it only occurs in the drier parts of Aceh. Central Sumatra is either too wet or, in the dryer highlands, too cold for the plant to grow. As the Acehnese usually did not write on *lontar*, which, however, was the most prominent writing medium in Java and Bali, it can be concluded that leaves of the *Borassus* palm were imported from Java. Although the material may be Javanese in origin, and some of the manuscripts, notably TK 217–222 also contain some text in Javanese language, the main language used in these manuscripts is usually Malay. Sumatran provenance is also evident from the fact that two palm-leaf manuscripts are incised with text in a variant of the Kerinci *surat incung* script (TK 226, 260, 261).

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In 1988, Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas claimed to have encountered what he called “the oldest extant Malay manuscript”, which, however, only dates to 1590 AD. In the chapter “Previous accounts of some of the oldest Malay manuscripts”, he gave a comprehensive account of previous known oldest manuscripts without, however, making any reference to the two letters from the Sultan of Ternate 12.
- <sup>2</sup> Ms A 30819 of the Linden-Museum (Stuttgart) collection was written on a leather bag. Cf. Figure 115 in Sibeth 15 (1991).
- <sup>3</sup> Enam helai soerat bertoelisan Djawa Lama pada daoen lontar, ada jang berbahasa Melajoe, ada jang berbahasa Djawa. Salinannja beloem siap (lagi diperiksa oleh toean Dr Poerbatjarakan di Betawi).
- <sup>4</sup> In other manuscripts, the *bismi-llāh* formula was written in *surat incung*.
- <sup>5</sup> The fact that the script is in Javanese does not mean, however, that it was originated from Java. The Jambi court has already a strong Javanese influence in the seventeenth century that “the *pangeran gedé* (crown prince) was heard many times to say that he found the Javanese language and attire the most attractive in the world, and an edict was even passed declaring that the interior people must lay aside their Malay clothes and dress in the Javanese style if they appeared at court” (Andaya 1993a, pp. 66–67).
- <sup>6</sup> Ook wist men, dat, was vroeger een veete tusschen landschappen uitgevochten, een *kandoeri* gehouden werd op den Boekit Tindjau Laoet (=Zeezicht-berg), waarbij op de beide hoorns van een geslachten karbouw de gesloten overeenkomst werd gegrift, één exemplar voor elk der partijen; en dat daarbij ook de landsgrenzen werden vastgelegd.
- <sup>7</sup> Voorhoeve erroneously titled TK 133 a legal text (seboeah kitab oendang-oendang), although in the next paragraph he correctly describes it as a genealogy (*tambo*).
- <sup>8</sup> This method is, however, not always a sound way of dating, as some of the same titles were in use by different individuals, e.g. Pangeran Suta Wijaya, over a long period of time.