

RAJA BILAH AND  
THE MANDAILINGS  
IN PERAK: 1875-1911

Abdur-Razzaq Lubis & Khoo Salma Nasution

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This book is dedicated to the memory of  
Muhammad Dahlan Harun @ Muhammad Dahlan Loebis,  
and Teh Puasa binti H. M. Salleh.

This work was made possible by a grant from The Toyota Foundation from 1997-1999, which enabled the authors to carry out research on the 'Penghulu Papers'. The grant also enabled us to retrieve reference materials, conduct interviews and make field trips to various states in Malaysia as well as to Medan and Mandailing in Sumatra. It also allowed us to make presentations of our findings at several seminars and conferences.

The 'Penghulu Papers' consist of family documents belonging to Raja Asal, Raja Bilah and Raja Ya'qub, kept in the Rumah Besar in Papan, Perak. The documents date from the 1870s to 1940s.

In the words of Annabel Teh Gallop, Curator for Indonesian and Malay, The British Library: 'It is rare to find such a cohesive collection of Malay manuscripts documents, covering the activities of three generations of a family of Penghulus, still intact in private hands. I have been able to personally inspect copies of approximately 150 documents which have been transliterated in Romanized Malay, and can confirm the importance of the contents. To the best of my knowledge, no comparable collection of Malay manuscripts of this nature is held outside Malaysia, although there may be smaller numbers of similar documents in the National Archives of Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur'.

*Letter, Annabel Teh Gallop, Curator for Indonesian and Malay, The British Library, to The President, The Toyota Foundation, 16 May 1997.*

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## PREFACE

Abdur-Razzaq Lubis and his wife, Khoo Salma Nasution, have made a major impact in the field of Malaysian historiography. Their contributions to the enrichment of Penang's historiography in particular have matched those achieved by scholars attached to universities in both Malaysia and foreign countries.

They have also done very useful work on Perak, and Abdur-Razzaq has spent many years studying the Mandailing community of which he is a member. The present work is a result of many years of sheer hard work. He has discovered private documents and, at the same time, examined official sources.

This is a history of the community in late 19th century and early 20th century Perak. It is even more of a biography of the very well-known Mandailing leader - Raja Bilah. In the process, Abdur-Razzaq also provides a useful picture of the development of tin mining in the Kinta district beginning from the mid-1880s. In all three respects, Abdur-Razzaq's study can lay claim to being a pioneering work.

It may be mentioned in passing that the movement of population from Sumatra to the Malay Peninsula occurred from very early times but among the various groups that have crossed the Straits of Melaka, the Minangkabau and the Acehnese are among the best known today. Indeed the Minangkabau founded the kingdom of Negeri Sembilan in the early 18th century and it has survived to this day. The Acehnese, for a little over a century after the conquest of Melaka by the Portuguese, had a major impact on the history of Kedah, Perak, Pahang and ancient Johor (Johor Lama). The Dato Balai Maharaja Lela (Pandak Lam), implicated in the assassination of J.W.W. Birch, the first British Resident in Perak, was of Acehnese origin.

Among the other Sumatran groups present in the Peninsula, the Mandailing, Rawa, Kerinci, Kampar, Bangkahulu, and Batu Bahara were among the more prominent. All these were conspicuously present in Selangor, while Perak and Pahang also