

Rule behind the silk curtain: the Sultanahs of Aceh 1641-1699.

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**RULE BEHIND THE SILK CURTAIN: THE SULTANAHS
OF ACEH 1641-1699**

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This is to certify that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is about the kingdom of Aceh Dar al-Salam in the latter half of the seventeenth century when four women ruled in succession: Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin Syah (1641-1675), Sultanah Nur Alam Naqiatuddin Syah (1675-1678), Sultanah Inayat Zakiatuddin Syah (1678-1688) and Sultanah Kamalat Zainatuddin Syah (1688-1699). How and why these queens came to power, and how they exercised it, are problems that have fascinated enquirers, prompting a range of comments and observations, especially the assertion that the queens were mere figureheads, during whose reigns the male elite (*orangkaya*) captured power. The Sultanahs were held responsible for the erosion of royal power and the kingdom's decline in the seventeenth century. Yet no in-depth study has ever investigated these claims. The main objective of this thesis is to evaluate the received views on these female sovereigns. The thesis also seeks to examine the origin, nature and impact of these Sultanahs. Female rule seems a curious phenomenon in a Muslim state. Furthermore, in a largely patriarchal kingdom such as Aceh, queens seemed to be strangely out of place. This unique episode in Aceh's history happened when European Companies -the Dutch VOC (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*) and the English East India Company - were gradually increasing their commercial hold and flexing their military muscles in the region. Indigenous polities suffered increasing interference and pressure from Westerners. Most Malay and Muslim coastal polities in maritime Southeast Asia fell into European intruders' hands. By exploring the circumstances and arguments surrounding female accession, and examining some key episodes that show how power worked in Aceh at the time, I hope to approach a new understanding of how and why the male elite of Aceh placed the fate of the kingdom in the hands of women, and with what effects.

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Glossary

Words in the thesis that are explained in the glossary below are identified with *.

Footnotes that are elaborated in Appendix 1 are marked with #.

<i>adat</i>	customary practice
<i>alim</i>	religious scholar
<i>balai</i>	audience hall
<i>bendahara</i>	treasurer or at times first ranking member of the court after the ruler.
<i>bahar, bharen (Dutch plural of bhaar)</i>	a Malay measure of weight varying roughly from 210-230kg
<i>bintharas</i>	court officials
<i>boedjangh</i>	royal messenger
<i>capados</i>	eunuchs
<i>chap</i>	seal
<i>chialoup</i>	boat
<i>coopman</i>	trader
<i>darurat</i>	crisis
<i>derbaka</i>	disobedience
<i>dewa-raja</i>	kings with divine powers
<i>daulat</i>	sovereignty, power (mystical) and authority of ruler
<i>estemie</i>	ruler's order without bearing the royal seal
<i>fatwa</i>	religious decree
<i>firman</i>	ruler's order
<i>gampung/ kampong</i>	village
<i>gorab</i>	vessel
<i>hadith</i>	sayings of the Prophet
<i>hadith repertories</i>	testimonies of the Prophet's disciples concerning his words and deeds
<i>hakim</i>	judge
<i>hikayat</i>	folklore
<i>hukumah</i>	laws
<i>ijtihad</i>	interpretation of Islamic law

<i>imam</i>	head of congregational prayers
<i>jawi</i>	Malay in Arabic script
<i> Jihad</i>	holy war
<i>Kadhi Maliku'l Adil,</i> <i>Qadi Malik al-Adil</i>	religious judge
<i>kali</i>	Acehnese version for kadhi
<i>Kanun/ Qanun</i>	Canonical laws
<i>kati</i>	a measure of weight, 1 kati is about 625g
<i>kerajaan</i>	a state of having a king
<i>khalifah</i>	God's shadow or representative on earth
<i>khutbah</i>	religious sermon
<i>kris</i>	dagger
<i>kurnia</i>	grant
<i>Laksamana</i>	admiral of the navy
<i>Mahamulia/Maha</i> <i>Mulia</i>	His/Her Highness
<i>mandalas</i>	circles of kings/influences
<i>mudhakkar</i>	being a male
<i>muhrim/ mahram</i>	is an unmarriageable kin with whom sexual intercourse would be considered incestuous, a punishable taboo
<i>muqim</i>	collection of villages
<i>musyawarah</i>	consensus-building
<i>naeleers</i>	captains
<i>nanggroe/ negeri</i>	district
<i>ondercoopman</i>	junior trader
<i>oppercoopman</i>	senior trader
<i>orangkaya</i>	rich nobles who were also state officials
<i>padi</i>	paddy
<i>panglima(s)</i>	governor(s)
<i>penghulu</i>	village head
<i>perahu</i>	small boats
<i>Perdana Menteri</i>	prime minister
<i>puji-pujian</i>	compliments
<i>Putri</i>	princess
<i>Rijxraad/ Rijxraaden</i>	State Council member/State Council members

<i>ruba</i>	customary dues
<i>sagi</i>	literally means a three-point or triangular sieve to separate rice from husks; here it refers to the three provinces comprising a confederation of districts
<i>sakti</i>	magical
<i>sarakata</i>	court document bearing the ruler's seal
<i>saudagar raja</i>	king's merchant
<i>sembah</i>	obeisance
<i>Serambi Mekah</i>	veranda of Mekah
<i>shahbandar</i>	an administrative official or representative of a merchant group in a port
<i>Sheikh al-Islam</i>	the highest religious judge
<i>Sri</i>	auspicious
<i>suassa</i>	alloy of copper and bronze
<i>sutti</i>	ritual burning of high-born widows on their husbands' funeral pyre
<i>syariah</i>	Islamic law
<i>tandil</i>	bodyguard
<i>ulama</i>	religious scholars
<i>uleebalang, hulubalang</i>	local leaders holding political and military authority
<i>ummah</i>	community of believers
<i>vrouwenregeeringen</i>	government by women
<i>wakil</i>	representative
<i>wali</i>	legal guardian of a bride

INTRODUCTION

In the seventeenth century, the kingdom of Aceh Dar al-Salam was best known as a staunchly Islamic kingdom in the north of the island of Sumatra and a major trading centre for pepper. Pepper propelled Aceh's ascendancy in the sixteenth century and made it Melaka's successor as the main Muslim commercial centre supplying the Mediterranean through the Red Sea, rivalling the Portuguese.¹ Soon after Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-1636) inaugurated what was deemed as the "golden age" in Acehnese history, when Aceh's influence expanded and reached as far south as Padang in Sumatra and Johor on the Malay Peninsula,² four female monarchs in succession ruled this Muslim kingdom for half a century (1641-1699). Female rule seems a curious phenomenon in a Muslim state. Furthermore, in a largely patriarchal kingdom such as Aceh, queens seemed to be strangely out of place. This unique episode in Aceh's history happened when European Companies -the Dutch VOC (*Veerinigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*) and the English East India Company were gradually increasing their commercial hold and flexing their military muscles in the region. Indigenous polities suffered increasing interference and pressure from Westerners. Most Malay and Muslim coastal polities in maritime Southeast Asia fell into European intruders' hands. It is extraordinary that in such dangerous times, the male elite of Aceh placed the fate of the kingdom in the hands of women.

Despite these historical curiosities, thus far, no in-depth research has been undertaken to explore this strange episode. Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin Syah (1641-1675), Sultanah Nur Alam Naqiatuddin Syah (1675-1678), Sultanah Inayat Zakiatuddin Syah (1678-1688) and Sultanah Kamalat Zainatuddin Syah (1688-1699) remain elusive.

¹ Anthony Reid, *An Indonesian Frontier: Acehnese and other Histories of Sumatra*, (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2005), p. 6. See also, Charles Boxer, 'A note of Portuguese reactions to the revival of the Red Sea spice trade and the rise of Aceh, 1540-1600,' *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 10.3 (1969). There are numerous studies devoted to explain the rise of Aceh after the fall of the Sultanate of Melaka in 1511 such as those by A. K. Dasgupta, Paulo Pinto and Jorge Alves. A.K. Dasgupta, 'Aceh in Indonesian Trade and Politics 1600-1641' (Unpublished Doctoral thesis, Cornell University, 1964).

² Aceh's purported "golden age" under the rule of Iskandar Muda (1607-1637) has also been well explicated by Lombard. Denys Lombard, *Le Sultanat d'Atjeh au temps d'Iskandar Muda (1607-1636)*, trans. by Winarsih Ariffin, *Kerajaan Aceh, Jaman Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-1636)*, (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1986).

Although little researched, the mystery surrounding the reigns of these queens has fascinated many enquirers, prompting a range of comments and observations, which are as varied as those who made them. These comments and observations range from hearsay to studied opinions to scholarly work by some nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Dutch and English scholars such as Valentyn, Veth, Van Langen, Marsden, Braddel, Snouck Hurgronje and Veltman. More recent writings on these queens are by Anthony Reid, Leonard Andaya and some Indonesian writers such as Hoessin Djadjadiningrat, Mohammad Said, Iljas Sutan Pamenan, Ali Hasjmy, Rusdi Sufi, Gade Ismail and Amirul Hadi.³ Their accounts, though noteworthy, have raised more questions by flagging up contradictions. Furthermore, these accounts are generic in nature and do not purport to study female rule in Aceh comprehensively. Only three studies, those by Takeshi Ito⁴ (1984), Auni Luthfi⁵ (1993) and Mulaika Hijjas⁶ (2001) directly focus on these female monarchs.

Origin, Nature and Impact of Female Rule

Accounts of the women who reigned in Aceh have centred on the origin, nature and impact of their rule. Anthony Reid explained that female rule in Aceh originated as a deliberate experiment conducted by the **orangkaya*. This experiment was a response to the absolutism of Iskandar Muda and the choice of successors to Iskandar Muda was indicative of the ambivalent attitude of the court elite to his reign.⁷ Reid further elucidated that female rule was one of the few devices available to a commercially oriented aristocracy to limit the despotic powers of kings and to make the state safe for

³ Please refer to bibliography for full details.

⁴ Takeshi Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh: A Historical Study of the Sultanate of Aceh' (Unpublished Doctoral thesis, Australian National University, 1984).

⁵ Auni Luthfi, 'The Decline of the Islamic Empire of Aceh, 1641-1699' (Unpublished Master's thesis, McGill University, 1993).

⁶ Mulaika Hijjas, 'The Woman Raja: Female Rule in Seventeenth Century Aceh' (Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Oxford, 2001).

⁷ Anthony Reid & Takeshi Ito, 'From harbour autocracies to feudal diffusion in 17th century Indonesia: The Case of Aceh', in *Feudalism: Comparative Studies*, ed. by E. Leach, S.N. Mukherjee, and J. Ward, (Sydney: Sydney Association for Studies in Society and Culture, 1985), p. 14.

international commerce.⁸ Reid concluded that having experimented with the female alternative, these aristocrats sought to perpetuate it.⁹

Inherent in this explanation was the idea that the *orangkaya* were supreme in Aceh and ruled as a unified oligarchy. Based on Reid's arguments, the *orangkaya* might have opted for female rule because a female ruler might be more compliant and reliant on the *orangkaya*, who wished to secure their positions and share the kingdom's wealth. But why did the *orangkaya* not choose a weak male ruler or better still, a minor with one of the elites acting as a regent, perhaps? Furthermore, why choose a woman in 1641, not earlier or later? Indeed, why choose a woman - something that was never ventured before in the dynastic succession of the Acehnese Sultanate, at such a critical juncture, when some Malay polities and even Portuguese Melaka had succumbed to the VOC? A strong leadership, *à la* Iskandar Muda, perhaps would seem to be a more appropriate response to meet this threat. Reid's thesis on the origins of female rule in Aceh invites further research.

The nature of female rule in Aceh is even more problematic than its origins and has been intensely debated. Thomas Braddel hailed the institution of female rule as "a most singularly revolution" that happened in Aceh.¹⁰ Similarly, William Marsden described it as "a new era in the history of the country", and noted that female rule in Aceh had attracted much notice in Europe.¹¹ An Acehnese, Ilyas Sutan Pamenan, writing in the twentieth century, felt that female rule was strange (*ganjil*) and asserted that the people did not accept this institution because the subjects only recognised the rule of males. On the other hand, P.J. Veth saw female rule in Aceh not as an aberration, nor an experiment conducted by the elite, but as part of the indigenous practice of Southeast Asian states. He cited other examples of **vrouwenregeeringen* in Patani, Borneo, Palembang and Celebes.¹² Mohammad Said, a local, argued too that female rule in Aceh was not an aberration and was part of **adat*. He argued that a few centuries previously, Aceh had a

⁸Anthony Reid, 'Female Roles in Pre-Colonial Southeast Asia', *Modern Asian Studies*, 22, Part 3, (1998), 629-645, p. 641.

⁹ Reid, 'Female Roles', p. 641.

¹⁰ Thomas Braddel, 'On the History of Acheen', *The Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia*, vol. IV, (1850), 15-25, p. 19.

¹¹ William Marsden, *History of Sumatra* Introduced by John Bastin 3rd. edn (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986) pp. 447, 454.

¹² P. J. Veth, 'Vrouwenregeeringen in den Indischen Archipel', *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indie*, Derde Derie, 4^{de} Jaargang, Tweede Deel, (1870), 354-369, pp. 362-365.

female navy Admiral and this was acceptable in the Acehese custom since women could be rated as powerful and as capable as men.¹³ Pamenan disagreed and even argued that female rule was not only unacceptable but also inappropriate especially since Aceh was not economically secure at that time. He contended that Aceh needed a strong hand to earn the respect of foreigners and a woman would not be able to carry out such heavy and important responsibilities.¹⁴

Despite the disagreements, most writers appear to agree on one thing: the impact of these female rulers on the history of Aceh. One of the most striking and popular perception of the Acehese female sovereigns was that they were weaklings, mere ceremonial rulers who were responsible for the decline of the monarchy and royal power by the end of the seventeenth century. Braddel wrote that in 1641, twelve *orangkaya* seized the reins of power and in order to carry on the government without opposition from the people, they placed the widow of the late king on the throne but without power to interfere in the management of affairs.¹⁵ Marsden noted that “the nobles finding their power less restrained... than when ruled by kings... supported these pageants whom they governed as they thought fit...” Marsden viewed the queens as ceremonial rulers with no power to appoint or remove any of the *orangkaya*.¹⁶ Veth’s slightly different nuanced explanation stated that female rule was favoured by the nobility because female rule provided a means for them to exercise their power and personal influence but did not assert that these queens were powerless. Early twentieth-century scholars such as Snouck Hurgronje and T.J.Veltman were even more scathing. Hurgronje claimed that Aceh’s weak female governments were responsible for undermining the monarchy.¹⁷ Veltman saw all female sovereigns as weak, manipulated by the *orangkaya* and concluded that Sultanah Safiatuddin’s reign contributed little to the greatness of the realm.¹⁸ More recent historians such as Amirul Hadi and Auni Luthfi saw the “rise of the *orangkaya*”

¹³ Mohammad Said, *Aceh Sepanjang Abad*, (1, Medan: Pengarang Sendiri, 1961), p. 379.

¹⁴ Ilyas Sutan Pamenan, *Renjong Aceh di Tangan Wanita*, (Jakarta: DJ Waringin, 1959), pp. 35-36.

¹⁵ Braddel, ‘On the History of Acheen’, p. 19.

¹⁶ Marsden, *History of Sumatra*, pp. 447, 454.

¹⁷ Snouck C. Hurgronje, *De Atjehers*, translated by the late A.W.S. O’Sullivan with an index by R.J. Wilkinson (Leiden: Brill, 1893), p. 94.

¹⁸ T. J. Veltman, ‘Nota over de geschiedenis van her landschap Pidie’, *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal – Land-en Volkenkunde*, 58 (1919), 15-157, pp. 66-67.

under the reigns of female rulers and the transition of power from royalty to nobility “possibly due to the mildness of the queen in governing the state”.¹⁹

Strangely, although the above writers concluded that the female monarchs were mere figureheads, they actually praised the governments that operated during their reigns. Braddel expressed his bewilderment by exclaiming that “in a rude state of society and among a people like the Achinese, one is not prepared to hear of such a refinement in the art of government; and surprise is increased by learning that this government lasted for upwards of sixty years, and examination will prove that the affairs of the nation were better administered during this period than at any other time before or since.”²⁰ Marsden commented that the first Sultanah, Safiatuddin Syah, “reigned with a degree of tranquillity little known in these countries, upwards of thirty-four years.”²¹ While these writers concluded that the governments under these female rulers were stable and peaceful, none attributed this good governance to the queens but implied that this was due to the *orangkaya*'s skill unfretted by royal power. Indeed, an earlier period where the *orangkaya* were dominating politics existed from the 1570's-1590's where kings became mere pawns of their game but this period saw one of the more disastrous periods in Aceh's history. Inability to recognise that a woman ruler might actually be successful in her own right smacks more of a biased sentiment than an informed judgement.

This assertion that the female sovereigns of Aceh were mere figureheads and the *orangkaya* were the ones who held the reins of power does not have sufficient evidence behind it. Its advocates seem to suggest that the nobles formed a powerful, homogeneous group, which promoted and prolonged female rule. Yet, there has been no detailed study of the politics involved. Very little is known about these *orangkaya* who were said to wield so much power. Who were they? What was their basis of power and authority and who were their supporters and their enemies? Thomas Bowrey, William Dampier and Jacob de Roy, who were present in Aceh during the reigns of these female monarchs, noted opposition by some *orangkaya* to female rule from the first; yet three more females ruled.

¹⁹ Auni Luthfi, 'The Decline', p. 124.

²⁰ Braddel, 'On the History of Acheen', p. 20.

²¹ Marsden, *History of Sumatra*, p. 449.

Contemporary commentaries on the reigns of these queens include accounts written by indigenous court chroniclers such as Nuruddin al-Raniri, European officials such as the employees of the Dutch and English East Indies Companies, merchants and travellers such as Wouter Schouten, Thomas Bowrey and William Dampier, amongst others. Their assessments of the queens were more favourable than later writers, who exude a stronger whiff of cultural and sexual bias. Thomas Bowrey, who was in Aceh from about 1675-1689, noted that the *orangkaya*(s), the **shahbandar*(s) and the Queen's greatest eunuchs were all very submissive to her and respected her, not daring to do any business of importance before they had thoroughly acquainted her with the matter at hand. If she agreed, she would send down her seal to show that she had granted their request. If she withheld the seal, the *orangkaya* must desist from the business and mind something else.²² Indigenous literature corroborated the positive point of view. *Bustan us-Salatin*, written by the famous seventeenth-century **ulama*, Nuruddin al-Raniri, depicted Sultanah Safiatuddin as a great and generous queen.²³ Initial findings from VOC records also revealed that the VOC was in favour of female rule. The Dutch hoped that the queen would safeguard their privileges,²⁴ and reported that she was a better ruler than her predecessor husband, Iskandar Thani, since she was able to maintain peace and control outright rivalries amongst her nobility.²⁵

Most recent writings, especially by those who referred to contemporary accounts, have tended to adopt a slightly more favourable view of these monarchs. Mulaika Hijjas, like Marsden, concluded that these Acehnese women rulers were pageant queens but unlike Marsden, she asserted, that because of the Malay sense of the importance of these spectacles and of theatre in state power, the queens who presided over rituals and ceremonies were not frail, but were successful exponents of traditional kingship.²⁶ Takeshi Ito, Anthony Reid and Leonard Andaya believed that as the kingdom of Aceh declined in the latter half of the seventeenth century, so did royal power. But in his most recent article, Andaya described Sultanah Safiatuddin's government as humane and

²² Thomas Bowrey, *Account of Countries Round Bay of Bengal 1669-1689*, (London: Haklyut Society, 1905), pp.299-300.

²³ *Bustan al-Salatin*, ed. by Siti Hawa Haji Salleh (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1992), p. 44.

²⁴ J.A. van der Chijs and others, *Dagh-Register van Batavia, 1640-1682*, (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, Batavia: G. Kolff & Co. 1887-1928), p. 423.

²⁵ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1641-1642, p. 123.

²⁶ Mulaika, 'The Woman Raja', p. 89.

successful. She held the reins of government with great skill and was successful in adapting to the aggressive policies of the Dutch.²⁷ Anthony Reid asserted that under the queens, “the *orangkaya* found that they could govern collectively with the queen as sovereign and referee and there was something of the quality of Elizabethan England in the way they vied for her favour but accepted her eventual judgement between them”.²⁸ Takeshi Ito claimed that despite the decline of royal authority after the reign of Iskandar Muda, Sultanah Safiatuddin was still able to maintain integrity and respect for the monarchy.

The variety of interpretations and debates and the shifts in views about these enigmatic women generated the inspiration for this study. With so many hypotheses presented, questions unanswered, the reigns of these queens still represent an intriguingly ill explored period in Aceh’s history, more surprisingly so since this missing puzzle is critical to explain the fate of the most powerful indigenous state in the Straits of Malacca at that time. Thus far, no comprehensive study directly focusing on these female rulers has been undertaken, using both European and indigenous contemporary sources. Was the decision to place female rulers on the throne an internally motivated one, as suggested by Reid, or was it due to external stimuli? Was this a deliberate experiment, a temporary political expediency, or merely an accident of history?

More intriguingly, why did this phenomenon end in 1699, never to be repeated again? Reid explained that female rule eventually failed when Aceh ran out of credible candidates who still had the charisma of the monarchy about them. Veth, on the other hand placed much more emphasis on the Islamic factor, which ended female rule.²⁹ He commented that Aceh was very much influenced by ideas from Arabia brought to Aceh by Arab *ulama* and merchants. These foreigners were hostile to the idea of female rule and claimed that this was against Islamic prescribed rules. Towards the end of Kamalat Syah’s rule, this *priesterpartij*, armed with a letter from Mekah issued by a certain Kadhi Maliku’l Adil made a strong bid to get rid of the female ruler and in 1699 this faction

²⁷ Leonard Andaya, ‘A very-good natured but awe-inspiring government’ The reign of a successful queen in seventeenth-century Aceh, in *Hof en Handel. Aziatische vorsten en de VOC 1620-1720*, ed. by Elsbeth Locher-Scholten and Peter Rierbergen, (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij, 2004), 59-84, p. 81.

²⁸ Reid, ‘Female Roles’ p. 641.

²⁹ Veth, ‘Vrouwenregeeringen’, pp. 368-369.

won. Kamalat Syah had to step down because of this letter described as a **fatwa* by latter writers, which stated that Islam forbid female rule.

If female leadership was anathema to Islam, and Aceh was famously known as the staunchly Islamic state, the “Veranda of Mekah”, how was it possible that the kingdom had four female sovereigns? It would be strange indeed, if the Acehnese elite after having respected female rulers for almost sixty years suddenly realized that Islam forbid this. Islam, some argued, demanded the seclusion of women and relegated them to the realm of the private (*dalam*). The political sphere, a public domain, was generally seen as a prerogative of men rarely encroached upon by the female sex, so how did the queens negotiate these traditional and religious values in their daily conduct of political affairs with men? What was the relationship like between the queens and the predominantly male elite within the patriarchal and Islamic context of the Acehnese court? Besides this relationship, other aspects worth exploring are the implications of female rule in regard to the issue of political power and state-formation. What was their basis of power and authority, who were their supporters- the *orangkaya* or the *ulama*, which faction supported the queens, when and why? In short, how did these purportedly “forbidden” and “invisible queens”, behind the golden curtain, rule?

Interest in queens of medieval Europe is an outgrowth of feminist historical studies since the 1960's. However, only recently has the institution of queenship begun to attract attention. A renewed interest in women first produced accounts of prominent women- nobles, abbesses, saints, including some medieval queens that excited popular interest such as Eleanor of Aquitaine, Blanche of Castile, Margaret of Anjou, Isabella of Castile. These works were limited because of tendencies to depict the queens as moral pendants to husbands or sons and to dwell on their lives, not offices. Then, the study of queenship fell into disrepute when political history was demoted. The popularity of socio-economic history in the 1980s shifted focus from elite political female roles to their less well known and unfortunate sisters. A distaste for administrative and institutional histories also impeded investigations into queenship.

Recent publications however suggest a renewed interest in the institution and workings of queenship.³⁰ The disentanglement of history from political history and power from political power has opened fresh approaches to discussions of gender and power in the Middle Ages. Recent studies do not focus on biographical studies of individual queens but instead have sought to dissect the ways in which queens pursued and exploited means to power and how others interpreted their actions.³¹

By contrast, it was only in the 1990s, did Southeast Asian historians like Reid³² and later Barbara Andaya³³ include ordinary people and women in the historical picture. In contrast with anthropology, historical studies on women in the early modern era remain under-researched. Among major shortcomings of available work on the queens is that the accounts and the use of evidence are limited, and the approach sometimes frankly partial.³⁴ The present study deploys a variety of sources and aims to cover events as exhaustively as possible or tolerable. It does not aspire to be feminist. Whilst the focus here is on women, the object of this study is not to see them as women but primarily as rulers exhibiting a fascinating anomaly. Nevertheless, this study cannot ignore other historians' rethinking of the past; and looking at Aceh's history through the lens of gender opens up a wide variety of avenues and challenges. It challenges traditional orthodoxies, which regard the dominant role played by men alone in the events of the state. This study also challenges attempts to generalize the roles played by men and women across countries and period. It examines a specific episode in a particular period that might help illuminate the more general hypothesis about roles of women in society and the factors that shaped them as well. By examining the Acehnese queens, this study shows how by transgressing "feminine roles", these females injected or integrated new elements or features into the largely masculine concept of the traditional monarch and the realm. This study also helps to show how definitions of

³⁰ For a list of these publications, see, John Carmi Parsons, 'Family, Sex and Power: The Rhythms of Medieval Queenship', in *Medieval Queenship* ed. by John Carmi Parsons, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993, 1998), pp. 1-2.

³¹ Parsons, *Medieval Queenship*, p. 2.

³² Reid draws attention to the high status of women in the early modern era as part of the defining regional or Southeast Asian characteristic, See Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce Volumes 1*, (London: Yale University Press: 1993), pp. 146, 162.

³³ Barbara Andaya, *Women, Gender and History in Early Modern Southeast Asia: Other Pasts*, (Center of Southeast Asian Studies: University of Hawai'i at Manoa, 2000), pp. 25, 26.

³⁴ No in-depth study of the queens has been attempted that corroborate Dutch, English and Malay records.

gender roles operated in Aceh and how these definitions generated its activities and societal concerns.

Chapter 1 explores the beginning of this phenomenon and explains why the first queen, Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah succeeded her late husband and predecessor, Iskandar Thani (r.1636-1641). Chapters 2, 3 and 4 detail the workings of the Acehnese court and examine the relationship between the female monarchs, their *orangkaya* and European envoys. Chapter 5 identifies the features unique to female rule and its impact on Acehnese conception of kingship, power and state-formation.

Did Aceh Decline under Female Sovereigns?

Although in 1600, Southeast Asian interacted as equals with Europeans, by 1700, Reid argued, the inequalities were already manifest.³⁵ Reid claimed that thriving Muslim port-polities such as Aceh, Johor, Makassar, Banda and Sulu generally declined by 1680 as a result of European encroachment on its commerce and politics.³⁶ The year 1680 witnessed “the end of commerce,” in Southeast Asia where indigenous states retreated from international commerce. One main reason he cited was the critical military encounters with Europeans, which eclipsed some local ethnic shipping, trade decline, loss of revenue and the failure of the last stand of Islamic commerce.³⁷ Reid’s majestic survey of Southeast Asia, his ideas on regional coherence and impact of Europeans in the early modern era were valuable but they raised adverse responses from historians such as Van Goor, Victor Lieberman, Dhiravat Pombejra and Barbara Andaya. Although appreciative of his illuminating insights, their main contention was, given the highly complex nature of the region and the existence of a high degree of diversity, regional patterns could not be generalized to apply to all or even most states. Lieberman rejected these regional characterisations in the case of Burma ³⁸ and Pombejra had

³⁵ Anthony Reid, *Charting the shape of early modern Southeast Asia*. (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000), p. 12.

³⁶ See studies by Lombard for Aceh, Andaya for Johor and Macassar, Villiers for Banda and Warren for Sulu. See bibliography for full details.

³⁷ Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce Volume 2: Expansion and Crisis*, (London: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 268-325.

³⁸ Victor Lieberman, ‘Was the Seventeenth Century a Watershed in Burmese History?’, in *South East Asia in the Early Modern Era* ed. by Anthony Reid, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

convincingly shown that they were wide of the mark in the case of Siam.³⁹ Barbara Andaya argued that Reid's regional periodization of decline in 1680 might create an artificial even misleading framework when applied to individual polities.⁴⁰ Van Goor asserted that although Macassar and Banten came under Dutch control by the 1680s, it was not necessarily the case that they declined. Furthermore, alternative foci for religious, cultural and economic life flourished after 1680 in ports such as Kampar on the east coast of Sumatra.⁴¹

What about Aceh? This raises another important question regarding the nature and impact of female rule in the latter half of the seventeenth century. Most historians claimed that Aceh declined by 1699. Did Aceh *really* decline, in relative or absolute terms? And if Aceh did decline, was it because of female rule? In this regard, both Indonesian and European writers contended that Aceh's power dipped after the glorious reign of Iskandar Muda (1607-1637). Mohammad Said⁴², Ilyas Sutan Pamenan⁴³, Anthony Reid⁴⁴, Merle C. Ricklefs⁴⁵ and Leonard Andaya⁴⁶ all concurred. Reid argued that the reduced skill and authority of rulers who succeeded Iskandar Muda and the growing power of the Dutch led to the decline of royal power.⁴⁷ According to Reid, Aceh, pressured by a Dutch blockade in 1647-50, could not prevent the VOC from gaining control of the dependencies that produced the pepper and tin on which its prosperity had been based.⁴⁸ In line with his argument about the seventeenth-century crisis in Southeast Asia, where most states experienced the end of the age of commerce by 1680, he indicated that Aceh too suffered and fell into disunity after its brief golden age.⁴⁹

³⁹ Dhiravat Pombejra, 'Ayutthaya at the End of the Seventeenth Century: Was there a shift to Isolation?' in *South East Asia in the Early Modern Era* ed. by Anthony Reid (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

⁴⁰ Barbara Andaya, 'The Unity of Southeast Asia: Historical Approaches and Questions', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 28, 1 (1997), p. 163.

⁴¹ Jan Van Goor, 'India and the Indonesian Archipelago from the Generale Missiven den VOC', *Itinerario*, 16-2, 23-39 (1992): 29.

⁴² Mohammad Said, *Aceh Sepanjang Abad*, p. 377.

⁴³ Ilyas, *Rentjong Aceh di Tangan Wanita*, pp. 35-36.

⁴⁴ Reid, 'Female Roles in Pre-Colonial Southeast Asia,' p. 641.

⁴⁵ Merle C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c1300*, 2nd edn., (Basingstoke Hampshire, London: McMillan Press, 1993), p. 36.

⁴⁶ Leonard Andaya, *Kingdom of Johore 1641-1678* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 56. In a recent article, 'A very-good natured but awe-inspiring government' (2004), Andaya sought to re-examine this earlier assertion. He concluded in this article that the impact of the first queen was positive and the queen ruled in her own right. The issue of whether Aceh declined was not ascertained.

⁴⁷ Anthony Reid, 'Trade and Problem of Royal Power in Aceh-Three Stages: c1500-1700', *Monographs of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 6, (Kuala Lumpur: Percetakan Mas Sdn Bhd, 1975), p. 52.

⁴⁸ Reid, *Southeast Asia*, Vol. 2, p. 266.

⁴⁹ Reid, *Southeast Asia*, Vol. 2, pp. 303-4.

Ricklefs claimed that Aceh entered a long period of internal disunity and ceased to be significant outside Northern Sumatra. From 1641-1699, royal authority was restricted to Aceh itself. The Sultanate became a weak symbolic institution.⁵⁰

This widely accepted view has not gone unchallenged. G.W. Irwin argued that by the end of the seventeenth century the attempt of the VOC to engross the tin trade of Western Malaya had failed. He suggested that the Dutch were defeated partly by the superior resources, tactics and persistence of their rivals, but even more by the rigidity of their own economic policies.⁵¹ It appeared that Aceh was unique since it had to be treated with caution by the Dutch, who preferred persuasion to force lest too much pressure provoked retaliation: the Acehnese might make it difficult for the Dutch to gain access to pepper in the Sumatra West Coast. This contrasted with many writers' picture of a weak Malay polity, dominated by the VOC's might.

A preliminary study of VOC sources revealed that Aceh had control of its pepper and tin trade as late as the 1670's. As for the elephant trade, in 1650, the VOC representative, J. Truijtmán, reported that Sultanah Safiatuddin did not consent for the VOC to buy even one head of the animal.⁵² Not only had the VOC failed to gain a toehold in the elephant trade, Aceh was successful in actually increasing this trade from 1640's to 1660's.⁵³

The received view on Aceh's decline from the mid-seventeenth century could not stand unchallenged in the light of new evidence. Indeed the concept of decline itself has to be re-examined or reinterpreted. It is difficult to agree with the assessment that the absolute and tyrannical rule of Iskandar Muda constituted the "golden age" in Aceh's history. In a region where politics were fluid, powers transient, and where the regional balance of power was precarious, no state or ruler could exercise hegemony. In the Malay world where soft power was as potent as hard power, the military might and expansionist policies of Iskandar Muda should not be the main criteria in determining the success of the ruler. To maintain peace and stability for commerce to thrive was an even bigger challenge. If Aceh declined during the second half of the century, how

⁵⁰ Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c1300*, p. 36.

⁵¹ George W. Irwin, 'The Dutch and the tin trade of Malaya in the Seventeenth century', in *Studies in the Social History of China and Southeast Asia*, ed. by Nicholas Tarling & Jerome Ch'en, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 287.

⁵² Ph. Coolhaas, ed., *Generale Missieven*, Vol. 2, (The Hague: Martinuss Nijhoff, 1960-1974), p. 461.

⁵³ Ito, *The World of Adat Aceh*, p. 415.

could the state defy the fate of other Malay polities and remain politically and economically autonomous? Furthermore, during the time of the queens, Malay writing and literature developed to a height unrivalled till today - which could be said to have constituted the real golden age.

If one were to shift the perspective of more recent writings on the idea of decline of Aceh in the late seventeenth century and to focus more on what Van Leur observed about the importance of the continuity and survival of indigenous forms and their ingenuity to absorb and adapt to new influences, then a study of the relative importance, continuity and change of indigenous economic forms and political institutions as manifested in Aceh in the second half of the seventeenth century is not only beneficial but necessary to test the above hypothesis.

Ties that Unbind

Besides the accepted view that Aceh declined under weak female rulers, another common assertion is that they were responsible for the loss of Aceh's power over its vassal states of Perak and Sumatra West Coast. Barbara Andaya concluded that with Aceh's decline in the mid-seventeenth century, and the slow crumbling of the relationship with the VOC, Aceh lost its useful vassal state - Perak. Vassalage had brought no benefits to Perak and now Aceh could no longer enforce its former control.⁵⁴ According to Kathirithamby-Wells, the decline of Aceh made the VOC protectorate of Sumatra West Coast possible. She argued that the Dutch capture of Melaka in 1641 severely eroded Acehnese commercial supremacy and political importance, boosted Dutch prestige and damaged Aceh's bargaining powers to such an extent that Sultanah Safiatuddin Shah was obliged to adopt a conciliatory policy.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Barbara W. Andaya, *Perak, the abode of grace: a study of an eighteenth-century Malay state*, (Kuala Lumpur, New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 48.

⁵⁵ Kathirithamby-Wells, J., 'Acehnese control over West Sumatra up to the 1663 Treaty of Painan', *International Conference on Asian History*, No. 87, Kuala Lumpur, (1968), p.465.

These assertions will be more easily and fairly evaluated when we examine certain aspects of Aceh's relations with the VOC. In line with the received view, she appeared to be much weaker than her male predecessors. In 1650, the VOC succeeded in pressuring the Sultanah to sign a treaty agreeing to the sharing of the tin in Perak, equally between Aceh and the VOC. The Treaty of Painan of March 1663 and another Treaty signed in April 1668 placed a number of Sumatra West Coast states under the protection of the Dutch.⁵⁶ The question here is how real were the losses? What was the nature of ties that bound Aceh's vassal states to her and to what extent were the Sultanah's male predecessors successful in controlling these vassals as assumed? A more accommodative and peaceful diplomacy does not necessarily entail a weakening of control and power. Chapters 3 and 4 examine Aceh-vassal ties during the reign of Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah and seek to address these questions.

Though this thesis does not aim to achieve the impossible task of providing all the answers to the above questions, it seeks to attempt a more comprehensive and focused study of these Sultanahs of Aceh than has previously been available. Given new evidence that hints at a different picture of Aceh under these female rulers, the clues have to be pieced together to obtain a fuller glimpse of this past still shrouded in uncertainty and controversy. In this process, the thesis purports to explore the above issues further to help illuminate the current debate. Whether this research supports the current widely accepted premises about these female monarchs or whether it will show that these female rulers have been judged too harshly remains to be seen. Given the current debate on the role and status of Acehnese women in a newly emergent autonomous Aceh, a better understanding of the roles and contributions of women in the past, especially at the helm of power, would either serve as a source of inspiration or the very least, a lesson in history. A more concerted effort has to be made to understand these elusive queens better.

Historiography

'Autonomous' History

⁵⁶ Kathirithamby-Wells, 'Acehnese Control over West Sumatra', pp. 473, 478.

A study of how the underlying political and social structure of a port-polity such as Aceh could be best served by adopting the indigenous perspective – without excluding the invaluable contribution of European sources - in order to understand internal developments and to examine whether the changes arose from within, as the dynamic of tradition modified the world-view of the Acehnese elite; or whether these new developments were responses to external stimuli; or where the balance lay.⁵⁷

This approach to the region's history owes much to the Dutch historian, J.C. Van Leur. Van Leur went much further than W.F. Stutterheim and B.Schrieke by shifting the colonial historians' lens "a hundred and eighty degrees, from that observed from the deck of the ship, the ramparts of the fortress, the high gallery of the trading house" to the Asian perspective. He advocated the writing of 'autonomous' history where the focus of enquiry shifts to natives instead of Europeans. The consequent revolution in the historiography of the region, the "Nusantara", came about in the period of nationalism during the inter-war years. Prior to this, the Eurocentric tradition was exemplified by colonial historians, such as F.W. Stapel, C.Gerretson and E.C.G. Molsbergen.⁵⁸ Writing at the height of Dutch power in the East Indies, these historians "were not concerned at all with the Asian side of things".⁵⁹ Another group of historians who could be termed "externalists", were H.Kern, N.J.Krom and G.Coédès who stressed on external influences such as Indianization in shaping Southeast Asian history and essentially saw Southeast Asia as incapable of engendering its own civilization, manifested in the "indigenous incapacity/external benefaction" dichotomy.⁶⁰ In striking contrast to the externalists, Van Leur saw the importance of local agents and internal forces in stimulating change and development.⁶¹ This historiographic tradition tended to stress on the continuity and survival of indigenous institutions. Autonomous history

⁵⁷ See Sunait Chutintaranond and Chris Baker, eds., *Recalling Local Pasts: Autonomous History in Southeast Asia*, (Chiangmai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2002).

⁵⁸ M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs, *Asian Trade and European Influence in the Indonesian Archipelago between 1500 and about 1630* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), p. 4.

⁵⁹ Meilink-Roelofs, *Asian Trade*, p. 4.

⁶⁰ Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asian Global Context, c.800-1830, Vol. 1. Integration on the Mainland* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 7.

⁶¹ See J.C. Van Leur, *Indonesian Trade and Society, Essays in Asian Social and Economic History*, (The Hague: W. van Hoeve Ltd., 1955).

gained popularity and acceptance in the 1960's with the burial of colonialism and imperialism. John Smail applied ideas of autonomous history to the period after 1850.⁶²

Gender History

Feminist historical studies have been a major influence in the reshaping of the idea of period and the methods by which topics are selected and discussed. Feminist studies, however, have now moved towards broader studies of how gender is understood, how women and men define themselves, are defined by others and by societal and cultural institutions.⁶³ Whilst general gender studies are useful in illuminating the relations between men and women in history, it is important to note that definitions of sexuality and gender roles are culture and period specific. Furthermore, the study of gender issues is intrinsically interdisciplinary, encompassing literature as well as history, economics and anthropology, which form the basis of cultural history.

As mentioned earlier, unlike Europe, women in Southeast Asia were included only fairly recently. The pioneering works of Anthony Reid and more recently, Barbara Andaya, discussed the roles and status of women in the regional context of "Southeast Asia." While Reid highlighted the important roles and high status of women as a defining feature in Southeast Asia, Barbara Andaya was more ambivalent in her assessment. She pointed out that Reid's assessment of women's position met a more guarded response from other disciplines. Anthropologists were generally reluctant to assert a regional pattern and saw female status as subject to constant negotiation in specific environments.⁶⁴ She further argued that the coming of world religions like Islam and Christianity to Southeast Asia limited the existing dominant and public roles of indigenous women.⁶⁵

⁶² John Smail, 'On the possibility of an Autonomous History of Modern Southeast Asia', *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 2 (1961), pp. 72-102.

⁶³ Jessica Munns, & Penny Richards, eds., *Gender, Power and Privilege*, (Great Britain: Longman Pearson Education Limited, 2003), p. 2.

⁶⁴ Barbara W. Andaya, *The Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), p. 2.

⁶⁵ These developments had a direct bearing on the construction of gender in contemporary Southeast Asia. "In stressing the behaviour expected of "good" women the newly arrived religions of Islam and Christianity joined Buddhism and Confucianism in presenting forthright and persuasive models of female modesty and submissiveness. See Andaya, B., *The Flaming Womb*, p. 230.

While these regional studies are useful in scoping patterns of women's status and roles, a more empirically based case study, such as the study on the female rulers of Aceh, could help illuminate, enrich or even complicate the picture painted by Reid and Andaya of women in Southeast Asia in the early modern era. The study of women placed in the specific contexts of status, class, religion and society at a particular historical time might engender a surprisingly different and unique picture compared to the regional sketch. Though studies on traditional concepts of kingship, monarchy, state-formation, power and commerce of the region abound, and the study of women in general is beginning to take its rightful place in Southeast Asian historiography, none has combined the two by examining the elite class and their activities from the lens of a gender-based study.

East-West Interaction and the History of European Expansionism

The early modern era is a period characterized by the encounter between the East and the West, one of expansion and interweaving of maritime connections within and between hemispheres which is seen as the basic factor in the creation of what Immanuel Wallerstein have termed the modern world-system.⁶⁶ Placed in this context of East-West interactions, the historiographic tradition of pre-colonial Southeast Asia tends to swing from the "Eurocentric" phase on the one end, to the "Autonomous" phase on the other. A more recent approach to Southeast Asian historiography is exemplified by the writings of Anthony Reid, who pointed out to Southeast Asians in the age of Asia's economic boom and with the rise of Asian Tigers and Dragons that their predecessors too had gone through the "Age of Commerce (1450-1680)". Their skilful use of the East-West economic interdependence and trade relations, western technology and new world-views or religions, had created a prosperous, urbane and cultured Southeast Asia comparable to Europe.⁶⁷ The original contribution of Reid, however, which could constitute the third paradigm shift⁶⁸ to Southeast Asian historiography so far, is to see

⁶⁶ J. E. Wills, 'Maritime Asia, 1500-1800: The Interactive Emergence of European Domination', *American Historical Review*, (February 1993), p. 83.

⁶⁷ Reid, *Charting*, pp. 7-12.

⁶⁸ Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, pp. 15-16.

that disparate individual polities share common features and experiences constituting a coherent whole.⁶⁹ Besides placing the study in a regional Southeast Asian context, Reid also sees the region as closely bound up with international commerce and tries to place Southeast Asia in the context of a wider maritime world.⁷⁰

Tracing the historiographical transformations of East-West encounters in Southeast Asia, one sense the idea that presently the pendulum, which has swung from the one end of Euro-centricism to the other, of Asia-centricism, has now come to rest somewhere in the middle. In the present era of globalization, when East and West are inevitably intertwined and interdependent, one could be confident enough to study East-West encounters in a more detached and objective manner; in terms of mutual heritage, which requires understanding and inputs from both sides.⁷¹ Placed in this context, the “long drift to European hegemony in Asia in the early modern era could be seen to be less over-determined, less a forgone conclusion and much more multi-causal and contingent to specific contexts”.⁷²

This study explores Aceh-VOC relations not in the mould of an analytic separation of European intrusion and Asian response but in the hope of placing the interaction in a more congruent and mutually adaptive perspective.⁷³ Following the argument of Van Leur that Western dominance was not yet in place in the seventeenth century, and that the kingdom of Aceh remained largely unmolested by the Dutch, one could posit that there was a high degree of interaction whereby Dutch supremacy was not yet a forgone conclusion and the nature of interaction was likely to be more complex and multifaceted depending on specific contexts.

Using Aceh as an empirical case study, and judging from preliminary evidence, one could argue that in the course of the seventeenth century, Aceh was exceptionally effective in maintaining its own independence, its own trade network and in engaging and counteracting the Europeans.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Reid, *Southeast Asia Vol. 1*, p. 7.

⁷⁰ Reid, *Southeast Asia Vol. 2*, p. 129.

⁷¹ Ernst van Veen and Leonard Blussé, eds., ‘Introduction’ in *Rivalry and Conflict: European Traders and Asian trading Networks in the 16th and 17th Centuries* (Leiden: CNWS, 2005), p. 4.

⁷² Wills, ‘Maritime Asia’, pp. 83-84.

⁷³ Wills, ‘Maritime Asia’, pp. 84-85.

⁷⁴ Wills, ‘Maritime Asia’, p. 98. Although Wills made this claim, he did not elaborate his argument.

It would be useful to ascertain whether Reid's regional hypothesis applies to Aceh. Given that Reid's hypotheses on Southeast Asia in the early modern era, exemplified in the third paradigm shift mentioned above, have been tested in Burma, Siam, and Java, it is rather peculiar that no such study has been undertaken for Aceh, a major and important port-polity in the Malay Archipelago in the seventeenth century, to determine the nature and extent of European-indigenous state interaction. This study attempts to fill the gap.

Sources

This study will use four core groups of sources:

- 1) Dutch VOC documents
- 2) English East India Company Records
- 3) Malay indigenous published manuscripts
- 4) Contemporary travellers accounts

Dutch VOC Documents

The VOC documents relating to Aceh as deposited in the Nationaal Archief are in the Overgekomen brieven en papieren (OBP) uit Indie aan de Heren XVII en de kamer Amsterdam, 1614-1794. Before 1660, the documents on Aceh are in a separate section under "Atchin". Post-1660, there is no longer any "Atchin" section and most reporting about Aceh is in documents scattered in the Sumatra West Coast, Melaka, Batavia, Jambi and Palembang sections. There is no Aceh Dagh-Register because the Dutch East India Company did not have a permanent factory there. However, political and economic news about Aceh were subsequently reported in the Batavia and Malacca Dagh-Register and the Generaal Missiven, letters from the Governor-General in Batavia to the Heeren Seventeen. The most useful and richest sources of information regarding Aceh are found in the correspondences between the envoys and senior traders appointed to serve in Aceh and the Governor-General in Batavia and the daily registers kept by

these officials describing the Company's day-to-day affairs in Aceh. After 1663, the Dutch East Indies Company no longer had a factory in Aceh and thus there was no need to appoint envoys and senior traders in Aceh. Reports on Aceh become harder to find and vivid details on the court proceedings and internal developments are lacking. This unfortunate gap affects this study, tilting coverage in favour of the reign of the first Sultanah, Safiatuddin Syah.

Another important source of information found in the VOC records are the letters exchanged between the indigenous rulers and the Governors in Melaka and Batavia. Most of these original letters, written in Malay in the **jawi* have perished, the remaining few being very rare indeed. Only one original letter from Sultanah Safiatuddin to King Charles II remains. The rest of these letters are translated in Dutch, copied and kept together with the other papers in the OBP. These letters are valuable because they constitute the indigenous perspective on events. Although these courtly letters are also tools of diplomacy and propaganda, read with caution they provide valuable insights to the understanding of the institution of monarchy in the Malay world. Major limitations arise from Dutch translators' tendency to translate freely, and inadvertent mistranslations that occurred owing to linguistic and cultural differences. In most cases, the important first section of the letter, the **puji-pujian* which describes the sender, the royal person, is either omitted, summarized or standardized for all letters. The VOC copiers saw this as unnecessarily distracting from the actual content, the business at hand. On the contrary, this *puji-pujian* carefully crafted represented what the ruler and his realm stood for in the Malay world.

English East India Company Records

The EIC documents are found in the India Office Records of the British Library. For the study purposes, the relevant records are those that fall within the period of interest i.e. 1639 to 1701. The English East India Company records are not as rich as the VOC's because Aceh and Sumatra did not factor significantly for the English Company in the second half of the seventeenth century since the Company concentrated

their activities farther north in India.⁷⁵ The missions sent to Aceh were sporadic and the English were not able to found a more permanent settlement in Aceh or Sumatra West Coast owing to the intense competition from the Indian traders and the VOC. Though it might be a useful future research agenda, it is beyond the scope and capability of this thesis to study English sources about Aceh found in other Indian port records and other European sources such as Portuguese, French and Danish.

Malay Indigenous Published Manuscripts

The third valuable category of sources used to gather information for this research is the classical Malay manuscripts, which gives an understanding of the metaphysics of indigenous society. There are several major indigenous chronicles and a range of religious treaties written during the reign of queens that provide an extremely good corpus of information to reconstruct the cultural dimension of female rule in Aceh at a time of cultural renaissance in a major Malay polity. These manuscripts are found in the Universiteit Bibliotheek, Leiden Universiteit.

The Malay Records include:

1. Kitab-Sejarah written in the 16th and 17th centuries such as the *Taj us-Salatin*, *Bustan us-Salatin* and *Sulalat us-Salatin*.
2. The *Hikayats* and *Adats* such as the *Hikayat Aceh* and *Adat Aceh*.
3. *Qanun* or laws such as *Qanun Meukota Alam* and *Qanun al-Asji Darussalam*

Travellers' Accounts

The other valuable source of information is the contemporary accounts of numerous European visitors both English and Dutch to Aceh, who had close links with the ruling elite and conducted business in Aceh for a length of time. These include the accounts given by Frederik de Houtman, John Davis, Augustin de Beaulieu, Nicolaus de

⁷⁵ Nevertheless, English activities in Sumatra West Coast are detailed in Chapter 4.

Graaff, Peter Mundy Wouter Schouten, Thomas Bowrey, and William Dampier, Jacob de Roy amongst others (publishing details in the bibliography).

Methodology

Corroboration of sources

VOC documents are the backbone of this study since the meticulous record keeping of VOC officials provides detailed information on the politics of Aceh and the economic background. The English East India Company records supplement information from VOC documents to establish the research framework and to counter-check the information whenever possible. Accounts of country traders, travellers and residents in Aceh complement the information given by both Company officers.

European accounts must be approached with care and read at times against the grain since they naturally provide a European perspective with its attendant inbuilt bias and cultural ignorance or unfamiliarity. They lack information on the patterns of thinking of the locals. The extensive indigenous accounts are therefore analysed to glean Acehnese world-views, which demand informed reading to understand the generic and symbolic significance of information presented. An understanding of *adat* and Islamic historiography is crucial. A good command of classical Malay and *jawi* is needed.

An interdisciplinary approach illuminates the problems. I draw on anthropological research that has explored the role of women in the evolution of local societies in Southeast Asia, while literary tools help me examine how women were perceived and represented in the writings of men. Bearing in mind the limits of skills a scholar could master, it will be more prudent to tap the richness of research on women already undertaken.

CHAPTER 1

Succession of the First Female Ruler of Aceh - Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah

Overview of historical succession from 1514-1702

Only one attempt has been made to explain the factors governing succession in Aceh in the seventeenth century. In his analysis, Amirul Hadi, concluded that the rules of succession in Aceh in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were at best obscure.¹ Before we try to clarify them, a brief narrative overview is in order, from the kingdom's founding by Ali Mughayat Syah in the sixteenth century to the reign of Sultan Badr al-Alam Syariff Hashim Jamal al-Din (r.1699-1702).

The origins of the kingdom of Aceh and its Sultans are still mired in confusion.² The Sultanate of Aceh Dar al-Salam, however, which began in the sixteenth century was believed to be a result of the unification of two small kingdoms, Aceh in Dar al-Kamal and Lamuri in Mahkota Alam, both at the northern tip of the island of Sumatra but separated by a river.³ Constant rivalry between these two kingdoms ended when Munawwar Syah, king of Lamuri, attacked and defeated Inayat Syah, king of Aceh, whose realm had to unite with Lamuri. Sultan Shams Syah, son of Munawwar Syah, then ruled this united kingdom. In order to strengthen his position, Shams Syah married his son, Ali Mughayat Syah to the daughter of Inayat Syah. Ali Mughayat Syah (r.1514-1528)⁴ expanded the kingdom by conquering neighbouring Daya (1520), Pidie (1521) and Pasai (1524).⁵ After his death, the entire northern tip of Sumatra came under the

¹ Amirul Hadi, *Islam and State in Sumatra: a study of seventeenth-century Aceh* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2004), p. 65.

² The historical survey given above draws largely from the indigenous chronicle, the *Bustan us-Salatin* and the study made by Djajadiningrat.#

³ *De Hikayat Atjeh* ed. by Teuku Iskandar, (s' Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1958), p. 72.

⁴ Raden Hoesein Djajadiningrat, 'Critisch overzicht van de in Maleische werken vervatte gegevens over de geschiedenis van het Soeltanaat van Atjeh' *Bidragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 65 (1911), 135-265 p. 212. Lombard, in Winarsih, *Kerajaan Aceh*, p. 247, did not give the start date of his reign, only the end date of 1530.

⁵ K.F.H. Van Langen, 'De Inrichting van het Atjehsche Staatsbestuur onder het Sultanaat', *BKI*, 5.3 (1888), translated as *Susunan Pemerintahan Aceh Semasa Kesultanan [Structure of Government during the Aceh Sultanate]*, by Aboe Bakar (Pusat Dokumentasi dan Informasi Banda Aceh, 1997), p. 14.#

influence of the Sultanate. Ali Mughayat Syah was thus, the founder and first Sultan of Aceh Dar al-Salam.⁶

As the son of Shams Syah, Sultan Ali Mughayat Syah was a descendant of the Mahkota Alam Dynasty. It is not known whether Ali Mughayat Syah was the eldest son of Shams Syah or whether that distinction belongs to another character, Raja Ibrahim, known to the Portuguese as a distinguished warrior; or whether they were the same.⁷ Nor is it clear, in any case, how he came to succeed his father. When he died, his son, Salah al-Din (r.1528-37), succeeded him.⁸ Known to be a weak leader, he was challenged by his younger brother, Ala al-Din al-Qahar, ruler of Pasai. Ala al-Din took power from him and ruled from 1537-1568.⁹ He was a strong ruler and continued his father's legacy of expansion and attacking the Portuguese in Melaka. After his death, his son, Sultan Husayn, succeeded him and took the title Sultan Ali Riayat Syah (1568-1575).¹⁰ He was the second son of Al-Qahar; the first, Abd Allah, the ruler of Aru, was killed in the campaign against the Portuguese in Melaka in 1568. Al-Qahar had three more sons, Sultan Mughal, Sultan Abangta and Sultan Abangta Abdul Jalil. Sultan Abangta Abdul Jalil, replaced his eldest brother as the Sultan of Aru. Sultan Mughal became the Sultan of Priaman while the remaining son, Abangta, who was seen to be ambitious, was executed by Al-Qahar.¹¹ Sultan Ali Riayat Syah was deemed to be a wise ruler who was revered by his people and the *ulama*.¹² Sultan Ali Riayat Syah died in 1575 after ruling for eight years. His death brought much political instabilities in Aceh, which witnessed a succession of three Sultans. Sultan Ali Riayat Syah was succeeded by his four-month old son who died seven months later. Very little is known about why this

⁶ The *Bustan us-Salatin* described Ali Mughayat Syah as the first Sultan of Aceh Dar al-Salam, defender of Islam and a fine warrior, p. 31. The date of reign given by the *Bustan* is 913-928 H, (1507-1522). Djajadiningrat 'Critisch', p. 212, places him at r.1514-1528, and Lombard, in Winarsih, *Kerajaan Aceh*, p.247, at r. ?-1530.

⁷ In another comprehensive but little referenced study of the genealogy of the Acehnese Sultanate, H.M. Zainuddin, an Acehnese historian, stated that Laksamana Raja Ibrahim was the younger son of Sultan Ali Mughayat Syah. See H.M. Zainuddin, *Tarich Atjeh dan Nusantara*, (Medan: Pustaka Iskandar Muda, 1961), p. 395.

⁸ Djajadiningrat, 'Critisch,' p. 212. The *Bustan*, however, states that he ruled for seventeen years. *Bustan*, Iskandar, p. 31. Lombard states that he ruled from 1530-1539 Lombard, in Winarsih, *Kerajaan Aceh*, p. 247.

⁹ Djajadiningrat, 'Critisch', p. 212. Lombard puts Ala-al Din date of reign at 1539-1571. Lombard, in Winarsih, *Kerajaan Aceh*, p. 248.

¹⁰ Djajadiningrat, 'Critisch', p. 212. Lombard puts Ali Riayat date of reign at 1571-1579. Lombard, in Winarsih, *Kerajaan Aceh*, p. 248.

¹¹ *Bustan*, Iskandar, p. 32.

¹² *Bustan*, Iskandar, p. 32.

infant was chosen as successor and who was the Regent appointed to rule on his behalf. The *Bustan* merely stated that the next ruler was his uncle, Abangta Abdul al-Jalil who took the title Sultan Sri Alam.¹³ Assassins killed him in 1576,¹⁴ allegedly because of his bad temper.¹⁵ Zayn al-Abidin, grandson of al-Qahar, became the next ruler but supposedly because of his murderous and bloodthirsty nature, he too was murdered after a few months, in 1577.¹⁶

The *Bustan* gave no explanation on how they were murdered or any clue as to who the killers were. It was also not clear under what circumstances these kings succeeded the throne. Only the *Hikayat Aceh* revealed a little bit more about these Sultans but even then, this chronicle was tantalizingly silent on their deaths. The *Hikayat Aceh* depicted Sultan Sri Alam as extravagant since he had depleted the kingdom's Treasury by giving expensive gifts to certain soldiers and elites from Fansur (Baros). This *Hikayat* related that the *orangkaya* and *ulama* in Aceh had then gathered and decided that this state of affairs was injurious to the kingdom and that this Sultan must be deposed.¹⁷ The *Hikayat* was however, silent on how this was done, merely mentioning that he was replaced by Sultan Zayn al-Abidin.¹⁸ This was in contrast to the *Bustan's* account that the Sultan was killed. The *Hikayat Aceh* then continued to relate that Sultan Zayn al-Abidin was also a bad ruler, extremely bad tempered and bloodthirsty. Again, here the elites of the kingdom felt that if this Sultan was not stopped, it would spell disaster for them, thus they decided to depose the Sultan. The *Hikayat Aceh* was again mysteriously silent on how this was done. It merely stated that after this Sultan ruled for two years, he died.¹⁹ Although these indigenous chronicles seemed to imply that the elites played an important role in appointing and demoting rulers, they revealed almost next to nothing about the identities and rights of the *orangkaya* and court officials except for mention of the highest titles.

After this period of violent successions, an era of foreign-born rulers ensued. Sultan Ala al-Din known as Mansur Syah, of Perak origin, succeeded to the throne and

¹³ *Bustan*, Iskandar, pp. 32-33.

¹⁴ Djajadiningrat, 'Critisch', p. 212

¹⁵ *Bustan*, Iskandar, p. 32.

¹⁶ Djajadiningrat, 'Critisch', p. 212. H.M. Zainuddin gave a differing account. See Zainuddin, *Tarich Atjeh*, p. 399.#

¹⁷ *Hikayat Aceh*, Iskandar, p. 96.

¹⁸ *Hikayat Aceh*, Iskandar, p. 97.

¹⁹ *Hikayat Aceh*, Iskandar, p. 98.

reigned from 1577-1586.²⁰ Again, no explanation is to hand of the circumstances of his succession or of why a foreign-born ruler came to be chosen to rule Aceh. The *Bustan* described him as a pious and just ruler who upheld Islamic law. Despite being popular, he was also killed, for reasons unfathomable.²¹ Next in line, was Sultan Mahkota Buyong from Inderapura who took the title Sultan Ala al-Din Riayat Syah.²² He reigned from 1586-88 and again for unknown reasons was killed.²³

After a decade of foreign rule, the succession returned to the Aceh's Dar-al-Kamal dynasty. Sultan Ala-Addin Riayat Syah, son of Firman Syah, descendent of Inayat Syah of the Dar al-Kamal dynasty, was installed on the throne in 1588 and ruled until his overthrow in 1604.²⁴ He took the title Sultan Ali Mughayat Syah al-Mukammil. He had four sons, two of which had died and the remaining two sons were installed as rulers in Pidie and Pasai.²⁵ He also had two daughters, one of which was the mother of Iskandar Muda, *Putri Raja Indra Bongsu.²⁶ He was said to have been chosen by the *orangkaya* and was already very old when he ascended the throne (the main reason it appears as to why he was chosen), but after becoming king, he was alleged to have killed many of the *orangkaya* who had supported him earlier.²⁷ His own eldest son, the ambitious Sultan Muda, the ruler of Pidie later deposed him in 1604. Sultan Muda, then took the title Sultan Ali Ri'ayat Syah.²⁸ Sultan Ali Ri'ayat Syah's brother, Hussain Syah, then took over as ruler of Pidie. Hussain Syah opposed his brother's deposition of their old father and in this opposition, he was supported by his nephew, Iskandar Muda. Their rebellion

²⁰ Djajadiningrat, 'Critisch', p. 159-160.#

²¹ *Bustan*, Iskandar, pp. 33-34. Djajadiningrat mentioned that he was killed by his *ulebalang* (soldier) but no reason was given as to why he was killed, Djajadiningrat, 'Critisch', p. 213. Zainuddin suggested that he was killed because the elites of Aceh wanted a return to their own native royal lineage of Mughayat Syah, Zainuddin, *Tarich Atjeh*, p. 400.#

²² *Bustan*, Iskandar, p. 34. Sultan Mahkota Buyong came to Aceh to look for his sister who was married to the late Sultan Sri Alam. When Sri Alam was killed, he was said to have been asked to succeed to the throne of Aceh. See J. Kathirithamby-Wells, 'The Inderapura Sultanate: the foundations of its rise and decline from the 16th - 18th century', *Indonesia*, 21 (April 1976), 65-84, p. 68 and Amirul, *Islam and State*, p. 69.

²³ *Bustan*, Iskandar, p. 34. Zainuddin ventured that during this Sultan's reign, Zayn al-Abidin returned to claim the throne. He was supported by the Acehnese elites and the army so much so that Ali Riayat Syah of Inderapura had to rely on his soldiers from Inderapura. In the ensuing struggles between these two factions, Sultan Ali Riayat Syah was killed, Zainuddin, *Tarich Atjeh*, p. 401.

²⁴ Djajadiningrat, 'Critisch', p. 213, pp. 162-163.#

²⁵ *Bustan*, Iskandar, p. 34.

²⁶ Djajadiningrat, 'Critisch', p. 169. Zainuddin cites her name as Indra Ratna Wangsa. See Zainuddin, *Tarich Atjeh*, p. 403.

²⁷ Beaulieu related this account when he was in Aceh in 1621. John Davis was the one who mentioned that this king was very old. See Djajadiningrat, 'Critisch', pp.162-163. Cf. fn. 16 and fn.22.#

²⁸ *Bustan*, Iskandar, p. 34. Also Djajadiningrat, 'Critisch', p. 213.

against Ali Riayat Syah failed and Iskandar Muda had to flee to Pidie to avoid being punished by Sultan Ali Ri'ayat Syah. Hussain Syah refused to surrender Iskandar Muda to his brother. Ali Ri'ayat Syah therefore attacked Pidie. Hussain Syah was defeated and Iskandar Muda, who was supporting this uncle, surrendered to Sultan Ali Ri'ayat Syah.²⁹ He was however, released in 1606 when the Sultan needed his services to repel an attack on Aceh by the Portuguese. Iskandar Muda succeeded in repulsing the Portuguese attack but the Sultan himself succumbed immediately after to an unknown cause of death. Iskandar Muda lost no time in getting the support of the *orangekaya* to place him on the throne. His uncle from Pidie was then duly captured and executed.³⁰

Iskandar Muda ruled from 1607 until his death in 1636.³¹ The *Bustan* considered him to be a great ruler and conqueror. Under him, Aceh expanded its territories and continued attacks against the Portuguese in Melaka.³² Iskandar Muda died without leaving any direct heir of his own since his only legitimate son was believed to be killed under his own orders a few weeks before his death.³³ As his successor, he named his son-in-law, Sultan Iskandar Thani (r.1636-1641), who became the third foreign-born ruler to rule Aceh. Iskandar Thani was the son of the Pahang ruler named Ahmad Syah. He was brought to Aceh at the age of seven when Pahang was conquered by Iskandar Muda in 1618 and was married to his daughter, Puteri Seri Alam. Iskandar Thani died in 1641, childless, at a young age of thirty-one, reasons unknown. With no apparent male heir, his widow, the daughter of Iskandar Muda succeeded him and became the first female ruler of Aceh, taking the title Taj al-Alam Safiatuddin Syah.³⁴ She enjoyed a long reign of thirty-five years until her death in 1675. She was succeeded by another woman who was crowned Sri Sultanah Nur al-Alam Naqiyyat al-Din Syah. She ruled for three years until her death in 1678.³⁵ According to Zainuddin, she was the daughter of Hussain Syah, the ruler of Pidie and the uncle of Iskandar Muda.³⁶ Apart from this claim

²⁹ Djajadiningrat, 'Critisch', p. 174. Also, Zainuddin, *Tarich Atjeh*, p. 403.

³⁰ Djajadiningrat, 'Critisch', p. 175. Zainuddin made no mention of what happened to Hussain Syah.

³¹ Both Lombard and Djajadiningrat placed his reign from 1607-1636 illustrating the fact that the information on the historical succession of the Sultans of Aceh in the seventeenth century is much more definite than the century before. See Djajadiningrat, 'Critisch', p.213. Lombard, in Winarsih, *Kerajaan Aceh*, p. 249.

³² *Bustan*, Iskandar, p. 35.

³³ Translation of Lombard, in Winarsih, *Kerajaan Aceh*, p. 236.#

³⁴ Djajadiningrat, 'Critisch', p. 214. Also Lombard, in Winarsih, *Kerajaan Aceh*, p. 249.

³⁵ Djajadiningrat, 'Critisch', p. 214. Lombard's study stops at this first Sultanah Taj al-Alam.

³⁶ Zainuddin, *Tarich Atjeh*, p. 408. He provided no evidence or source for this claim.

there is no other information about her origin nor the circumstances leading to her succession. A third woman came to succeed to the throne of Aceh and was crowned as Sultanah Inayat Syah Zakiyyat al-Din Syah and she ruled from 1678 until her death in 1688.³⁷ Again, her origins cannot be verified. The *Bustan* stated that she was the daughter of a certain Sultan Muhammad Syah.³⁸ Zainuddin claimed that she was the daughter of Mahmud Syah or Sultan Ali Riayat Syah (1604-1607).³⁹ After her death in 1688, the last of four queens by the name of Kamalat Syah was installed, her origin seems to be totally obscure. She ruled until 1699 when she was deposed by a challenger of Arab descent, Sultan Badr al-Alam Syariff Hashim Jamal al-Din (r.1699-1702).⁴⁰

Criteria for Succession

Not many countries in the seventeenth century had written succession laws, at least not in the Malay world. The closest indication of any written prerequisites a candidate must possess before being appointed as Sultan is found in the *Kanun Syarak Kerajaan Aceh*⁴¹ based on **syariah*. It states that the candidate must be a Muslim of good lineage, an adult (have reached puberty), an Acehnese citizen, courageous, wise, just, loving and soft-hearted or merciful (*lembut hati*), conversant with the nuances of language, a keeper of promises, not physically handicapped, truthful, loving, patient, restrained (keeping anger in check, controlling baser instincts), forgiving, firm yet submissive to Allah's will and thankful to Allah.⁴²

Most rulers did not meet all these prerequisites. Nevertheless, the common sources of legitimate succession that could be gleaned from the above narrative are religion, good lineage usually of royal birth, nomination by a previous ruler, oligarchic nomination or election. Conquest can confer legitimacy, as, in appropriate cultural

³⁷ Djajadiningrat, 'Critisch', p. 214.

³⁸ *Bustan*, Iskandar, p.74. No explanation was given as to who this Sultan Muhammad Syah was.

³⁹Zainuddin, *Tarich Atjeh*, p. 409. This means that the second and third queens were cousins of Sultan Iskandar Muda and their grandfather was Sultan al-Mukammil. Again, no evidence provided.

⁴⁰ Djajadiningrat, 'Critisch', p. 192.

⁴¹ The *Kanun Syarak Kerajaan Aceh [Aceh Canonical Laws]* was written in 1853 by Tengku di Meulek, descendent of Aceh's Arab Jamal al-Din dynasty during the reign of Sultan Alauddin Mansur Syah. The *Kanun Syarak Kerajaan Aceh* however, was believed to be based on an earlier kitab *Tazkirah tabakah* written in 1507 during the reign of Sultan Ali Mughayat Syah. See Abdullah Sani Usman, *Nilai Sastera Ketatanegaraan dan Undang-undang dalam Kanun Syarak Kerajaan Aceh dan Bustanus Salatin*, [henceforth referred to as *Kanun Syarak Kerajaan Aceh*] (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2005), p. 18.

⁴² Abdullah Sani, *Kanun Syarak Kerajaan Aceh*, p. 38.

environments; as can the ruler's sacrality, piety, or prowess. Amirul isolated a few salient factors in determining historical succession in Aceh. First, rulers must be of royal lineage.⁴³ Secondly, the succeeding ruler may be chosen by the reigning one but this designation must be agreed by important state officials in order to avoid future crisis.⁴⁴ The consent of these state officials was important especially in cases where the previous ruler had failed to propose a name or in times of crisis. The other condition for succession was that the potential sovereign must possess personal qualities such as military prowess, leadership capabilities and moral superiority.⁴⁵

Before commenting on Amirul's arguments and analysing how these pertain to the context of female succession, one other important condition that should be examined but was not explained by Amirul was the succession of foreign-born rulers to the throne of Aceh Sultanate. As mentioned above, three foreign-born Sultans ascended the throne of Aceh Dar-al-Salam. They were Sultan Ala al-Din of Perak (r.1579-1586), Sultan Ala al-Din Riayat Shah (r.1586-89) from Inderapura, and Sultan Iskandar Thani (r.1636-1641) from Pahang. These Sultans, though foreign, were accepted as legitimate because they were related to Aceh's royal family by marriage. Besides this royal lineage, the *orangkaya* and *ulama* accepted them because of the special circumstances surrounding their accession. After the death of Sultan Ali Riayat Shah in 1579, Aceh was faced with a dearth of native-born, suitable heirs and this failure to install a good ruler brought about the need to look elsewhere for a successor. So the prince from Perak was chosen in 1579. This ushered in a decade of rule (1579-1589) under foreign rulers with royal marriage ties with Aceh's ruling dynasty. Though legitimate, these foreign rulers ended up killed and it was not until 1636 that Aceh once again came under a foreign ruler, Iskandar Thani, son of a Pahang prince. When Iskandar Thani died unexpectedly in 1641, leaving no male heir, the choice of a foreign ruler would be a logical one and in keeping with the Sultanate's customary succession practices. The first two foreign-born Sultans who ruled in the years 1579-1589 were chosen and placed on the throne by the elites of Aceh whilst the third was chosen by the reigning Sultan. Since Iskandar Thani died suddenly and did not name a successor, the only other way a foreign-born Sultan

⁴³ Amirul, *Islam and State*, p. 74.

⁴⁴ Amirul, *Islam and State*, pp. 87-88. There is only one clear case of this happening - the naming of Iskandar Thani as successor by Iskandar Muda.

⁴⁵ Amirul, *Islam and State*, p. 89.

could succeed was by the choice of the *orangkaya* and *ulama* of Aceh. In 1641, the elites certainly had some legal choices of contenders. As a result of relations by marriage, the possible contenders were from Perak, Pahang and Johor.

When news of the death of Iskandar Thani reached the ears of the neighbouring Malay polities, rumours were rife as to who would go to Aceh to succeed to the throne. The Dutch records revealed that the Sultan of Johor, Sultan Abdul Jalil (r.1623-1677) on his return to Johor from Patani wanted to stop over in Aceh to succeed Iskandar Thani.⁴⁶ Back in 1613, when Aceh razed Johor to the ground, its ruler, Sultan Alaudin managed to escape with his son, Abdul Jalil. His brother, Sultan Ma'yat Syah, was carried off to Aceh to be married to Iskandar Muda's sister, thus securing the Sultan of Johor a legitimate ground to contest for the throne based on marriage ties. Sultan Abdul Jalil succeeded Sultan Ma'yat Syah when he died in 1623. As mentioned earlier, Aceh already had reigning Sultans related by marriage to the Aceh royal house from both Pahang and Perak making these Sultans legible for succession.

So why did the elites of Aceh not choose another foreign-born Sultan to rule Aceh this time round as they did before when no apparent heir was in sight? This question is a difficult one to answer. One indication perhaps was that the elites of Aceh generally preferred native to foreign-born Sultans. Despite being "chosen" by the elites, both Sultan Mansur Syah of Perak and Sultan Ala al-Din Riayat Syah of Inderapura were killed. H.M. Zainuddin suggested that Sultan Mansur Syah was killed because the elites of Aceh wanted a return to their own native royal lineage of Mughayat Syah. They were not happy with this Perak Sultan because he married his daughter to the Sultan of Johor. The result of this union was a son, Raja Hashim, and the Sultan intended to name this grandson as his successor. The elites opposed this and he was eventually killed by a **uleebalang*.⁴⁷ H.M. Zainuddin ventured that during Sultan Ala al-Din Riayat Syah of Inderapura's reign, Zayn al-Abidin, grandson of Al-Qahar, returned to claim the throne. The Acehnese elites and the army supported this claimant from Aceh's original royal lineage that Ali Riayat Syah of Inderapura had to rely on his soldiers from Inderapura. In the ensuing struggles between these two factions, Sultan Ali Riayat Syah was killed.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1640-1641, p. 362.

⁴⁷ Zainuddin, *Tarich Atjeh*, p. 400.

⁴⁸ Zainuddin, *Tarich Atjeh*, p. 401.

There is the suspicion that Sultan Iskandar Thani too might have been killed since he was still very young and his death came so unexpectedly.⁴⁹ The Dutch officials reported that Iskandar Thani was not loved by the Acehnese because he was a foreigner.⁵⁰ Indeed, in addition to this, he was not liked because he was wasteful and had depleted the Treasury. The elites of Aceh were not happy that he had ordered a lot of very expensive jewellery from the Company and after his death, they had refused to accept these jewels from the Dutch saying that they were not obliged to carry out his orders. Tensions between the Company and Iskandar Thani had already arisen in 1640, a year before his death when Iskandar Thani refused to help the Dutch to conquer Melaka. This was his way of registering his displeasure at the Company's decision to ally itself with his vassal, Johor behind his back. But when Melaka was finally successfully conquered by the Company with Johor's help in 1641, this only resulted in leaving Aceh in a balance of power that was not in her favour. Furthermore, Aceh had recently lost another vassal, Pahang, Iskandar Thani's own birthplace to Johor in 1638. These circumstances, plus the weakened state of the Acehnese military after the 1629 fiasco in Melaka added to the sense of insecurity of the Acehnese. Because of this bad experience with this Pahang-born ruler, the elites of Aceh learnt a very important lesson, which made them more determined to keep out foreigners beyond its borders. The elites thus looked inwards, to a native-born to lead them and to gather their strength to meet and respond to these outside challenges. Strangers, at that moment, were not welcomed. These circumstances coupled with rumours rife, made the Acehnese elite even more wary of attempts at marrying their queen, Iskandar Thani's widow and Iskandar Muda's daughter, to strange princes who could later claim the throne. The Acehnese *orangkaya*, thus secretly made a pact never to allow a foreign prince to claim the throne of the kingdom or to be obeyed voluntarily.⁵¹ In these circumstances, a native heir, or in this case, even an heiress, was preferable. It is significant to note here that given the fear of the elite, that the throne could fall into foreign hands, they accepted that Iskandar Muda's daughter could rule in her own right without the need to have a male spouse. Indeed, they jealously guarded their queen from marrying again. Revulsion or fear of

⁴⁹ The *Bustan* reveals a plot hatched by those who were against Iskandar Thani who poisoned his food. This plot was however foiled and the conspirators were executed, *Bustan*, p. 46.

⁵⁰ Nationaal Archief [henceforth identified as NA], Dag-Register van Pieter Sourij, May-August 1642, f.572R.

⁵¹ NA, Justus Schouten and Johan van Twist in Malacca, July 1641, f.343V.

foreign-born princes at that moment was one explanation for the need to install a local-born one, albeit a female.

This brings us to the main object of discussion. In 1641, an entirely new variable emerged on the issue of legitimate succession: sex. Can a woman succeed to the throne of the Sultanate of Aceh Dar-al-Salam? In a Muslim and largely patriarchal kingdom such as Aceh, this could indeed be problematic. So how did the elites deal with this issue, how and why was she chosen and was this choice consistent with prior customary practices and traditions? First, the above four conditions governing the succession that Amirul identified need attention. He concluded that the procedure for succession was less structured in Aceh than in other Malay Sultanates. This very obscurity surrounding the rules ensured that the Acehnese approach to this issue was flexible and pragmatic.⁵² On the other hand, Amirul saw pragmatism as constrained by ideology. He asserted that at the core an Islamic-moral paradigm prevailed.

It appears that in the case of a female succession, royal lineage applies, certainly for the first Sultanah, Safiatuddin Syah. This is consistent with earlier practices of male succession where it is believed that most rulers were of royal blood. Granted that there are some inconsistencies regarding the identity of the Sultans and their succession in the sixteenth century, most accounts do corroborate on the dynastic lineage of the Aceh Sultans, especially in the seventeenth century. The kingdom of Aceh was founded on the basis of unification of the Dar al-Kamal and Mahkota Alam Dynasties and rulers from Mughayat Syah to Zayn al-Abidin sprang from these two dynastic lines. In 1589, after the era of foreign-born rulers, al-Mukammil restarted the Dar-al-Kamal line which ended with his son, Ali Riayat Syah, in 1607. The two dynastic lines were then reunited in the person of Iskandar Muda whose father was Mansur Syah, grandson of al-Qahar of Mahkota Alam dynasty. His mother was Putri Raja Indra Bongsu, daughter of al-Mukammil of Dar al-Kamal.⁵³ Safiatuddin Syah was Iskandar Muda's daughter, clearly from a royal mother since another son of Iskandar Muda, from a non-royal mother was disqualified to succeed.⁵⁴ According to Zainuddin, Safiatuddin's mother was Putri Sani,

⁵² Amirul, *Islam and State*, p. 65.

⁵³ Lombard, in Winarsih, *Kerajaan Aceh*, pp. 248-249. Djajadiningrat, 'Critisch', p. 216.

⁵⁴ Ali Hasjmy has also identified the mother of this princess. She was said to be royal and her title was *Puteri* (Princess) Ratna Indra. Evidence given is rather vague though because the *naskah tua* (tr. old manuscript) mentioned by Hasjmy could not be properly identified. Ali Hasjmy, *59 Tahun Aceh Merdeka dibawah Pemerintahan Ratu* (Banda Aceh: Penerbitan Bulan Bintang, c1977), p. 33.

the daughter of Daeng Mansur whilst her half brother was the son of a concubine from Lam Si.⁵⁵ He became the **panglima* of one of the provinces in Aceh instead and took the title Panglima Polem.⁵⁶ Very little else is known about her other legitimate siblings except for the brother who was killed by the orders of their own father, Iskandar Muda, a few weeks before his death.⁵⁷ It is possible that there was indeed a dearth of other suitable royal male heirs with impeccable lineage since Iskandar Muda was so paranoid that he killed many royal males during his reign. He killed his own nephew, the son of the Sultan of Johor (this Sultan married Iskandar Muda's sister) because he was jealous that his own mother favoured his nephew. He also put to death other royal relations such as a son of the Sultan of Bantam and another of the Sultan of Pahang.⁵⁸ Iskandar Thani too contributed to this shortage of royal male heir since Peter Mundy, an English traveller who visited Aceh, reported that he killed about four hundred people namely Iskandar Muda's other diverse daughters together with their sons who he alleged tried to usurp his throne.⁵⁹ Thus, at the time of Iskandar Thani's death, it appears that none other with such impeccable lineage existed other than the daughter of Iskandar Muda and the widow of Iskandar Thani, Safiatuddin Syah. In such a circumstance, on the account of royal lineage, she was the only one most qualified to succeed and therefore the only one who would be most likely to be accepted by all as legitimate.

Unfortunately, the origins of the other three Sultanahs are still inconclusive. Thus far, a search of the VOC sources has confirmed the accession dates of these queens but not their identities and origins. From the indigenous chronicles, only the *Bustan* mentioned the female rulers. The *Bustan* confirmed the identity of the first queen but the identity of her immediate successor, Nakiatuddin Syah remained a mystery. According to Zainuddin, Nakiatuddin Syah was the daughter of Hussain Syah, the ruler of Pidie, the uncle of Iskandar Muda.⁶⁰ Teuku Iskandar, editor of the *Bustan* stated that the second queen was another daughter of Iskandar Muda but he provided no evidence

⁵⁵ Zainuddin, *Tarich Atjeh*, p. 426.

⁵⁶ Van Langen, in Aboe Bakar, *Susunan Pemerintahan*, p. 15.

⁵⁷ According to Zainuddin, this son, named Merah Pupok, was also not from a royal mother but the son of another concubine from Pasai, Zainuddin, *Tarich Atjeh*, p. 426.

⁵⁸ Iskandar Muda imprisoned and tortured his own mother whom he suspected of being engaged in a conspiracy against him. Marsden, *History of Sumatra*, p. 446.

⁵⁹ Peter Mundy arrived in Aceh in February 1638, four months after the reported executions ordered by Iskandar Thani. Peter Mundy, *The Travels of Peter Mundy*, vol. III, part II, no. XLVI, (Cambridge: The Hakluyt Society, 1907, 1919), p. 330.

⁶⁰ Zainuddin, *Tarich Atjeh*, p. 408. He provided no evidence or source for this claim.

for this speculation.⁶¹ The third queen, Zakiatuddin Syah, the *Bustan* told us, was the daughter of a certain Sultan Muhammad Syah. The *Bustan* ended with the mention of this third queen without elaborating on the identity of this Sultan Muhammad Syah and his daughter. Djajadiningrat suggested that the third queen might be the daughter of the second queen.⁶² Zainuddin claimed that the third queen, Zakiatuddin Syah was the daughter of Mahmud Syah or Sultan Ali Riayat Syah (1604-1607).⁶³ The fourth queen, Kamalat Syah remains a complete mystery.⁶⁴ Although their origins are still in doubt, it is hard to imagine that they were not from royal lineage since their succession would surely be opposed. No such claims of illegitimacy were ever made to contest their succession. The three foreign-born rulers, Ala al-Din (r.1579-86) of Perak and Ala al-Din Riayat Syah (r.1586-89) of Inderapura and Iskandar Thani (r. 1636-1641) were all royal themselves who married into the Acehnese royal line. Therefore, it appears that royal lineage is an essential pre-requisite of succession in Aceh even in the context of a female succession. Furthermore, it seems that as long as they were of royal lineage, the order in which progeny appeared did not matter, since the eldest son did not necessarily succeed. Other sons or brothers, or for that matter daughters or sisters of previous rulers could succeed to the throne.

Another criterion of succession is the designation of an heir by the reigning ruler.⁶⁵ The wish of the dying ruler, had however, to be declared in front of the court officials and confirmed by them. The *Bustan* reported that Iskandar Muda had gathered the most important officials such as the **Kadhi Malik al-Adil*, **Perdana Menteri*, **hulubalang* and other religious leaders, most prominent being Syeikh Shamsuddin al-Samatrani, the **Syeikh al-Islam* and announced that when he passed away, his “son” Sultan Mughal [Iskandar Thani] would take his position and the court officials present agreed.⁶⁶ The nomination by the reigning ruler, however, did not appear to be a common practice for

⁶¹ *Bustan*, Iskandar, p. 13.

⁶² Djajadiningrat, ‘Critisch’, p. 189. Djajadiningrat based this claim from some written manuscript of Snouck Hurgronje, the details are unknown.

⁶³ cf. fn. 39.

⁶⁴ According to Ali Hasjmy, based on the genealogy given in the *naskah tua*, the origins of these female rulers could be traced back to the same family dynasty, i.e. the grandfather of the founder of the Sultanate of Aceh, Ali Mughayat Syah, whose name was Sultan Alauddin Abdullah Malikul Mubin. However, the evidence here is inconclusive. See Ali, *59 Tahun*, p. 39.

⁶⁵ This procedure of naming or designating a successor was widely practiced in other Malay kingdoms and was one of the preconditions recognized in the *Sejarah Melayu* for legitimate succession.

⁶⁶ *Bustan*, Iskandar, pp. 43-44.

succession in Aceh since this was more often than not contested. Iskandar Muda's naming his son-in-law as heir designate was the only example mentioned in the indigenous chronicles. Even then, Iskandar Thani did not last long since he incurred the displeasure of some circles of the *orangkaya* with his extravagant behaviour and his support of the execution of Shams al-Din followers. This appointment may be an exception rather than the rule given the kind of power wielded by Iskandar Muda. Other successions were more a result of an oligarchic nomination and consensus of the *orangkaya*. This was in line with the Acehnese tradition of **musyawarah* where a decision tended to be made by the majority rather than one person even though he was the Sultan. A successor accepted by the majority elite would stand a better chance of survival rather than one appointed by the Sultan.

Amirul argued that the consent or compliance of these state officials with the wish of the dying sovereign served to avoid "future crisis in the succession". This is impossible since these conditions are mutually contradictory and cannot prevail simultaneously. An heir is either designated or elected, never both. The appointment of Iskandar Thani by Iskandar Muda could not survive his death, since Iskandar Thani "died" in mysterious circumstances. Neither did it prevent a future crisis since Iskandar Thani's unexpected death threw the court into an uproar. It is thus clear that election from the *orangkaya* and *ulama* factions was crucial in determining the choice of a successor. Whether the consent needed to be unanimous would be difficult to ascertain but it would be likely the result of a consensus of the dominant elites. I suggest that this election by the elites constituted one main criterion in the kingdom's succession history.

Circumstances leading to the succession of the first female ruler of Aceh Dar al-Salam

The critical question here is why did the *orangkaya* decide to nominate and pay their oath of allegiance to a female successor in 1641? Amirul contended, "with the death of Iskandar Thani in 1641, the power of the *orangkaya* reasserted itself in the midst of the resulting political confusion, as he had left no son to succeed him. The *orangkaya* played a major role in the crisis by installing his widow on the throne..." and "the accession of this ruler marked the beginning of a gradual transferral of power into the

hands of the aristocrats.”⁶⁷ Unfortunately, in making this assertion, Amirul did not offer any explanation as to why or how the *orangkaya* “installed” this widow or how their “power reasserted itself.”⁶⁸ Let us first examine both contemporary and recent accounts on the first female succession in Aceh. In the main, these accounts differed on two major questions - firstly, whether her succession was smooth and peaceful or problematic; whether she was installed immediately after the death of her husband or some days after. Secondly, the alleged debate that took place at court amongst the elites as to whether a woman could be allowed to lead or rule an Islamic kingdom.

One contemporary account, that of Nicolaus de Graaff's, a Dutch surgeon, who was in Aceh at the time of Iskandar Thani's death, described a problematic succession. He wrote about an *opschudding* (state of commotion) under the *orangkaya* where many people lost their lives and the Company's lodge was closed for four to five days because each of the *orangkaya* desired to be king.⁶⁹ Because of this chaotic situation, it took three days before Safiatuddin was installed.⁷⁰

The rest of the contemporary accounts, Dutch and indigenous did not mention any disturbances. A Dutch Company official, the **oppercoopman* Jacob Compostel who resided in Aceh wrote in a letter dated 26 February 1641 that the King of Aceh had departed this world on the 15th of February 1641, without leaving any children to succeed and thereafter, after a lapse of three days, his widow was crowned as Queen and resumed duties of administration.⁷¹ Similarly, the *ulama* Nuruddin al-Raniri who was present at the time of the queen's accession to the throne, had written in the *Bustan us-Salatin*, that Iskandar Muda's daughter was chosen as the successor and was enthroned as Paduka Seri Sultan Safiatuddin Syah Berdaulat zillu' l-Lah fil 'alam ibnat Sultan Raja Iskandar Muda Johan Berdaulat without any opposition. But, unlike the Dutch reports, he wrote that the Sultanah's reign started on the very same day of her husband's death.⁷²

⁶⁷ Amirul, *Islam and State*, p.81.

⁶⁸ Amirul, *Islam and State*, p.81.

⁶⁹ Nicolaus de Graaff, *Reisen van Nicolaus de Graaff gedaen naar alle gewesten des werelds, beginnende 1639 tot 1687* ed. by J.C.M. Warnsinck, (s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1930), p. 13. See also, Raden Hossein Djajadiningrat, *Kesultanan Aceh trans. of Critisch* by Teuku Hamid (Departmen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan: Proyek Pengembangan Permuseuman, Daerah Istimewa Aceh, 1982-1983), No. 12, p. 56.

⁷⁰ Djajadiningrat stated that three days were taken before the queen was installed. Djajadiningrat quoted Nicolaus de Graaff (1701), p. 9: See Djajadiningrat, 'Critisch', p. 188. However, in the 1930 edition of *Reisen van Nicolaus de Graaff* ed. by Warnsinck, there was no mention of how long it took before the queen was installed.

⁷¹ Chijs, *Dagh-Register van Batavia, 1640-1641*, p. 322.

⁷² *Bustan*, Iskandar, p.58.

Modern historians tended to agree with contemporary accounts that described a peaceful succession though some pointed out that initially some difficulties and opposition arose because of her sex. The Acehnese historian, Mohammad Said, agreed with al-Raniri's description that Safiatuddin's enthronement took place smoothly on the very day her husband died and opined that she had the full support of the *orangkaya* and the *ulama*, especially Nuruddin al-Raniri and Abdul Rauf.⁷³ He argued that a woman holding high positions in Aceh was not a strange phenomenon since in earlier times Aceh already had a woman admiral.

Another Acehnese historian, Ali Hasjmy held the view that the succession of the queen was without bloodshed but it was not without some difficulties. There was a period of *musyawarah* amongst the *orangkaya* and the other *ulama* headed by al-Raniri and Hasjmy ventured that the discussion centred on the issue as to whether a female ruler was legal in Islam. It must have taken some time before everyone came to agree to enthrone the widow of Iskandar Thani, the daughter of Iskandar Muda as the successor. This happened after the *ulama* ruled that a female could become a ruler as long as she met the requirements of religion, moral conduct, and knowledge.⁷⁴

Another Acehnese historian, Rusdi Sufi, claimed that there were three days of mourning before the *orangkaya* unanimously decided to appoint the late king's widow as successor. But just before her coronation there was some opposition in the court over the issue of the legality of a woman becoming the head of the Muslim kingdom since a woman could not even be appointed as an **imam* or **wali*.⁷⁵ Rusdi Sufi suggested that this issue was resolved when another **alim*, Al-Singkel proposed the separation of politics and governance from religion thus absolving a female ruler from performing the rituals expected of a Muslim leader such as leading men in congregational prayers in mosques on Fridays.⁷⁶

The above narratives alluded to the important role of the *orangkaya* and the *ulama* in consenting to her succession by consensus. Only H.M. Zainuddin argued that Safiatuddin was already influential behind the throne during the time her husband was in

⁷³ Mohammad Said, *Atjeh Sepanjang Abad*, pp. 377-379.

⁷⁴ Ali, *59 Tahun*, p. 49.

⁷⁵ Rusdi Sufi, 'Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah', in *Wanita Utama dalam Lintasan Sejarah*, ed. by Ismail Sofyan, Hassan Basry and Ibrahim Alfian, 1st edn., (Jakarta: Jayakarta Agung Offset, 1994), p. 43.

⁷⁶ Rusdi, 'Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah', in *Wanita Utama* ed. by Ismail and Others, p. 44.#

power. When he died, she herself contested for the throne but the *ulama* opposed her claim by decreeing that a female could not rule in Islam because a woman could not be appointed as an *imam* or a *wali*. Safiatuddin responded to this opposition by using her army led by Maharaja Lela. In the ensuing struggle, one *alim*, Fakhir Hitam was killed, and al-Raniri himself was kidnapped and then later killed. During this turbulence, another *alim*, Sheikh Abdul Rauf, intervened and proclaimed Safiatuddin as Queen on the condition that the role of the *imam* and *wali* was taken by an *alim* from the royal family.⁷⁷ Although it is not impossible that Safiatuddin herself contested for the throne rather than being nominated by the elites, this account is problematic because there is no evidence of al-Raniri's opposition and kidnapping. His writing in the *Bustan* on her smooth succession and the support she obtained from her subjects did not even hint of dissent. It is difficult to believe that Safiatuddin could be accepted as ruler if she did not get the blessings of the *Syeikh al-Islam*, the highest religious judge, and most prominent *alim* at that time. Contrary to Zainuddin's claim, al-Raniri was not killed but he left Aceh in 1644.

So, how does one reconcile these inconsistencies to explain the first female succession in Aceh's history? In weighing the above accounts, Nicolaus de Graaff, the resident Dutch surgeon's report was the most immediate and neutral. It appeared that Iskandar Thani's death was certainly unexpected for it caused an uproar amongst the *orangkaya* and made the succession issue critical since no apparent successor was in sight. In an unprecedented move, some of the *orangkaya* appeared to have tried to put themselves up as a candidate but others vehemently opposed, which split the nobility into factions. Whether the claim was opposed because of the issue of legitimacy since the previous rulers had royal blood or because of sheer jealousy none of the *orangkaya* wanted to pay allegiance to their own kind. None of the *orangkaya* faction was perhaps strong enough to support their candidate. To force the issue might bring Aceh into a civil war. None of the *orangkaya* could afford this especially given the uncertain external condition where the VOC with the help of Aceh's enemy Johor had just conquered Melaka. Both representatives were on their way to Aceh to discuss peace and there was

⁷⁷ Zainuddin, *Tarikh Atjeh*, p. 406. Although, the period of commotion and lost of lives mentioned here corroborated de Graaff's account, Zainuddin's claim that al-Raniri was killed had been proven wrong since most scholars cited al-Raniri's death to be in September 1658 in Gujerat. See Azra Azyumardi, *The Origins of Islamic reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern Ulama' in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, (Honolulu: Allen and Unwin, University of Hawaii Press, 2004) p. 62.

a rumour that the Sultan of Johor was on his way to Aceh too to claim the throne, which was legitimately his due to the marriage ties between the Johor and Aceh royal families. He might even marry Iskandar Thani's royal widow and daughter of Iskandar Muda to seal this deed. The initial commotion reported by de Graaff therefore, did not erupt into violence and the scramble for power did not last longer than a few days. Thus, the peaceful succession reported by most other accounts.

The *orangkaya* however, had to find a suitable candidate fast. Based on the above discussion, one of the criteria of succession was that the candidate had to be of royal blood. More importantly, the candidate had to be acceptable to the dominant majority of the *orangkaya*. The other politically prominent group that had to give consent would be the *ulama* or religious scholars at court. As mentioned above, the next suitable royal candidate that met the legitimacy criterion and closest in term of consanguinity to the previous rulers were none other than the widow and daughter of Iskandar Muda. The only "problem" was that she was female. The "female" factor was unprecedented in the history of Acehnese royal succession.

This female factor must have bothered the elite of that time but it appeared to have bothered recent Acehnese male historians more since they placed emphasis on the alleged religious debate whether a female could succeed as a ruler in Islam. This was no trivial matter since the last queen was deposed allegedly because of a *fatwa* from Mekah which stated that Islam forbid a female from ruling a country. An excellent political pedigree would not have guaranteed the succession if there was still the issue of whether female leadership was legal in a Muslim state.⁷⁸ As mentioned by some scholars earlier, the Sultanah was enthroned only after three days and they conjectured that this delay was due to a debate that took place as to whether female rule was allowed in Islam. Rusdi Sufi claimed that a section of the elite who opposed her succession argued that Islamic law did not even allow a woman to be an *imam* or even a *wali*, what more a ruler. This view however was opposed by another group of *ulama* headed by Nuruddin al-Raniri⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Rusdi, 'Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah', in *Wanita Utama* ed. by Ismail and Others, p. 43.

⁷⁹ This *alim's* full name is Nur al-Din Muhammad b. Ali al-Hamid al-Shafi'i al-Asha'ri al-Aydarusi al-Raniri al-Surati. He was appointed by Iskandar Thani as *Sheikh al-Islam*, the chief religious position and remained as such under the first Sultanah until he left Aceh in 1643. See Peter Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World*, (London: C. Hurst & Co. 2001), pp. 116-118.#

and (later by) Abdul Rauf al-Singkel,⁸⁰ two of the most prominent *ulama* in Aceh in the 17th century. Many scholars⁸¹ were of the opinion that because of the intervention and support from these two *ulama*, a female successor was enthroned.

Not much information is available on the religious debates that seemed to have put the politics of the kingdom in such a state of indecisiveness. Jacob Compostel, the VOC *oppercoopman* in Aceh at that time, made no mention of any religious debate and those scholars who mentioned the role these *ulama* had played in the presumed debate did not offer any evidence. But it is not surprising that the issue of whether a female was allowed to rule would attract controversy in a Muslim polity such as Aceh. Although not much information is available to confirm that such a debate took place, it is safe to conclude that without the concurrence of the leading *alim* of that day, viz. al-Raniri, the first Sultanah could not be enthroned. However, it is difficult to agree with Amirul when he claimed, “an orthodox *alim* like al-Raniri has approved a legal ruling allowing for a queen to take the throne”.⁸² No such legal ruling or *fatwa* allowing a female to rule a Muslim polity was mentioned in al-Raniri’s works. As Amirul himself pointed out, there was nothing in the *Bustan*, where al-Raniri sought to explain, why a female ruler was allowed to rule in the first place. Nothing was mentioned in the *Bustan* about whether her sex qualified or disqualified her to be a legitimate successor. Indeed, al-Raniri wrote in the *Bustan* stating that her rule was accepted and justified because she had the qualities of a good ruler, i.e. she was just, generous, loving, caring and pious and exhorted her subjects to do good.⁸³ The possession of these virtues determined rightful rulers regardless of their sex. The *Bustan* described good male rulers in much the same way. I venture that this neutral attitude toward female rule suggests a less conservative and extreme interpretation of Islamic tenets regarding female roles and perhaps reflects a

as such under the first Sultanah until he left Aceh in 1643. See Peter Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World*, (London: C. Hurst & Co. 2001), pp. 116-118.#

⁸⁰ Abd al-Rauf b.Ali al-Fansuri al-Singkili (c.1615-1693) was born in Singkel, West Sumatra. He left Aceh in 1642 for the Middle East to study and returned in 1661. After his return, he was appointed as *Sheikh al-Islam*. He remained in this position until his death in 1693. Riddell, *Islam*, pp. 125-128. Also Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism*, p. 71.

⁸¹ These are Ali Hasjmy, Rusdi Sufi, Cheah Boon Keng and Amirul Hadi. See Rusdi Sufi, ‘Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah’, p. 43. Cheah Boon Keng, ‘Power behind the throne: The role of Queens and Court Ladies in Malay History’, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of Royal Asiatic Society*, 66 (1993), Part 1, 1-21, p. 11. Amirul, *Islam and State*, pp. 83-85. As mentioned earlier, Ali Hasjmy claims that because the *ulama*, headed by Al-Raniri, ruled that a female could rule in Islam, she was enthroned.

⁸² Amirul, *Islam and State*, p. 83.

⁸³ *Bustan*, Iskandar, p. 73.

less gendered pre-modern concept of rule and power. It demonstrates a respect for sovereignty **daulat* per se regardless of the sex of the person in whom it is manifested. The silence on the question of female rule reflects a normal and valid acceptance of the varied potentialities of women instead of the more modern emphasis on masculinity and the concomitant unease with a woman who is not subordinate to a man. Since these religious debates that purportedly delayed the Sultanah's succession could not be ascertained, it might be likely that whether a woman was accepted in Islam was not a critical question asked by the elites of Aceh in 1641. Furthermore, as will be discussed in chapter 5, there was no separation of politics and religion under the female monarchs. Indeed, Sultanah Safiatuddin emphasized her role as the upholder of Allah's laws. Nevertheless, this question whether female rule was acceptable in Islam remained an important one and needed to be addressed. It revolved on how Islam was interpreted to shed light on the role of a woman as sovereign. The outcome of this interpretation **ijtihad* might have been dependent upon the relative authority and the influence of the persons involved in the *musyawarah*, especially the *ulama*.

Regarding Amirul's argument about al-Singkel's role and his works⁸⁴ in supporting the succession of the first Sultanah, Safiatuddin, it must be noted that the *Mirat al-Tullab* was written after he returned to Aceh in 1661.⁸⁵ Whilst his role and work would be important in the perpetuation of female rule in the subsequent enthronement of the subsequent three queens, it could not be used nor should it be confused to justify the first Sultanah's accession in 1641. It may be probable, based on the accounts by Rusdi Sufi and Zainuddin, that he was one of those *ulama* who supported her accession to the throne way back in 1641, even before al-Singkel was appointed as the *Sheikh al-Islam* and before he was commissioned to write the *Mirat al-Tullab*. Whether, he was key to the installation of the first Sultanah may be still a matter of debate since he was fairly young in 1641 (about twenty-six years old). Furthermore, he had not gone to the Middle East to further his studies, which might affect his stature as an experienced *alim* compared to the older and more authoritative al-Raniri who held the position of *Sheikh al-Islam* in 1641.

⁸⁴ Abd al-Rauf al-Singkel wrote about twenty-two works ranging from law, Quranic exegesis, theology and mysticism. In his *Mirat al-Tullab*, completed in 1663, he left open the possibility of women being in leadership position, for example, as a judge. See Amirul, *Islam and State*, pp. 85-86.#

⁸⁵ Amirul, *Islam and State*, p. 85.

Pre-Modern conceptions of kingship/ queenship

More queens ruled in earlier times when conceptions of power and authority were not defined in terms of sex. Dean Miller argued that the early European and Byzantine concept of the ruler was of a hermaphroditic being, uniting masculine and feminine principles, and implied that the concentration on masculinity was a modern phenomenon. In ancient and pre-colonial Africa, women held power in the phenomenon of *queen mother*. In Southeast Asia, ancient and pre-colonial concepts of power and authority were defined in terms of dualities of male/female with implications of fertility and complementarity.⁸⁶ With the advent of world religions like Christianity and Islam, interpreted and executed by males, power and authority began to be constructed and defined as necessarily male. Even then, early Islam and Christianity gave women a much more prominent position compared to the latter years when religion became institutionalised and bureaucratized by male elite. Only in recent years with a more feminist reading of the Quran and Bible that women began to interpret religion themselves resulting in the redefining ideas of power, authority, and leadership.⁸⁷

How was women's involvement in politics viewed in the Malay world in the early modern era? It is important at this juncture to draw on the earlier Malay/Islamic political treatises that laid out the theory on kingship. In the context of Muslim Southeast Asia, the religious scholars in Aceh might well have referred to these contemporary religious and other writings that touched on the issue of female participation in politics and governance.

As mentioned earlier, the *Kanun Syarak Kerajaan Aceh* did not consider being male as a pre-requisite to becoming a ruler. The *Taj us-Salatin*, a political treatise, written in

⁸⁶ Leonard Andaya, 'The Stranger-King Complex in Bugis-Makassar Society,' unpublished paper presented at the Stranger-Kings in Southeast Asia and Elsewhere Workshop, Jakarta, Indonesia, 5-7 June 2006, p. 1.

⁸⁷ See Muslim feminist writings by Fatima Mernissi, *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory*, (London: Zed Books, 1996); Fatima Mernissi, *Forgotten Queens of Islam*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) and Amina Wadud, *Quran and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006).

Aceh in 1603 by al-Jauhari,⁸⁸ viewed female rule as legal in the absence of a male heir. This was clearly not written as a response to the circumstance that faced Aceh in 1641. One could argue that this treatise was way ahead of its time and was a reflection of the local religious scholars' attitude towards leadership and women in general. In chapter five of the *Taj us-Salatin*, under the heading of **kerajaan* and the **hukumat* regarding the sultan, the writer, albeit, reluctantly⁸⁹ stated that a female could succeed a male king, but, only in special circumstances viz. in the event of the non-existence of a male heir in the royal family and to prevent crisis (*darurat*) in the country.⁹⁰ Although he placed caveats on female leadership, the very discussion on the legality of female leadership put this indigenous scholar's thesis in sharp contrast to the views held by Islamic scholars found in the Muslim heartlands at the time. Mainstream Islamic doctrines formulated in the Middle East implied that a leader should necessarily be male.⁹¹ *Taj us-Salatin* explication of theories of female leadership, had unconsciously or inadvertently perhaps, taken on a distinctly local interpretation of Islamic doctrines to explain and reflect a local political reality, i.e. the existence of female rulers in the archipelago way before the issue of female succession arose in Aceh.

The *Sulalat-us-Salatin*⁹² or commonly known as *Sejarah Melayu*, (believed to be written in 1612), did not seem to object to female rule either or the involvement of several powerful aristocratic women behind the throne during the Malaccan Sultanate; in some instances even judge their influence as positive. Tun Sri Lanang, told his readers that a woman, Sikadar Syah, ruled the kingdom of Bentan and he described in great detail the greatness and prosperity of Bentan under her rule. For example, she bestowed upon Sang Sapurba and Sang Nila Utama, emissaries from Palembang, two crowns so decorated with precious stones that one could not even glimpse the gold underneath.⁹³

⁸⁸ *Taj us-Salatin*, ed. by Khalid Hussain (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1992), p. xiv.

⁸⁹ I suggest that Al-Jauhari reluctantly agreed to female rule because, in his explication of the ten prerequisites to good leadership, he advised kings to spend less time with women because according to him, they lacked good deeds. He also stated that a king, by right, should be a male because a king is also an *imam* and a woman can never be an *imam*, *Taj us-Salatin*, Khalid, p. 60.#

⁹⁰ *Taj us-Salatin*, Khalid, p. 60.

⁹¹ Al-Ghazali cited manliness, good horsemanship and skills in bearing arms as necessary qualities a ruler should possess. See Ann K.S. Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam: An Introduction to the Study of Islamic Political Theory* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press) p. 121.#

⁹² See, *Sejarah Melayu - The Malay Annals* ed. by Cheah Boon Keng (Kuala Lumpur: The Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1998), pp. 10-20.

⁹³ *Sejarah Melayu*, Cheah, p. 25.

The *Taj*, as mentioned earlier, placed two caveats to female succession. It appears that the first condition- absence of a suitable male heir fitted Aceh's situation in 1641. The second was to avoid *darurat*. Amirul contended, "the emergence of the first queen should be seen in the context of a political crisis that came to represent a serious threat to the social order, a circumstance that was used to justify her rule."⁹⁴ The unexpected death of Iskandar Thani leaving Aceh with no apparent male heir constituted a crisis in succession. The ensuing panic coupled with the uncertain external situation needed a speedy solution. It did appear that at that juncture, a female was preferable to anarchy. The *ulama* in Aceh could have used the *Taj* to justify their choice. However, it appears that the elite in Aceh did not see the need to justify her rule based on her sex. Although al-Raniri did not spell it out clearly why a female should be allowed to rule in his writings, the fact that the *Bustan* described the Sultanah being enthroned on the very day of the death of the previous ruler showed that he wanted to demonstrate that her succession was not at all problematic.⁹⁵ One can argue that it is not surprising that al-Raniri would write in praise of his patron and his widow, the first Sultanah, since her late husband commissioned the *Bustan* to be written by al-Raniri and appointed him as the *Syeikh al-Islam*, the highest religious position at court. This may be true, but, one must take note that he finished writing this chronicle after he had left Aceh. Thus, his firm support of this Sultanah's succession, deemed smooth in the *Bustan*, reflected the concept/belief that female rule could be accepted even under less exceptional critical situations. Amirul himself had shown very convincingly that al-Singkel had no objections to the female sex taking the mantle of power *regardless* of whether it was born out of necessity or crisis, and al-Singkel even saw female rule as nothing exceptional or strange but as a "normal phenomenon."⁹⁶ This explains why three more female sovereigns ascended the throne up to 1699.

Spatially and culturally far away from the heartland of Islam in the new frontiers and far-flung regions of insular Southeast Asia, the *ulama* found themselves faced with a uniquely different political reality from that faced in mainland Islam, that was the

⁹⁴ Amirul, *Islam and State*, pp. 81-82.

⁹⁵ *Bustan*, Iskandar, p. 58.

⁹⁶ Amirul, *Islam and State*, p. 85.

tradition of powerful women in general and high-born women who played important roles at court. One finds only a handful of Muslim female sovereigns in other parts of the world. The neglect, sometimes silence, in mainstream Islamic discourses on women rulers perhaps reflects the insignificant numbers of these female sovereigns in Islamic history. The few women rulers who have been recognised and recorded in history are, in this instance in India, Sultana Radiyya who ruled Delhi in 1236.⁹⁷ Others are Mongol Queens such as Tindu who ruled the Jallarid Dynasty from 814-822, Kutlugh Khatun who reigned from 1257-1282, her daughter, Padishah Khatun ruling from 1282-1295, her niece, Absh Khatun who ruled the Atabek dynasty from 1263-1287 and Sati Bek who became Head of State in 1339.⁹⁸ The Fatimid Dynasty, who first established their own Ismai'li Shi'i caliphate in Yemen to rival the Sunni Abbasids, placed two queens on the throne, Malika Asma and Arwa who held power from 1019-1038.⁹⁹ In the Maldives, three Queens Sultana Khadijah, Sultana Myriam and Sultana Fatima ruled from 1347-1388.¹⁰⁰ The very fact that the number of such politically active and prominent women is very small, even though Islam has been established in the world for the past fourteen centuries, shows that women holding high positions in the world of politics are an exception rather than the rule. Mernissi's survey also showed that amongst the number of Muslim women who had ruled in their own right, more women were found ruling in the peripheral areas of Islam.¹⁰¹

According to Reid, "Austronesian societies...which include Polynesia and Madagascar as well as Indonesia and the Philippines have been more inclined than perhaps any other major population group to place high-born women on the throne."¹⁰² Indeed, the elites of Aceh need only look back in history to consent to the succession of a female ruler. Prior to the founding of the kingdom of Aceh, in the Northern part of Sumatra, a historical precedent had been set where female rulers appeared not only to have already been in existence but were highly honoured and commemorated. A pair of

⁹⁷ Peter Jackson, 'Sultan Radiyya Bint Iltutmish,' in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*, ed. by Gavin Hambly (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), pp. 181-182.

⁹⁸ Hambly, *Women in the Medieval*, pp. 13-17.

⁹⁹ Farhad Daftary, 'Sayyida Hurra: The Isma'ili Sulayhid Queen of Yemen', in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*, ed. by Gavin Hambly (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), p. 118.

¹⁰⁰ Fatima Mernissi, *Hidden from History- Forgotten Queens of Islam* (Pakistan: Al-Abbas International, 1996), p. 89, pp. 107-108.

¹⁰¹ Fatima, *Hidden from History*, pp. 107-108.#

¹⁰² Reid, 'Female roles in Pre-colonial Southeast Asia', p. 639.

gravestones, one written in Old Javanese and one in Arabic characters, were found in the village of Minye Tujoh in Aceh, inscribed with the dates of death 781 or 791 A.H. (1380 or 1390 A.D.) respectively.¹⁰³ According to Ibrahim Alfian,¹⁰⁴ the stones mark the grave of a Queen Nur Ilah, with the appellation “Queen of the Faith...who has rights on Kadah [Kedah] and Pase [Pasai].”¹⁰⁵ In what is now the district of North Aceh, another gravestone made of marble with exquisite Arabic calligraphy and Quranic verses was also found. The Arabic calligraphy translates as “this is the grave of a brilliant holy woman, a Queen respected by all...Nahrasiyah...who died on 17 Zulhijah 823 (1428).¹⁰⁶ Although only male Sultans had ruled the kingdom of Aceh since its founding, the tradition of powerful women being accepted as rulers in its antecedent Muslim kingdom of Pasai was an exemplary tradition that Aceh appeared to continue. Besides Pasai, Patani, a Malay Muslim polity in what is now southern Thailand, is another example where four women ruled in succession, from 1584 to 1688. The *Hikayat Patani* related that when Sultan Bahadur died, there was no male heir to succeed him. The *orangkaya* appointed his daughter, Raja Ijau as Patani’s next ruler.¹⁰⁷ Several more instances of female rulers in the region were in Sukadana between 1608 and 1622, in Jambi between 1630 and 1655 and in Solor from 1650 to 1670.¹⁰⁸ Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to undertake a comparative study of these queens, the preponderance of these female rulers may show that sex was not the main criteria for succession.

Many scholars¹⁰⁹ drew attention to the prominence of women in the Acehnese court as a reason allowing female leadership to be accepted. Although not exactly holding the highest position in the kingdom, they were nevertheless powerful in their own right. Mohammad Said argued that female rule was not an aberration in Aceh since the kingdom had a female **laksamana* and historically Acehnese women took up

¹⁰³ W. F. Stutterheim, ‘A Malay sha’ir in Old-Sumatran characters of 1380’, *Acta Orientalia*, 14 (1936), 268-279, pp. 276-277.

¹⁰⁴ Ibrahim Alfian, ‘Ratu Nur-Ilah’, in Ismail Sofyan and Others, *Wanita Utama Nusantara* p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ Translated from Old Javanese by C. Hooykaas, quoted by Ibrahim Alfian, ‘Ratu Nur-Ilah’, in Ismail Sofyan and Others, *Wanita Utama Nusantara* p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ Ibrahim Alfian, ‘Ratu Nahrasiyah’, in Ismail Sofyan and Others, *Wanita Utama Nusantara* p.16.

¹⁰⁷ *Hikayat Patani*, ed. by Siti Hawa Haji Salleh, (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka:Kuala Lumpur, 1992), p.28.

¹⁰⁸ Cheah, ‘Power behind the throne’, pp. 1-2. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to compare these female rulers in the region. This invites further research.

¹⁰⁹ Such as Veth, Reid, Cheah and Mohammad Said.

positions of power.¹¹⁰ Contemporary European travellers who visited royal courts of the Sultans of Aceh reported that palace women served as emissaries, advisors and guards. John Davis, who visited Aceh in 1599, claimed that Sultan Ala al-Din Riayat Shah al-Mukammil's (1589-1604) "chiefest counsellors" were women.¹¹¹ Al-Mukammil also had a woman as *laksamana* since "hee will trust no men."¹¹² Even Iskandar Muda (r. 1606-1636) taken to be the greatest ruler the Acehnese ever had, relied on female guards for his protection.¹¹³

Conclusion - Why Female Rule in 1641?

Reid argued that the commercially oriented aristocrats who made every effort to maintain political control in the interests of mercantilism prompted the rise of female rule in the age of commerce.¹¹⁴ A woman ruler would be more appealing since women were commonly perceived to have a tighter grip on purse-strings and more shrewd in matters of business given the common role of Southeast Asian women as financial managers of the household, as petty traders and money-changers in the market place. In Aceh's case, Reid ventured that the *orangkaya*'s aversion to absolutism was the reason why they chose a female ruler. Iskandar Muda, wrote Reid, "had been a particularly frightening example of the dangers of absolutism, seeking to monopolize trade with the English and the Dutch while killing, terrorizing and dispossessing his own *orangkaya*."¹¹⁵ These were indeed plausible reasons for choosing a female candidate. Nevertheless, this did not explain why the *orangkaya* chose a female candidate in 1641. If commercial reason prompted the *orangkaya* to choose a female candidate, this should have been done perhaps decades earlier. If it was an aversion to absolutism, then the *orangkaya* should have appointed a female candidate in 1604 after the death of the tyrannical al-Mukammil. Furthermore, the *orangkaya* would have no way of knowing beforehand whether the

¹¹⁰ Mohammad Said, *Atjeh Sepanjang Abad*, p. 379. Only Pamenan argues that female leadership was a strange phenomenon in Aceh. See Pamenan, *Rentjong Aceh*, pp. 34-35.

¹¹¹ *The Voyages and Works of John Davis the Navigator* ed. by A. H. Markham, (London: Hakluyt Society, 1880), p. 150.

¹¹² Markham, *The Voyages and Works of John Davis*, p. 150.

¹¹³ Augustine de Beaulieu, 'The Expedition of Commodore Beaulieu to the East Indies', *Navigantium atque Itinerarium Bibliotheca or A Complete Collection of Voyages* ed. by John Harris, Vol. 1, (London: Hakluyt Society, 1764), p. 744.

¹¹⁴ Reid, 'Female Roles' p. 641. Also, Amirul, *Islam and State*, p. 81.

¹¹⁵ Reid, 'Female Roles', p. 641.

chosen candidate would serve their motives. As mentioned earlier, al-Mukammil was believed to have been chosen by the *orangkaya* because he was very old, but once in power he decimated the *orangkaya* who supported him. I suggest that the *orangkaya* who elected a female ruler on the throne did not choose her because she was female. They chose Safiatuddin Syah who happened to be a female. Nevertheless, by the unprecedented action of accepting a female candidate, the *orangkaya* in a sense was taking a gamble the outcome of which only time would tell.

I suggest that there is perhaps, no one important reason that could help explain the beginning of female rule in Aceh, rather the succession of the first female ruler was a result of a unique confluence of events and personalities. It was largely internally motivated- a function of circumstances facing the situation in the kingdom at the time. A response to external circumstances that were at that time uncertain given the increasing European incursions would logically necessitate the choice of a strong king such as Iskandar Muda. Most women became rulers because of special circumstances (deaths of husbands, fathers) rather than by laws or customs of succession and some of these exceptional queens survived despite male opposition in the name of religion and misogyny. They had to devise elaborate legitimation processes, imperial and coronation rituals, a few even had to declare a new dynasty. Queen Njinga of Ndongo-Matamba (r.1624-1663) overcame the illegitimacy of her sex by trying to become a man.¹¹⁶ Chinese sources condemned the imperial ambitions of women as unnatural calamities. Empress Wu Zetian who ruled China in 686 and 693 was an exception, even then, traditional Chinese historians condemned her short rule as anomaly, a gender reversal and a violation of nature comparable to having hens instead of roosters crowing at dawn.¹¹⁷ In Aceh however, Islam as interpreted by the elite and *adat*, which allowed women to assume positions of power enabled the first female ruler to succeed.

The accession of the first female ruler set a new tradition in the succession history of the Acehnese kingdom since three more female rulers followed. The option to place the first female on the throne was a deliberate albeit cautious one, not by choice but because of circumstances. This was no mere accident of history and as I will show

¹¹⁶ John K. Thornton, 'Legitimacy and Political Power: Queen Njinga 1624-1663', *Journal of African History*, Vol.1, 32 (1991), 25-40, pp. 38-39.#

¹¹⁷ Jennifer W. Jay, 'Imagining Matriarchy: Kingdoms of Women in Tang China', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 116.20 (Apr-Jun 1996), 220-229, p. 228.

in later chapters, the success of the first Sultanah paved the way for three more female successors. Thereafter, this idea of a female ruling this Muslim kingdom became widely acceptable. Very little information is available on the succession of these three other female rulers in the indigenous chronicles and VOC sources. However, the very fact that all sources mentioned that all three were replaced because of their deaths and not because they were killed or was deposed (except for the last queen) showed that the historical successions during this period of six decades of female rule were peaceful. This was in contrast to the earlier period of violent and unstable historical successions of the 1570s - 1580s. The only mention of a problematic succession in 1688, quickly resolved in favour of female rule, was described by William Dampier. He related that “all the *orangkaya* were not for the election; many of them were for choosing a king.”¹¹⁸ This episode however, illustrates that the option of female successors was not a dictate of a homogenous group of *orangkaya* but a contested one. Female rule was not simply a device of the elite who sought to weaken royal power in order to promote and perpetuate their own interests.

In summary, the above discussion shows that although Aceh had no fixed rules or laws of succession in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there were some identifiable pre-conditions for qualification before a candidate was accepted as a legitimate successor to the throne. These pre-requisites were, candidates having royal lineage and candidates having the consent and support from at least the majority of the *orangkaya* and *ulama*. As a Muslim kingdom, the ruler must therefore, be a Muslim. These pre-requisites took precedence over the practice of designation by the reigning ruler since as in Iskandar Thani’s case; an appointed heir did not survive if he or she did not obtain the consent and support of the elite. The reasons for consent and support were however, changeable, determined by the attitudes and perceptions of the elites and the political and religious milieu of the time. During the time of the first female succession in 1641, the sex of the candidate did not seem to factor heavily for the elites. Other factors such as being a Muslim with an impeccable lineage took precedence since Safiatuddin was an adult closest in consanguinity to her predecessors. In Aceh, unlike in France, there was no Salic Law forbidding the succession of a female ruler.

¹¹⁸ William Dampier, *Voyages and discoveries Vol. 2* ed. by N.M. Penzer (London: Argonaut Press, 1931), p. 100.#

Furthermore, unlike Queen Mary Tudor and Queen Elizabeth in England, Sultanah Safiatuddin did not have a John Knox to contend with.¹¹⁹ On the contrary, the *ulama* in Aceh at that time interpreted Islamic law in line with local *adat*, which were favourable to women. Thus, the queens did not have to be like a Njinga of Ndongo-Matamba to find acceptance. The first female succession in Aceh did not contradict *adat* laws nor did it contradict Islamic tenets.¹²⁰

Another condition or tradition of succession that could be identified was the preference for a royal native-born rather than a royal foreign-born. The *orangkaya* of Aceh clearly preferred Safiatuddin Syah, the daughter of Iskandar Muda of the Dar al-Kamal and Mahkota Alam dynasty to the son of any other foreign royal house. The killing of all the two (possibly three if one were to include Iskandar Thani) foreign-born Sultans from Perak and Inderapura attested to this. So would the pact the elites made in Aceh in 1641 never to be ruled under a foreign-born Sultan again.¹²¹

Still, it must be borne in mind that political and religious mindsets do shift and the formation of new guards amongst the elites changed the criteria for succession, such as in 1699, when female rule was said to be forbidden in Islamic law. Female involvement in politics has been one of the most controversial and highly debated issues in the Muslim world. While in some instances, female participation has been applauded and praised, in other cases it has been condemned as un-Islamic. Historians of different periods look to their own selection of Islamic memory where female participation existed highlighting on either the positive or the negative impacts of female involvement and using these “evidences” as justification for or against female participation in politics.¹²² Political conservatism in mainstream Islam, however, does not view women’s political participation favourably. Conservatism, usually interpreted only by men, sees a woman’s claim to political power as an aggressive violation of the rules of the game. As soon as a woman comes to the throne, a group of men whose power she challenges would oppose her in the name of the *syariah*, thus denying her of spiritual validation.

¹¹⁹ John Knox in his treatise, *The First Blast of the Trumpet*, published in 1558, stated that a woman had no natural right to rule any realm, even when the royal line of succession included no male heir. See, Robert Healey, ‘Waiting for Deborah: John Knox and Four Ruling Queens’ *Sixteenth Century Journal*, XXV/2, (1994), 371-389, p. 376.

¹²⁰ Discussed further in Chapter 5.

¹²¹ This pact however lasted until 1699 since after Sultanah Kamalat Syah was deposed, an Arab succeeded her, probably foreign-born. Even then, this Arab dynasty did not last long with most of the rulers deposed, see Chapter 5, pp184-185 and 230-231.

¹²² Hambly, *Women in the Medieval*, p. 9.

After ascending the throne, much depended on Sultanah Safiatuddin herself whether she could remain as the ruler of Aceh Dar al-Salam. The qualities and attributes of a good ruler, identified in the *Taj*, the *Bustan* and the *Kanun* are being just, morally upright and possessing the willingness to uphold Islamic law. Was she able to achieve this or would she need to gain acceptance only after demonstrating that she had enough prowess as most other powerful traditional kings did? Practically, perhaps the most important “condition” that guaranteed the acceptance and survivability of the ruler was that point of equilibrium, where the balance was struck between meeting the need and the interests of the ruler, the elite and of course ultimately the kingdom. Was Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah able to strike this balance?

CHAPTER 2

Sultanah Safiatuddin's Early Years: Keeping Afloat

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, the consent of the majority of the *orangkaya* was needed to install the first female ruler to the throne of Aceh Dar al-Salam. Whether or not she remained on the throne and for how long, I suggest, depended much on the recently widowed princess herself. A good start was crucial as it enabled her to tackle the vital matter of securing her position on the throne and getting the support if not the compliance of her *orangkaya*, especially those who initially opposed her accession if indeed the alleged debate between the *orangkaya* did take place. As mentioned earlier, very little is known about who these *orangkaya* were, the functions they undertook and the power they wielded in the Acehnese court, especially in the sixteenth century. There is more information about these elites though, in the seventeenth century when Company officials wrote about them especially when these court officials had a hand in Company's affairs. This chapter is a result of the mining of the accounts of court politics of VOC officials' who resided in Aceh for months on end on Company's business. The narrative constructed below, contrary to popular belief, shows that the *orangkaya* were not a homogeneous group but a fractious one. Whilst a fractious nobility might work in her favour, these divisions meant that the Sultanah had a daunting task ahead to manage and balance these factions to keep herself on top.

Dealing with Sultan Iskandar Thani's Legacy

Iskandar Thani's sudden death on the 15th of February 1641 brought confusion at court. He died unexpectedly at a young age of thirty,¹ childless and left a young widow of twenty-nine.² Iskandar Thani ruled for less than five years and historians saw this short interlude in Aceh's history as uneventful.³ Others viewed him as a pious and mild ruler. Contemporary records suggest otherwise. Although Iskandar Thani's

¹ He was believed to be born in 1612. Peter Mundy reported that he was 25 years old when he took over power in December 1636. See Lombard, in Winarsih, *Kerajaan Aceh*, p. 236.

² Ali, *59 Tahun*, p. 87.

³ Andaya, 'A very-good natured but awe-inspiring government', p. 65.

succession was never contested since Iskandar Muda chose him as his heir before his death and the *orangkaya* was believed to have consented to this appointment, his short reign had many opponents. Sultanah Safiatuddin inherited a more precarious legacy than was commonly supposed.

Eight months after Iskandar Thani's succession to the throne (August 1637), there was an attempt to get rid of him by poison. The *Bustan* related that several people had conspired with the official food-taster to put poison into his food. But owing to the will of Allah, Iskandar Thani had a fore-taste of this plot when his food did not taste as it usually would and he stopped eating immediately.⁴ The *Bustan* did not reveal more about this plot or the conspirators, merely stating that Iskandar Thani investigated and duly punished the guilty. The *Bustan* however, mentioned that the *Kadhi Maliku'l Adil* and the *Perdana Menteri* agreed with this punishment.

Another contemporary record written by Peter Mundy, an English traveller who arrived in Aceh in February 1638, mentioned an act of treason against the king of Aceh. He related that about three to four months ago (November 1637):

wee understood of about four hundred persons putt to death by this king some three or four monthes since with sundry sorts off exquisite torments, *viz.* divers cutt in peeces, others sawne in two...some hung on iron hookes by the heeles, stretched wide abroad and molten lead powred into the fundaments of the men and privities of the weomen to cause them to confesse...⁵

Peter Mundy revealed that this act of treason was hatched by "his wives sister (the old King's daughters both) in beehalffe of her sonne, intending by poison to take this King away, thatt her said sonne mightt reigne."⁶ Her plot was discovered and she was the first to taste his fury plus others who had conspired or were suspected of this treason.

Iskandar Thani had other enemies, namely the followers of the previous *Syeikh al-Islam*, Shamsuddin al-Sumatrani. Sultan Iskandar Muda had appointed Shamsuddin al-Sumatrani as the leading religious scholar of the kingdom, promoting the teachings of a

⁴ *Bustan*, Iskandar, p. 46.

⁵ Mundy, *The Travels of Peter Mundy*, p. 330.

⁶ Mundy, *The Travels of Peter Mundy*, p. 330.#

more mystical, Sufistic brand of Islam, the *Wujudiyah wihdatulwujud*.⁷ After succeeding to the throne, Iskandar Thani, in contrast, leant more towards a less mystical brand of Islam and supported the more orthodox *ulama* Nuruddin al-Raniri from Gujerat. He appointed him as the *Syeikh al-Islam* in 1637.⁸ These two groups came to a violent clash during the reign of Iskandar Thani. With the death of al-Sumatrani in 1630 and with Iskandar Thani's blessings, al-Raniri led a hunt against the *wihdatulwujud* faction and issued a *fatwa* denouncing them as heretics. This enabled those who refused to renounce their teachings to be killed and their writings burnt. According to Ahmad Daudy, the *wihdatulwujud* group, followers of Hamzah Fansuri and Shams al-Din were also involved in a plot to capture power from Iskandar Thani. Thus, Iskandar Thani allowed these most brutal killings of those in this *Wujudiyah* faction to take place and at the same time eliminating this political opposition.⁹

It appears that at the time of Sultanah Safiatuddin's accession, al-Sumatrani's group was seriously weakened by the executions. It also appears that those who might oppose her succession, or a rival claimant in the person of her nephew (if Peter Mundy's account is accurate), would not be strong enough, since Iskandar Thani had thinned their ranks. Thus, at the beginning of her reign it is safe to venture that this majority group of the important elites in power, both from the *orangkaya* i.e. the *Perdana Menteri* and the *ulama*, al-Raniri supported her candidacy. The stand of the other factions opposing her husband regarding her installation was not clear. In most probability, as argued in the earlier chapter, they would support her because of the absence of any other suitable male heir. Still, she had to contend with a fractious elite.

It was thus fitting that one of the first feats of Sultanah Safiatuddin was to seal the support from the dominant *orangkaya*. The first responsibility she had to fulfil was to ensure the previous ruler's, her late husband's, proper burial. She organised one of the grandest funerals the kingdom had ever witnessed. The successful execution of this

⁷ The brand of wujuddiyah embraced by Shams al-Din and Hamzah Fansuri is *wihdatulwujud* i.e., the belief that the universe is part of God, like foams on waves. This is in opposition to the brand of wujuddiyah followed by ar-Raniri i.e., *wihdatusshuhud*, the belief that the universe is not part of God but exist as a reflection or witness to the existence of God. See Zainuddin, *Tarich Atjeh*, p. 105.

⁸ Lombard, in Winarsih, *Kerajaan Aceh*, pp. 218-219. This rise of orthodoxy was also prevalent in India at that time under Sultan Aurangzeb.

⁹ Ahmad Daudy, *Allah dan Manusia dalam konsepsi Syeikh Nurudin al-Raniri [God and Man in Syeikh Nurudin al-Ranii's Conception]* (Jakarta: LV Rajawali, 1983), pp. 41-42.

responsibility was significant too in a sense that this announced her inauguration as the first female ruler of Aceh to her subjects.

*A Truly Royal and Magnificent Funeral Procession*¹⁰

Sultanah Safiatuddin's performed her first responsibility with aplomb. Nicolaus de Graaff, wrote that:

the funeral procession was executed in such royal magnificence; with a huge following of princes, the elites, about two hundred and sixty elephants, some were bedecked with expensive golden silk cloth whose tusks were suffused with gold and silver, others with palanquin decorated with costly draperies and multi-coloured flags embroidered in gold and silver threads. Rhinoceros and Persian horses, expensively clothed, strutted proudly with gold and silver bridles. Also, a retinue of the king's women formed part of the funeral procession. The king's coffin was made of **suassa* finely draped with gold cloth. At the end of the procession, the king's body was laid to rest beside his predecessors in a royal mausoleum behind the palace. For a hundred days more his women brought tobacco, food and drinks here as if he was still alive. As soon as the king's body was buried, two silver canons were fired, its sound reverberating the whole night long interspersed with shouts of "God Save the new Queen" (*God Bewaar de nieuwe Koningin*). Thereafter, all was calm and in peace.¹¹

The *ulama*, Nuruddin al-Raniri detailed more information on this magnificent funeral ceremony in his *Bustan us-Salatin*. He vividly described the grandeur of this funeral ceremony and the richness of the bejewelled tomb the Sultanah had ordered to be specially made in memory of her husband, the Sultan who loved jewels. She instructed her stone craftsman to make a headstone that was never before made by previous kings.

¹⁰ *Reisen van Nicolaus de Graaff* ed. by Warnsinck, pp. 13-14.

¹¹ *Reisen van Nicolaus de Graaff* ed. by Warnsinck, pp. 13-14. See also, Lombard, in Winarsih, *Kerajaan Aceh*, pp. 203-204.

The *Bustan* detailed this splendid ceremony.¹² It started from the palace, reached the main mosque Masjid Baitu'r-Rahman, and on orders from the Sultanah camped round its precincts. That night, all the princes, court officials and palace guards kept vigilance over the tombstone. Tents were erected and the entourage occupied themselves with mock fights, games, and plays. Interestingly, the *Bustan* related that many communities took part in the activities. The Javanese had spear-fights and held masked plays (*wayang*). The Chinese also staged their own *wayang* using masks and pulled their own man made dragon. Even the Klings held their own theatre. These festivities, much to the delight of the people, went on all night. The next day, Sultanah Safiatuddin mounted an elephant and ordered the procession to continue to Kandang Daru'd-Dunia (the royal gravesite). Since this was the last leg of the ceremony, all along the way, the Sultanah's officials distributed and scattered on the ground her generous alms of gold, silver, gold plates cut into small pieces and gems. The *Bustan* related that all those who obtained her alms became rich. Finally, the tombstone reached the burial site.

Of the sixteen pages used to describe her reign, al-Raniri spent about thirteen on describing this ceremony.¹³ Al-Raniri concluded that this ceremony was so well-executed by the Sultanah, so beautifully done and well-planned that never before was such a ceremony witnessed in other courts and other lands above and below the winds.¹⁴ Al-Raniri claimed that under the Sultanah, Aceh truly lived by its name of *'Serambi Mekah' and this testimony was confirmed by her subjects.¹⁵

Never before was any funeral ceremony of previous kings, even one as great as Iskandar Muda, was noted by European travellers and indigenous chronicle alike as the one the Sultanah organised for her late husband. This ceremony informed the kingdom's subjects of the death of their king and it announced the accession of a new one - in this case a queen. Sultanah Safiatuddin proclaimed her inauguration with great effect and style, one that would be etched in her subjects' memory. They would certainly appreciate her generosity on this occasion too, amply demonstrated in the distribution of

¹² The description of the funeral ceremony is summarised and translated by this author from the *Bustan*, Iskandar, pp. 60-73.#

¹³ *Bustan*, Iskandar, pp. 58-74, where al-Raniri describes the start and end of her reign but the funeral ceremony takes centre-stage from pp. 60-73.

¹⁴ *Bustan*, Iskandar, p. 68.

¹⁵ *Bustan*, Iskandar, p. 68.

alms for her people of such worth that those who obtained them could actually become rich.

The Sultanah and her orangkaya - first dealings

Besides dealing with her own elite, her subjects, the young Sultanah had to manage foreign ambassadors who arrived in her court. The VOC officials were one such group and she had to treat them with care especially since the Company had just conquered Melaka and becoming a power to be reckoned with in the Straits. Her relations with Company officials started on a good footing. Writing on the state of affairs after the first few months of the Sultanahs's rule, Jacob Compostel, the Company's Resident in Aceh, wrote that the kingdom under her temperate rule continued in peace and prosperity. Compostel reported on the favourable state of the Company's fortune since the Company's profit of thirteen months amounted to f.49445.1.6 and losses to amount f. 9545.2.1. Compostel also reported that the Sultanah treated him well. The problem faced by the Sultanah however, was that in pleasing this foreign elite, she incurred the displeasure from some of her own.

The Dutch reported that there were four principal *orangkaya* who formed the main Council, the **Rijxsraad*, who advised the Sultanah and they had much influence at court. The Dutch described them as the Lebai Kita Kali, the Maharaja Sri Maharaja, the Laksamana, and the Paduka Tuan. Compostel noted that the *orangkaya* Maharaja Sri Maharaja "had conceived a great distrust against the rising state of the Company." He had suspected the Lebe Kita Kali, to have conspired with Commissar Schouten and Compostel against the Acehnese Crown.¹⁶ According to Compostel, this suspicion and rumours were spread by a Portuguese renegade named Manuel Mangbangh. Nevertheless, this suspicion had also arisen from the orchestration and promptings of the *orangkaya* Maharaja himself. This caused the Sultanah great consternation and she ordered an enquiry. This investigation (not elaborated by Compostel) found that these rumours were unfounded. The Sultanah took swift action against the alleged rumourmonger, Manuel Mangbangh and he was punished to death by pouring molten

¹⁶ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1641-1642, p. 96.

lead down his throat, despite the protests of the *Orangkaya* Maharaja. The *Orangkaya* Maharaja, although not punished, fell out of favour with the Sultanah. The Sultanah Compostel was happy to report, continued to favour the Dutch.¹⁷

The *orangkaya* then were divided not only between the pro and anti Iskandar Thani factions mentioned above, they were also divided between the pro and anti Dutch factions. Compostel wrote that the Sultanah, the Lebe Kita Kali, the *Orangkaya* Maharaja Lilla together with her **capados* continued to favour the Dutch, especially the Kali, who showed them “exceptional affection”.¹⁸ The anti-Dutch faction consisted of the Council member *Orangkaya* Maharaja Sri Maharaja and his follower the Panglima Dalam. The Manuel Mangbangh episode, however, illustrates the swift action taken by the Sultanah to secure her rule by quelling rumours and then punishing those that might cause instability. The harsh punishment meted out to Manuel Mangbangh served as an example. Interestingly, the Sultanah treated opposition from her own *orangkaya* more circumspectly and certainly with no taint of harshness or cruelty that characterised earlier kings. *Orangkaya* Maharaja was in the Sultanah’s disgrace and was absent from court for a few months. But in a matter of two to three months he was rehabilitated and was once again in her favour and soon enough he too made peace with the Kali. This tactic of the young Sultanah apparently worked since Compostel noted that thereafter, the Maharaja was “very friendly” towards him and “publicly showed” that he did not like people who wanted to disadvantage the Dutch!¹⁹

Two months after the Mangbangh episode, Compostel reported that the situation in Aceh was still peaceful but he noted that there were some hidden jealousies amongst the four *Rijxraaden*. An interesting observation made by Compostel was that the Sultanah, through her *capados*, was secretly “feeding these jealousies”.²⁰ Her eunuchs, as will be seen in later sections, was one main conduit where the Sultanah would plant her eyes and ears and help her manage and balance her factious elite. Another way to effect this art of fine balancing her *orangkaya* was by her prudent giving away of rewards and punishment, as illustrated above, which would characterise her rule and was key to her success as the first female ruler of Aceh in the succeeding years. In summarising the

¹⁷ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1641-1642, p. 96.

¹⁸ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1641-1642, p. 123.

¹⁹ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1641-1642, p. 123.

²⁰ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1641-1642, p. 123.

Sultanah's rule by November 1641, Compostel noted that she had been more established in her position and with great authority ruled absolutely.²¹ Compostel wrote that this princess had higher royal worthiness compared to the earlier kings.²²

The Sultanah started her reign on a good footing. Her initial acts, to an extent, were a measure of her personal political sagacity; a hint of a shift in leadership style that contrasted with her male predecessors. It is important to note however, that the peaceful conditions described by Compostel was also a result of the *orangkaya's* willingness to maintain this status quo, especially considering the vulnerable state the kingdom was in at that time - given the recent violent internal divisions and the uncertain external conditions because of the tilt in the balance of power in the VOC's favour.

Despite his praise for the Sultanah, Compostel warned that the court of Aceh was pregnant with inconsistencies since there were many *orangkaya* who mistrusted the Dutch. He recommended to the Governors in Melaka and Batavia that the continued residence of a distinguished person was necessary in order to preserve the Company's alliance and prominence.²³ Indeed, this alliance between the VOC and the Acehnese was sorely tested in the next episode, dubbed the "Jewel Affair." To the best of this author's knowledge, no study has revealed such a detailed account of court affairs in Aceh under the Sultanah or for any other ruler for that matter. Since this detailed narrative is important in providing insights to the workings of the Acehnese court and the leadership style of the Sultanah – at the risk of a protracted narrative – it is worth following all its twists and turns.

The Jewel Affair: The Sultanah, her orangkaya and the Dutch Foreign Envoys

The "Jewel Affair" refers to the VOC officials' attempt to pressure Sultanah Safiatuddin and her *orangkaya* to accept and pay for some very expensive jewels ordered by her late husband, Sultan Iskandar Thani. At first glance, this episode appears to be just one of the many commercial transactions engaged in by both parties. However, on closer examination this episode becomes significant because it helps to illuminate two

²¹ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1641-1642, p. 163.

²² Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1641-1642, p. 123.

²³ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1641-1642, p. 163.

things: first the nature of early Dutch-Aceh relations and secondly the subtle and overt workings of the court of Aceh under the reign of the Sultanah. This affair tested the wills and diplomacy of both parties since it dragged on for almost four years. It shows that east-west encounters were still at a trial phase where both powers needed to learn about each other in order to know when to compete and to compromise. It shows that east-west encounters were not only about commercial and military contests at the macro-level but they were also about compromises between personalities and human relations at the micro-level. Internally, this episode reveals the shaping of a leadership style that was merely hinted in the first few months of her reign. In particular, the “Jewel Affair” shows how the Sultanah and her male predecessors used jewels in political culture highlighting the contrasting leadership styles between the late Sultan and the new Sultanah.

Jewels and the aura of Kingship

Associations with rare and precious materials, some in the form of regalia are an important aspect of kingship in other parts of the world as in Southeast Asia. Precious materials like gold, silver, and precious stones are commonly used as symbols of royal magnificence meant to increase the status and charisma of the wearers. The “Crown Jewels” were supreme symbols of princely magnificence which when used would rub off their charisma onto their wearers.²⁴ The dress and insignia of kings could also have propagandistic significance such as the *diadema* band of Alexander the Great, believed to be associated with the hero-god and conqueror of the East, Dionysus. This badge became a symbol of his victory and power at Gaugamela and his proclamation as “King of Asia” at Arbela.²⁵ During Suleyman the Magnificent’s reign (1520-1566), his grand vizier, Ibrahim Pasha, ordered a spectacular golden helmet for the Sultan, which was produced by Venetian goldsmiths in 1532. Although this helmet was foreign to the Ottoman imperial regalia and considered as a non-Islamic royal status symbol, this was

²⁴ Bruce Lenman, ‘The Exiled Stuarts and the Precious Symbols of Sovereignty’, in *Eighteenth Century*, 25.2 (2001), 185-200, p. 185.

²⁵ E.A. Fredricksmeyer, ‘The Origins of Alexander’s Royal Insignia’, in *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974-), 127 (1997), 97-109, pp. 97, 107.

displayed as part of parade accessories in ostentatious ceremonies with the aim of communicating Ottoman imperial claims to a European audience.²⁶

Besides being symbols of sovereignty and power these jewels could take on **sakti* and divine powers as they did in Southeast Asia.²⁷ Siamese kings regarded the magical nine-stone jewel (*permata sembilan jenis*) as part of their regalia.²⁸ The *Sulalat us-Salatin* or the *Sejarah Melayu* mentioned the importance of precious stones in legitimising the predecessors of all Malay Rajas. Chapter two of the *Sejarah Melayu* brought its readers to a hill named Si-Guntang Mahamiru in the land of Andalus, Palembang, where the first mythical Malay Rajas appeared. On this hill lived two widows- Wan Empuk and Wan Malini who worked on a vast and fertile rice field.²⁹ As the **padi* were ripening, one night, Wan Empuk and Wan Malini saw what seemed to look like fire at a distant horizon. The next morning, they decided to investigate the source of the light. To their amazement, they saw their *padi* turning into gold, the leaves turning into silver and the stems into copper. There, they found three young and good-looking princes who had ascended from the universe below the sea. They were clothed royally and each wore a crown studded with gems. They were riding on white cows³⁰. The two widows were awestruck by their good looks and fine clothings and deduced that they were the cause of their *padi* turning into gold. When they queried the three princes about their origin, they related their story and introduced themselves as the great- great grandsons of Iskandar Dzulkarnain. As prove, they pointed to their gem-studded crowns and clothing and the magical transformation of the *padi* fields.

In Aceh, gold, *suassa*, precious stones, horses, and elephants are symbols of royal wealth and status. Sultan Iskandar Muda was one example of a king whose love for rich, expensive jewels was not only confined to personal tastes but as a reflection of his royal wealth, prestige and magnificence. According to Gallop, the Sultan's immense wealth was strikingly conveyed not so much by his precious regalia but by everyday objects

²⁶ See Gulru Necipoglu, 'Suleyman the Magnificent and the Representation of Power in the Context of Ottoman-Hapsburg-Papal Rivalry', *The Art Bulletin*, 71.3 (1989), 401-427, p.401.

²⁷ A *chakravartin* is considered to possess seven treasures, one of which is a magic jewel or *cintamani*. J. Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship From the Religious Point of View* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969), p. 38.

²⁸ Annabel Teh-Gallop, 'Musings on a Piece of Wallpaper: Some Thoughts on Early Royal Letters from Aceh', Unpublished paper, International Workshop on Malay Manuscripts, Leiden University Library, 16-18 March 1988, pp. 12-13.

²⁹ *Sejarah Melayu* ed. by Abdul Samad Ahmad (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1984) p. 19.

³⁰ *Sejarah Melayu*, Abdul Samad, p. 21.

fashioned out of solid gold, *suassa*, and silver encrusted with precious stones like his water pipes, saddles and even his bathing scoop.³¹ Besides these everyday things, the nine-stone jewel (*permata sembilan jenis*), mentioned above constituted part of his royal power.³² Iskandar Thani, his successor, inherited not only all the treasures and jewels from his father-in-law but also his love for these expensive jewels for their beauty and also for their reflection of wealth and royal status.

The *Hikayat Aceh* depicted Iskandar Muda as the “King of Kings” in the Malay world.³³ He was seen as the representative of the Caliph in the Malay world whilst recognizing the Sultan of *Rum* (Turkey) as the Caliph in the Islamic West. In his letter to King James I, Iskandar Muda presented himself as the “subduer” and “conquerer” of several “kingdoms, territories and sovereignties” of Tiku, Pariaman, Deli, amongst others and Johor, with all the territories subjected to it.³⁴ Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Thani adopted many high-sounding titles, such as *Makhota Alam* (Crown of the Universe), *Perkasa Alam* (Courage or Warrior of the Universe),³⁵ *Khalifah Allah* and *Sajjidina as-Sultan* to reflect their universal kingly status.

It is not in the least surprising that these men who wished to project charisma and prowess; Kings who claimed the title of King of Kings displayed symbols of magnificence befitting their status to impress other lesser kings. Audience days and royal processions on festival days provided the perfect opportunity to display these magnificent precious and rare jewels to inspire awe from foreigners and subjects alike. On these important days, the Sultans bedecked with dazzling jewellery truly resembled the glittering sun and moon they were so fond of associating themselves. Iskandar Thani described himself as “...King of the whole world, who like God, is glittering like the sun at midday, whose attributes are like the full moon...”³⁶

For other monarchs who could not admire this visual display of power, especially European ones whom they sought to impress, they would apportion a substantial part of their letters to describing and enumerating their kingly possessions

³¹ Teh-Gallop, ‘Musings on a Piece of Wallpaper’, p. 12.

³² Teh-Gallop, ‘Musings on a Piece of Wallpaper’, pp. 12-13.

³³ *Hikayat Aceh*, Iskandar, pp. 153, 167.

³⁴ Teh-Gallop, ‘Musings on a Piece of Wallpaper’, p. 13.

³⁵ Localized versions of the Persian title, *Shah-i-Alam* (Ruler of the World).

³⁶ “*Coninnghe vande gantsche werreld, die gehyck een Godt daerover is, glinsterende als the son op den middach, een Coningh, die zyn schynsel gehyck de volle maen geeft...*” see Iskandar Thani’s letter to Antonio van Diemen in Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1640-41, pp. 6-7.#

and treasures ranging from the palace, gold mines, elephants, and horses. Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Thani's letters³⁷ to foreign potentates' best illustrate how they represented themselves and how they wished to be perceived by other powers. Iskandar Thani drew attention to the gold deposits Aceh was blessed with, the numerous mosques made of copper and gold (*suassa*), the throne he sat on made of fine gold encrusted with costly precious stones and his numerous elephants and horses clothed with golden coverings set with precious stones.³⁸

The Sultan who Loved Jewels

The Dutch officials in Aceh reported that Iskandar Thani had a lust for jewels.³⁹ Peter Mundy, who had an audience with Iskandar Thani observed that the Sultan's clothes were something ordinary, following the fashion of the country "but [he] was adorned with many jewells off diamonds, etts. [and other] pretious stones."⁴⁰ Paulus Croocq was certainly impressed with Iskandar Thani's crown and clothing which he described was so dazzlingly encrusted with mostly diamonds and some rare stones. Iskandar Thani's throne, he reported was newly made and he estimated it to be worth 40 *bahar of heavy gold or 100,000 guilders!⁴¹ So not surprisingly, the Dutch seized upon Iskandar Thani's fascination with precious stones and they would often bring all kinds of jewelleries to entice Iskandar Thani. They learnt that Iskandar Thani was even prepared to accept jewels instead of *reals* or cash from the Dutch in exchange for pepper and payment of tolls.⁴² Interestingly, this Sultan was not so much interested in any type of

³⁷ Letter from Sultan Iskandar Muda of Aceh to King James I, 1615. See, Teh-Gallop, 'Musings on a Piece of Wallpaper', pp. 12-13. Iskandar Thani's letter to Antonio van Diemen in Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1640-41, pp. 6-7. In contrast, Sultanah Safiatuddin's letters emphasized her moral attributes to increase her aura as ruler rather than material treasures. See Chapter 5 of this thesis.

³⁸ NA, VOC 1131, ff.1433-1466, f.1433: Letter from Iskandar Thani to Governor General Antonio van Diemen, 1640.

³⁹ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1640-41, p. 4.

⁴⁰ Mundy, *The Travels of Peter Mundy*, Vol. 3, pp. 335-336.

⁴¹ NA, VOC 1131, f.1194. Iskandar Thani described himself as "the auspicious Sultan, the honoured and revered Paduka Seri Sultan Alauddin Mughayat Syah, Champion Sovereign, shadow of God on earth, the vicegerent of Allah, King of the whole world, who like God, *is glittering like the sun at midday*, [my italics] whose attributes are like the full moon, is the king chosen by Allah whose characteristics are like the Pleiades, who is king of kings, descendents of Alexander the Great." ... "see Iskandar Thani's letter to Antonio van Diemen in Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1640-41, pp. 6-7.

⁴² Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1640- 41, p.4. See also: NA, Letter from Commissaris Paulus Croocq to the Governor General, 10 September 1639, VOC1131, ff.1142-1176, f.1162.

jewels but he had a special fascination for diamonds; in particular very prominent (*aensienelijcke*) diamonds with all faces cut. Furthermore, Iskandar Thani was not keen on the ready-made ones brought by the Dutch such as the table and pointed diamonds that other kings were so fond, he preferred to order the special designs that he liked and he wanted them crafted in the Netherlands itself. Commissar Deutecom reported that the Sultan was particularly pleased with a sketch of a belt designed in the Persian manner that was woven from silk, set with diamonds and wished to possess this rare and extremely expensive treasure estimated to cost about a few thousand taels.⁴³ He was very specific in his instructions in that only beautiful pure cut diamonds were to be used and that this must be crafted in the Netherlands itself.⁴⁴ To this order, he added his request for two to three emerald pendants and more beautiful diamond pendants, which he wanted holed presumably to be threaded later by chains.⁴⁵

The Sultan's fondness for rare and costly diamond pieces was well known not only to the Dutch but also to others. Iskandar Thani forgave Radja Tancas of Minangkabau who had fallen out of favour with him after he presented the Sultan with a beautiful diamond ring.⁴⁶ The English too brought jewels to Aceh when they found out that the Sultan had bought some small but costly rare pieces of jewellery specially brought from London from an English merchant's wife, a Mrs. Courten.⁴⁷ He bought a very expensive **keris* with a golden and diamond studded handle from the Portuguese which the Company officials estimated to be about 30,000 *reals* of eight.⁴⁸ Besides being an avid buyer and collector of jewels, Iskandar Thani had a penchant for showing off these beautiful and costly jewels to the foreign envoys who visited Aceh.⁴⁹ Once, he was showing off some of his jewellery to a Company official and turned to ask him whether Batavia had such big diamonds. The Dutch official diplomatically answered that no king in the whole of the Indies would possess such rich treasures.⁵⁰

This practice of preferring diamonds to the more common gold and the habit of

⁴³ Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, 1639-55, p. 57.

⁴⁴ NA, VOC 1131, 1639, f.1165.

⁴⁵ Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, 1639-55, p. 109.

⁴⁶ Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, 1639-55, p. 4.

⁴⁷ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1640, p. 3.

⁴⁸ NA, VOC 1131, 1639, f.1167.

⁴⁹ Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, 1639-55, p. 57. The Dutch reported that Iskandar Thani had shown his costly jewels at different times to Commissaris Deutecom who was in Aceh in 1639.

⁵⁰ NA, VOC 1119, 1636, f.1214.

ordering jewels made in Europe was not customary in Aceh. Although it could be argued that this showed nothing more than Iskandar Thani's personal absorption with diamonds and his narcissistic and spendthrift nature, this practice could acquire a greater significance when one saw how this could enhance the status and prestige of his kingship. Being a Sultan who wished to claim that he was the "King of Kings," one who was concerned about his status compared to other neighbouring kings and what other kings might think about him, wearing glittering cut diamonds made in Europe would certainly add to his status, not to mention his lead in setting a new fashion trend. Iskandar Thani would be the first among the monarchs in maritime Southeast Asia who would be wearing accessories so copious and glamorous during audience days and ceremonial processions, and more importantly, they were specially made in Europe! That would certainly impress and dazzle not only his subjects but other representatives from the surrounding polities and foreigners from afar especially the numerous Europeans who had begun to frequent Malay courts during this period. It is likely that this focus on diamonds was Iskandar Thani's way of reinventing himself setting him apart from his predecessors. His keenness to possess a Persian-style belt may reflect his intention to represent himself to be on par with other great Muslim kings in the Persian and Mughal courts.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to ascertain exactly what and how much jewellery he had ordered before his death. According to Valentijn, "the Company suffered a heavy loss through the sale of the deceased King of Atsjien jewellery, since but 5,025 taels⁵¹ of the said jewellery were taken over by the Queen."⁵² Andaya stated that the jewels were worth 6,000 taels.⁵³ A further search of the Company sources, however, revealed a figure to be much more than it first appeared. In his letter to Jacob Compostel, Antonio Van Diemen mentioned that the total cost of the jewels brought by Schouten was

⁵¹ A tael or thail is a unit of weight and a monetary unit used in China, Japan, Tonkin, Cambodia, Siam, Aceh, Makassar etc. As a unit of weight, 1 tael is about 37.5 gram. The worth of 1 tael in monetary unit varies from place to place. In Aceh, the tael is usually measured in gold. 1 tael is worth 4 rijksdaalders, 16 golden mas. If in silver, worth about 60 stuivers or 8 silver mas. See W. F. Stapel, *Pieter van Dam's Beschrijvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie*, ('s Gravenhage: Martinuss Nijhoff, 1931) pp. 834-835.

⁵² F. Valentyn, 'Valentyn's Account of Malacca', translated by D.F. A. Harvey, *Journal of Malayan Branch of Royal Asiatic Society*, 16 (1965), 225-246, pp. 236-237. Valentijn did not mention the total sum brought by the Dutch.

⁵³ Andaya, 'A very good-natured but awe-inspiring government', p. 77.

f.82018.6.8.⁵⁴ More detailed information could be gleaned on the jewellery from the Queen's letter to Antonio Van Diemen. Sultanah Safiatuddin wrote that she acknowledged the receipt of a gold chain with 1064 diamond stones, 2 arm-rings with 306 diamond stones, a golden *keris* with 211 diamond stones, 2 pendants with 58 diamond stones, 4 hoop-rings beset with table-diamonds, 4 ruby rings with set diamonds, 4 diamond rings, 1 hoop-ring beset with 16 table diamonds, 4 earrings in gold.⁵⁵ This was worth 10, 000 taels out of the 15,000 brought by Commissar Sourij. The third part of the jewels amounted to about 8,500 taels.

The Conflict over the payment of jewels

The first signs of trouble over the payment of jewels appeared in Antonio van Diemen's letter to Iskandar Thani, where he drew attention to the fact that Iskandar Thani had declined to accept and pay for the jewels brought by a delegation led by Commissar Jan de Meere in 1640.⁵⁶ Although Jan de Meere advised for the return of the jewels, Antonio van Diemen firmly urged the king "to unburden us [the Dutch] with these and accept them in a pleasant way."⁵⁷ The Dutch, Van Diemen argued, would not make it difficult for the King if these diamonds could be returned to the Netherlands. However, that was impossible because Iskandar Thani ordered these diamonds to be specially crafted according to the Acehnese style.⁵⁸ He stressed that if these jewels were not accepted and paid for, they would cost the Dutch great losses.

⁵⁴ NA, ff.223-227, f.225: Letter from Antonio Van Diemen, Governor General in Batavia, to Jacob Compostel, Resident in Aceh, 1642. This was the sum brought by Justus Schouten which was about 6 834 taels. Two other envoys, Pieter Sourij brought 15,000 taels and Vlamingh Oudshoorn brought another 8,500. Total sum brought would be 29, 500 taels. The Queen accepted a total of 21,000 taels, the Dutch would have lost 8,500 taels. After this whole episode, the Company was still left with five diamond and one emerald rings.

⁵⁵ NA, VOC 1141, ff.146R-148V, f.146R. Letter from Queen of Aceh to Governor-General in Batavia.

⁵⁶ NA, VOC 1136, f.951V.

⁵⁷ NA, VOC 1136, f.951V.

⁵⁸ NA, VOC 1136, f.951V. For example, the eight crafted jewels especially made to decorate the shirt of the king, which according to Van Diemen was very costly. This specific order fashioned in the style of the Acehnese made it impossible for the Dutch to sell them to other Kings. For instance, the King of Mataram preferred table-shaped diamonds whilst the King of Siam fancied pointed ones.

The Sultanah who preferred cash than jewellery

When the next envoy, Commissar Justus Schouten arrived in Aceh, he found that the Sultan who was responsible for ordering all these diamonds had passed away and in his place was his young widow, Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah.⁵⁹ The Dutch had no idea how this would affect their jewel trade. Indeed, the situation was rather critical since the Company officials were uncertain how this new successor would respond to the Company. Dutch-Aceh relations had soured under Iskandar Thani when he suddenly refused to help the Company conquer Melaka in 1640 after promising to do so earlier. The Dutch saw this sudden reversal of intent as a reflection of the Sultan's ambitious designs in the Straits.⁶⁰ So after Melaka was conquered from the Portuguese, the Company officials were not certain of Aceh's next move.

One of the first things Commissar Justus Schouten wrote in his report to Antonio van Diemen after informing the Governor of the accession of the new Sultanah was that she had refused to accept and pay for the very expensive jewels. This he noted was very damaging to the Company and of course did not augur well for relations between the Company and the newly crowned ruler of Aceh. Schouten reported later that despite his great insistence, only a part of the jewels was accepted, 5025 taels at f.16 1/5 per tael.⁶¹ The Sultanah refused to accept the rest even when Schouten offered to sell them at cost price. As far as the Acehnese were concerned, her reasons were impeccable - that her late husband had been too extravagant resulting in the depletion of the Treasury. Furthermore, these jewels and accessories were specially designed and made for the male king's clothes and certainly could not be worn by a woman!⁶²

⁵⁹ Iskandar Thani passed away unexpectedly at the age of thirty-one on the 15th of February 1641.

⁶⁰ For a fuller account of the reasons behind Iskandar Thani's refusal to help the Company and the Company's perceptions of him, see Sher Banu Khan, 'Ties that Unbind: The botched Aceh-Dutch Alliance in the Conquest of Melaka', unpublished manuscript, presented at the TANAP-UGM Workshop in Jogjakarta, 2003.

⁶¹ NA, f.339V. Justus Schouten and Johan van Twist in Malacca, July 1641. This presumably would be the 5025 taels of jewellery accepted by the Queen as mentioned by Valentyn.

⁶² NA, f.339V. Schouten, Johan van Twist in Malacca, July 1641.

After Justus Schouten, the next Commissar appointed to represent the Company's delegation to Aceh was Pieter Sourij.⁶³ His task was to get Sultanah Safiatuddin to accept and pay for the remainder of the jewels and Governor-General Antonio Van Diemen specifically instructed him not to bring them back to Batavia.⁶⁴

Commissar Sourij's detailed report is extremely useful because it gave a rare glimpse of how affairs were conducted under the reign of the Sultanah. From here, we gathered that matters of business must be discussed first with her *rijsraden* before they could be forwarded to the Queen on audience day. The Company officials had to learn quickly whom they had to petition first and who the Company's friends were. In the first year of her reign, the most important council member was the Lebe Kita Kali.⁶⁵ Being a friend of the Company, he gave Compostel two important pieces of advice. Sourij should visit the other *orangkaya* to discuss about the sale of the jewels but he must be kept informed of their answers.⁶⁶ He also cautioned him that the Dutch might face problems with the rest of the *orangkaya* since the kingdom did not need any more jewels as Aceh was already so well known for its jewels; there was no need to look any further than the jewel-studded grave of Iskandar Thani to prove this.⁶⁷ More importantly, the Kali said that since a queen now ruled Aceh, it was in the nature of women not to be willing to see her treasury depleted.⁶⁸

On the 12th of July, Sourij had his first audience with the Queen. The Sultanah, much to Sourij's surprise, decided to accept the jewels with the consensus of her *orangkaya*. Happy at this good turn of events, Sourij decided not to be impolite by discussing questions of payment. Sourij did not want to prejudice the good standing the Company had at that moment. The first shock Sourij faced was one week later when the

⁶³ Pieter Sourij stayed in Aceh from the 15th of May to the 18th of August 1642.

⁶⁴ NA, f.556R. Dagh-Register van Pieter Sourij, May-August 1642. In his letter to Jacob Compostel, Antonio Van Diemen mentioned that the total cost of the jewels brought by Sourij was f. 82018.6.8. NA, ff.223-227, f.225 Letter from Antonio Van Diemen to Jacob Compostel, 1642. More information on the jewels is gleaned here, when Sourij wrote that the cost of production for these jewels was 12,000 taels but the Dutch asked for 15,000 taels considering the dangers of transportation at sea and interest costs.

⁶⁵ The Kali, was said to be the illegitimate son of Iskandar Muda, thus the Sultanah's half-brother. Ito, *The World of Adat Aceh*, p. 71.

⁶⁶ NA, f.557R. Dagh-Register van Pieter Sourij, May-August 1642.

⁶⁷ *Bustan*, Iskandar, pp. 60-73.

⁶⁸ NA, f.560V. Dagh-Register van Pieter Sourij, May-August 1642.

Queen ordered the *orangkaya* and her jewellers to gather at the **balai* to value the price of the jewels. All the *orangkaya* were present except interestingly, the Kali. Maharaja Adonna Lilla, the Queen's *capado*, together with the Shahbandars and two other *orangkaya* came with the jewel box and opened it for the others together with the Queen's jewellers to value. After the jewels were carefully examined, the price that was determined was totally unacceptable to the Company delegates – an outrageous 5,900 taels.⁶⁹ At that moment, the Queen herself was not present, being in the inner precinct of her palace. Sourij protested, claiming that either the Acehnese diamond jewellers did not know their stones or they simply refused to declare the real amount! The Dutch delegates threatened a walk out. Maharaja Adonna Lilla then wrote the price down and brought this to the Queen inside the palace. This did not help to calm Sourij one bit, since the Queen agreed with the price valued by her jewellers. Sourij warned that this better not be a trick or mere excuses devised by the Acehnese for not taking the jewels since they remained obliged to take them and he was not allowed to bring the jewels back to Batavia. Sourij stressed that the Governor-General himself had requested the Acehnese to unburden the Dutch of these expensive jewels especially since Iskandar Thani had ordered them. The Acehnese retorted that although their King had ordered this, and his family members were obliged to take, he was now dead and all that was done by him had died with him. They explained to Sourij that Iskandar Thani was not loved by the Acehnese and his name was remembered and honoured less than Iskandar Muda. Sourij replied that regardless of the fact that Iskandar Thani was a foreigner or was not loved, the Governor-General, out of the affection of the Acehnese kingdom had obliged him, and the Acehnese should therefore not refuse the jewels without any fundamental reasons.⁷⁰ From the Dutch point of view, the Acehnese as subjects of the King, dead or not, were obliged to carry out his orders. The Acehnese argued otherwise, stating that the Queen following the law of the land was not liable to execute her late husband's orders.⁷¹ After a soft welcome, the situation had indeed turned problematic for Sourij.

⁶⁹ NA, ff.571R-571V. Dagh-Register van Pieter Sourij, May-August 1642.

⁷⁰ NA, f.572R. Dagh-Register van Pieter Sourij, May-August 1642.

⁷¹ The rights and obligations of successor Kings in Aceh (and as it seems, in the Malay world during the pre-modern period) do not appear to be written and codified in any form, thus this law would most probably be one belonging to the oral tradition. Snouck Hurgronje, in his epic study of the Acehnese, states that no King of Aceh felt obliged to fulfil the promises or concessions granted by his predecessor. Hurgronje, *De Atjehers*, p. 126.

Back at the *balai*, where the Dutch and Acehnese elite were eye balling each other, after much whisperings and discussions, the Shahbandars offered 2,000 taels more. Sourij declared angrily that he would not accept such “frivolous talk” any longer and that they would not accept anything less than 15,000 taels. Sourij warned the Acehnese that their refusal to pay for the jewels would lead to the Governor-General’s displeasure. Maharaja Adonna Lilla then asked whether this meant that the Queen would be forced to accept them. This was too much for the Company officials to tolerate. Sourij and the other Company officials then started to walk out from the *balai* in a huff. It was at this tense juncture, that the Queen decided to intervene and sooth matters. When the Company officials reached the third gate of the palace compound, by the order of the Queen, Sourij and the others were called back to go and sit at the *balai* and were subsequently treated to a banquet, which they accepted with courtesy. Sourij complained that after four hours of fruitless discussion, there was still no progress made regarding the sale of the jewels and subsequently returned to their lodge.⁷² The Queen’s timely intervention left him disappointed, but no longer angry.

In the meantime, Sourij and other Dutch officials had to engage and lobby all the other important *orangkaya*. To do this, appropriate gifts were arranged to accompany the request for help. Such gifts were carefully calculated and the worth of these must commensurate with the order of the rank and importance of those *orangkaya*. Sourij learnt soon enough that although these gifts usually ensured fair reception, they did not always result in co-operation. The *orangkaya* at that time were divided into two factions - one comprising those who were against accepting the jewels and the other consisting of those who were willing to accept but at a reasonable price. The Maharaja Sri Maharaja and his follower, the Panglima Dalam⁷³ belonged to the former camp. The Panglima Dalam was friendly in his manner but pointed in his opinion about buying the jewels. Although he diplomatically told Sourij that some jewellery might be bought, like the four golden earrings and some rings since the Queen usually wore some jewellery to important occasions, he made it clear to Sourij that the rest of the jewellery were useless.

⁷² NA, ff.72R-572V. Dagh-Register van Pieter Sourij, May-August 1642.

⁷³ The Panglima Dalam is also known as the Laksamana.

The jewels served no other purpose other than just to be admired, so paying for them would be like throwing money away like throwing water.⁷⁴

Since Sourij's arrival in Aceh, he had been unsuccessful in meeting up with the next most important *rijsraad*, the second in rank in the Council, the Maharaja Sri Maharaja. Sourij complained that the latter had been avoiding him by giving the excuse that he was sick. When Sourij was finally able to make an appointment to see the Maharaja at the latter's house, he found him with some other *orangkaya*. Despite the Maharaja's reluctance to see him, he treated Sourij well and gave him an Acehnese dress as present. Sourij remarked that the Maharaja was a man of not many words and as usual, again pretended to be sick. Despite being ill though, on this occasion, the Maharaja managed more than a few words. He told the Dutch officials that if it was a matter of 200-300 taels it would not be a problem especially since the Acehnese had been friends with the Dutch for so long. "Although both parties were so different and their lands were so far apart, in their hearts they were affectionate with each other." He promised that he would prove himself a good friend of the Dutch; nevertheless, he made it clear that as far as it was in his power to do so, he would ensure that the means of the kingdom would not be harmed.⁷⁵

The *orangkaya* who belonged to the latter camp, was the Lebe Kita Kali and his follower, Maharaja Sestia.⁷⁶ They were both secretly trying to work out a compromise price that would be acceptable to the Company, the Queen and the other *orangkaya*. Maharaja Sestia's uppermost concern was to maintain good relations with the Company. Thus, he wanted this jewel affair settled in a way that was the least damaging to the friendship between Aceh and the Dutch, especially since the Governor-General had been in friendship with Aceh since the time of Mahkota Alam (i.e. Iskandar Muda, the Queen's father). He suggested that the Company now must continue to show the same friendship to Aceh although it was now ruled by a woman. He advised Sourij that this friendship should not be lessened but should be increased. He told the Dutch that

⁷⁴ NA, ff.573R-574R. Dagh-Register van Pieter Sourij, May-August 1642. This is a translation of a Malay proverb which means that if one throws money like one throws water, then one does not value the money since water in this context is seen as abundant and thus of little value.

⁷⁵ NA, f.576R. Dagh-Register van Pieter Sourij, May-August 1642.

⁷⁶ Sourij was convinced that Maharaja Sestia and the Kali had been discussing this matter amongst themselves since they both spoke "the same words." NA, f.575V. Dagh-Register van Pieter Sourij, May-August 1642.

although a radical change had taken place in the court of Aceh with a woman on the throne, there would be no radical change in the friendship that previous Acehnese kings had shown to the Dutch. Being the daughter of Iskandar Muda, she would continue in the tradition of her illustrious father. Indeed, he pointed out that she had shown herself to be even more accommodative towards the Dutch than her male predecessors. As far as Maharaja Sestia and the Kali's arguments were concerned, their decision to accept the jewels demonstrated not so much their pro-Dutch attitude but more the need to maintain good friendship with the Dutch since being an ally of the Company was of paramount importance to protect the kingdom's interest. The Kali's and Sestia's private efforts to keep relations between them and the Dutch cordial seemed to work since Sourij told them that the Company would be willing to lower the price and settle for 12,000-13,000 taels after they offered to pay for 10,000 taels. In the meantime, Possie Melor, their translator informed Sourij that all the *orangkaya* except for Maharaja Sri Maharaja were gathered at court engaged in an intense discussion about the jewels since it entailed a lot of money. Sourij learnt that many of the *orangkaya* opposed the purchase on the grounds that the jewels served no purpose and that this would be tantamount to throwing away good money. Clearly the elites of Aceh were unhappy with Iskandar Thani's extravagant spending on these diamonds and were therefore not ready to oblige his wishes. To the *orangkaya*, keeping the Treasury healthy was important to maintain the kingdom's power.

The tussle for an acceptable price for the jewels continued in the big *balai* at the next audience day. Although the Sultanah was supposed to be present, she had sent her **chap* indicating that she would not be present. The Sultanah left the preliminary bargaining and haggling to her *capado* and thus all attention was on the *orangkaya* Maharaja Adonna Lilla, the Queen's *liefste* (favourite) eunuch. He raised the Acehnese offer from 5,900 taels to 9,000 taels although he claimed that he was not happy with this price since upon closer inspection, some of the big stones were worth "no more than pebbles" and alluding that he was suspicious of the Dutch true intentions.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, because of the Acehnese affection for the Company and the Governor-General, they would pay 9,000 taels. This would be his offer but if the Dutch were not

⁷⁷ NA, f.577V. Dag-Register van Pieter Sourij, May-August 1642.

satisfied then they should speak to her Majesty herself since he would not dare to tell her.

This ploy seemed to work since Sourij finally relented and asked for 10,000 taels and Maharaja Adonna Lilla promised he would try to help the Dutch fetch that price. He indicated that the Sultanah was ready to pay part of the amount in cash and the remainder would have to be in the goods exchanged and some discounted from the tolls the Company had to pay. Despite this positive change in the Acehese position, Sourij's frustrating moments persisted and it was only a few days before Sourij's departure to Batavia were there some signs that the jewel business would be eventually settled. During the Audience Day on Saturday, 3rd of August 1642, the Sultanah offered 9,000 taels for the jewels. Sourij pointedly but politely said if he accepted this amount he would not dare return to Batavia to face the Governor-General. He told the Sultanah that the honour and respect the Dutch had for her would hinge on the reasonable settlement of this issue. This clearly showed that the "Jewel Affair" was more than just a commercial transaction but one that had serious diplomatic repercussions on Aceh-VOC relations. The Sultanah agreed to pay the amount of 10,000 taels despite much protest from some of the *orangkaya* at the hall.⁷⁸ She promised to make the payment for these diamonds partly from the tolls that the Dutch ships had to pay which according to her calculation would amount to 4,000 taels. The remainder of 6,000 taels, she would settle in two *mousums* (seasons).⁷⁹

The Sultanah, her Orangkaya and Commissar Arnold Vlamingh

This episode with Commissar Sourij did not bring about a closure but just a temporary breather to the jewel affair. The jewel affair continued to test the tenacity and the diplomacy of both parties because Sourij sold only a small part of the total amount of jewellery.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the Governor-General was dissatisfied that he had to pay interests on the jewels over the past three years. He appointed the more formidable

⁷⁸ NA, ff.581R-581V. Dagh-Register van Pieter Sourij, May-August 1642.

⁷⁹ NA, VOC 1141, f.146V.

⁸⁰ On his return to Batavia, Pieter Sourij did not bring back the jewels to Batavia but instead left them in Aceh with Bintara CanCanan with the Acehese envoy to Batavia Sri Bidia Indra as witness.

Commissar Arnold de Vlamingh van Oudtshoorn as the next envoy. He was in Aceh from July to October 1644 and his task was unenviable. He had to sell five great diamond pieces for 8,500 tael, preferably to be paid 7,000 tael in cash and gold, 500 in merchandise and 1,000 in tolls.⁸¹ There were also some other rings the late King had ordered but the Company had given up hope of ever selling these. Vlamingh boastfully vowed that he would not return to Batavia with the jewels and incur the Governor-General's indignation but would rather wear himself out and be miserable and die in Aceh.⁸²

When Vlamingh arrived in Aceh on the 13th of July, he was welcomed with the customary protocol of receiving a foreign ship in the Achenese harbour. Vlamingh's first disappointment on landing in Aceh was when he was told that the Queen was away on an amusement trip with the English and other foreigners.⁸³ The Queen's party was expected to return to court only on the 21st of July, about a week later. However, even then, Vlamingh had to wait longer still since the Governor-General's letter and gifts were brought to court in a magnificent procession only on the 31st of July. As for Vlamingh, he was granted his first audience with the Queen only on the 6th of August and even then the issue of the jewels was not discussed since it was considered improper to conduct business first time at court. Vlamingh's patience was already severely tested with the Acehnese delaying tactics even before he had his first sight of the Sultanah.

Vlamingh tried to keep himself useful and busy in the meantime before making his request to Sultanah Safiatuddin. The *orangkaya* had to be lobbied and gifts had to be prepared. Vlamingh proportioned the gifts in such a manner; Lebe Kita Kali (first in rank and the Company's patron) - f.176.18.4, Maharaja Sri Maharaja (second in rank) - f.131.1.8, Laksamana (third in rank) - f.123.7.5, Siry Paduka Tuan (fourth in rank and Company's friend) - f.174.17.4, Maharaja Adonna Lilla (Queen's favourite eunuch) f.159.2.4, Maharaja Sestia (another eunuch, who was also a Company's friend) f. 123.7.4 and the Lebe Kita Kali's brother-in-law - f.113.3.4.⁸⁴

⁸¹ NA, f.591V, f.599R. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Commissaris Arnold de Vlamingh.

⁸² NA, f.575V. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Commissaris Arnold de Vlamingh.

⁸³ Most probably, this amusement trip refers to a hunting trip that the Acehnese court was fond of organizing since the time of previous Kings which was continued by the Queen. It appeared that the English officials were complaining of the hunger and terrible conditions they had to endure since they had to sleep on mats under tents. Vlamingh whilst disappointed that he was not able to see the Queen soon was happy that he escaped this hunt.

⁸⁴ NA, ff.579V-580V. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Commissaris Arnold de Vlamingh.

After learning that the Lebe Kita Kali was away on an elephant hunt, Vlamingh decided to concentrate on lobbying the hardliners, the Maharaja Sri Maharaja and the Laksamana or Panglima Dalam. Vlamingh was well received at the Maharaja's house but when the matter of the jewels was brought up, this time; he did not bother to sweeten the ears of the Dutch but directly declined to accept the rest of the jewels from Vlamingh. He reiterated his objections to the purchase of the jewels to Vlamingh. He reasoned that the King who had ordered such costly jewels was now dead and in his place, was the present Queen who according to the Acehnese was not obliged to carry out his orders. Furthermore, the Sultanah, being a woman, found cash to be more useful than jewels, which would not serve the kingdom better.⁸⁵

Next, Vlamingh visited the Laksamana. Vlamingh reported that unlike the "inconsiderate" Maharaja, the Laksamana was downright contemptuous. After the customary greetings and gifts, Vlamingh told the Laksamana that because of the Acehnese friendship to the Dutch, they should accept the jewels. Instead the Laksamana retorted by questioning the Dutch sincerity in wanting to maintain and preserve the friendship with the Acehnese. He pointed out that all these talk of the Dutch professed friendship ran counter to their actions of merely getting down to the business of selling the jewels so much so that the Queen seemed forced to accept them. For good measure, he added that the amount of jewels put to sale by the Dutch was not even worth the effort spent by the so many words exchanged. Indeed, if Vlamingh's mission was to sell jewels, then it had been unnecessary for the Governor-General to send such a high-ranking person as the Commissar to Aceh. It would be sufficient to send a mere trader instead of a Commissar who rightly should be concerning himself with only courtly matters.⁸⁶ He reminded Vlamingh of how Sourij had left the jewels behind hoping that it would be accepted when the Queen was not in the least inclined to accept them. The Laksamana found it strange that the Governor-General being aware that the Acehnese were totally averse towards accepting the jewels was still insistent on making matters so difficult for the Queen. He accused the Dutch of "making her ears warm" with this talk about the jewels, especially after she had given the Dutch exceptional pre-eminence in

⁸⁵ NA, f.581R. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Commissaris Arnold de Vlamingh.

⁸⁶ NA, f.582R. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Commissaris Arnold de Vlamingh. This crisis of identity was a perennial problem faced by the VOC in the East Indies.

her land and territory, more than what other foreigners enjoyed.⁸⁷ This disagreeable posture taken by the Dutch was damaging the old alliance between the two nations and that so much had be paid for the jewels which would only lead to the alienation or at least attain the displeasure of the Acehnese.⁸⁸

After two months of lobbying and presenting gifts to the *orangkaya*, Vlamingh wrote that all hope for the acceptance of the jewels was destroyed. Vlamingh's desperation became more apparent when he came to know that despite the violent disputes among the *orangkaya* over the jewels,⁸⁹ the Laksamana still "sang his old tune."⁹⁰ Vlamingh lamented that he had gone to the extent of even giving his gun that was hanging in his room as a gift to the "rude" Laksamana since the Laksamana's servant had spotted the gun and claimed that his master had so wished to have it.⁹¹ Vlamingh confessed that he had done all that he could and had thrown away so many gifts but still obtained no results. He complained that these "hungry vultures remained insatiable."⁹²

After tiring the Commissar and weakening his spirit for almost one and a half months, Sultanah Safiatuddin instructed the Dutch to bring the jewels to court the following Saturday where the jewels would be valued by her diamond experts and her **naeleers* and the *shahbandars*. A decision would then be made regarding the purchase of the jewels. Like Sourij, Vlamingh became very furious when the Queen's diamond experts valued these jewels at 3,000 taels, which to him, was a disgraceful price for five big pieces of diamonds. Vlamingh's ill fortune did not seem to see any end. He reported how he was ridiculed by the Queen's jewellers since they asked whether the Dutch had been mistaken and placed the cost in taels when it should have been only in reals.⁹³ They asked whether the Company officials had ever seen diamonds since they had seen better ones and alluded to the fact that the Company might have even obtained these through dishonourable means.⁹⁴ The Acehnese further accused the Dutch of aggressively pushing the jewels on them and Vlamingh retorted on the "extraordinary manner in

⁸⁷ The Sultanah had granted the Dutch a *firman* allowing them exclusive nation treatment at Sumatra West Coast.

⁸⁸ NA, f.582V. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Commissaris Arnold de Vlamingh.

⁸⁹ NA, f.591R. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Commissaris Arnold de Vlamingh.

⁹⁰ NA, f.589V. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Commissaris Arnold de Vlamingh.

⁹¹ NA, f.595R. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Commissaris Arnold de Vlamingh.

⁹² NA, f.589V. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Commissaris Arnold de Vlamingh.

⁹³ NA, ff.593V-594R. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Commissaris Arnold de Vlamingh.

⁹⁴ NA, f.594R. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Commissaris Arnold de Vlamingh.

which he was spoken to” by the Acehnese considering he was a Commissar, an official appointed to lead a diplomatic delegation to Aceh by the Governor-General in Batavia. He expressed shock at how the Dutch were not treated with more respect and honour considering the friendship and courtesy they had shown to the Acehnese envoys when they were in Batavia.

Vlamingh’s fortune finally turned for the better when he visited the last in rank in the Council of four Sri Paduka Tuan. Vlamingh did not make much headway with him either but he gave the Commissar a useful advise as to who was the most powerful and exceptionally well regarded by Her Majesty, the one who had more influence compared to all the other *orangkaya*, “the one who could be where the other *orangkaya* cannot” – the Queen’s favourite *capado* Raja Adonna Lilla. He advised Vlamingh to seek the help of Raja Adonna Lilla and to keep him in the Company’s faction but he warned that the other *orangkaya* must also be treated just as well and must also be given presents so as not to stir up jealousies at court.⁹⁵

Realising that he was getting nowhere with the *orangkaya*, Vlamingh and the senior trader in Aceh, Harmanszoon decided to follow Paduka Tuan’s advice. They resolved to approach the Queen’s *liefste capado*, Radjia Adonna Lilla, instead to promote the sale of the jewels. When Harmanszoon was finally able to meet Radjia Adonna Lilla, the *capado* assured him that he was a friend of the Company and they should not have any reservations about the Queen’s goodwill for the Dutch just as she had for the earlier Commissars who were in Aceh. He told Harmanszoon that the Queen had not fixed the price of the jewels yet. Furthermore, the Dutch should not be troubled when the *orangkaya* had offered to pay less than half the cost desired by the Dutch. According to Radjia Adonna Lilla, this was the Acehnese way of doing things.⁹⁶

This new approach proved to be valuable. The Queen’s *liefste capado* provided the Dutch with good advice compared to the *orangkaya* as regards to the Sultanah’s stand on the matter. Vlamingh’s description of the next audience day amply demonstrated this. His detailed report was valuable in illuminating how the Sultanah managed both her *orangkaya* and foreign envoys.

⁹⁵ NA, f.585R Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Commissaris Arnold de Vlamingh.

⁹⁶ NA, f.596R. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Commissaris Arnold de Vlamingh.

On audience day, Sunday, the 11th of September, Sultanah Safiatuddin demonstrated that her foremost concern was still in maintaining good relations with the Dutch, confirming Radjia Adonna Lilla's counsel. The young Sultanah dealt with the Dutch in a skilled and astute manner. She first put the officials in a good temper by generously honouring the *oppercoopman*, Harmanszoon with two titles, namely, *Orangkaya Poeti* (White Orangkaya) and *Capitain Radja* (Prince of Captains) which he was at liberty to use in all the lands under her jurisdiction. When it came to the business of the jewels, the Sultanah was rather coy. When Vlamingh requested her to settle the matter of the price of the jewels, she declared that it would be 3,000 taels. One could imagine how someone like Vlamingh would try his very best to keep his anger under check while fronting this young Sultanah. He tried to persuade her by appealing to the fact that these were especially ordered by her late husband and that these were very expensive jewels specially crafted and brought all the way from the Netherlands. The Sultanah replied that the price offered was based on what these jewels were worth and that it was because of her friendship with the Dutch and the Governor-General that she had agreed to accept the jewels in the first place although she had no desire for them. But, teasingly she said, as a sign of goodwill, she would raise the offer to 3,500 taels to which Vlamingh promptly replied, was too little. She declared finally that she would offer 4,000 taels and then, as customary, she retired to the inner palace and let the *orangkaya* to gather in the *balai* to discuss the matter led by the Maharaja Sri Maharaja. The general feeling among the *orangkaya* was that they doubted the sincerity of the Dutch and they were particularly suspicious as to whether the Governor-General had seriously ordered this course of action since Vlamingh had refused to deviate even a *penning* from the original price. The *orangkaya* complained that this was making it more difficult for them to persuade the Queen. They told Vlamingh that the matter of the jewels depended on them since the Queen, being a woman did not have the greatest knowledge regarding these things and had to be taught.⁹⁷ While the *orangkaya* were still debating on the price, Maharaja Adonna Lilla appeared at the *balai* and after a short discussion with the *orangkaya* in Malay, the Maharaja Sri Maharaja informed Vlamingh that the *orangkaya* had agreed to raise the offer to 4,500 taels but subject to the Queen's concurrence. Vlamingh, as expected, disagreed with this slightly higher offer and he showed no sign of relenting still

⁹⁷ NA, f.597R. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Commissaris Arnold de Vlamingh.

insisting on the original price. Maharaja Adonna Lilla went back to the inner *balai* to talk to the Queen but she, unlike her male elites, would not offer more than 4,000 taels. By this time, Vlamingh was in despair and he pithily described how sad and hopeless he felt about the whole affair and wished he understood the Malay language! Maharaja Adonna Lilla was sent for the second time to the Queen. When he reappeared, he brought with him a silver dish with all the jewels that had been bought by the Acehnese from the Dutch from time to time. The Acehnese claimed that the pro-rated price of all these jewels did not come up to the cost the Dutch demanded for the five big pieces. Realising that he was caught in a spot, Vlamingh confessed that he was ignorant of the previous jewel transactions but explained that these other jewels were uncut whilst the five big pieces were expensive because they were made from cut table diamonds (*tafels diamenten*) which had to be specially ordered and cut in the Netherlands. As they were discussing, another *capado* appeared from the inner *balai* and announced that the Sultanah had increased the offer to 5,000.⁹⁸

Feeling desperate by that time and being worn down after two months of fruitless negotiations, Vlamingh wanted this affair to be settled quickly before he returned to Batavia. He continued to negotiate with the Sultanah's eunuch. Although Vlamingh had reservations that this eunuch was not one of the four *rijxraaden*, it appeared that he might have unique access to the Queen ears or rather, he had the unique privilege of listening to the Queen's whispers. Vlamingh had consistently complained about the "obscure and slow negotiations" he experienced in Aceh since he was not allowed to speak with the Queen but only through intermediaries whom, he understood was the custom of the land.⁹⁹ According to Paduka Tuan, the only "man-person" (*man-persoon*) who could speak to the Queen was the *capado* Maharaja Adonna Lilla and that all the Queen's business must be executed through him. It slowly dawned on the Dutch then that they had to treat this particular *capado* well and keep him in the camp that favoured the Company.¹⁰⁰ True enough, it was Maharaja Adonna Lilla's

⁹⁸ NA, f.598R. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Commissaris Arnold de Vlamingh.

⁹⁹ Other monarchs in Southeast Asia, including male ones, were also not accessible in the inner palace except to women, children and eunuchs. See C.5, p.214.

¹⁰⁰ NA, f.599R. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Commissaris Arnold de Vlamingh.

dealings with the Dutch that finally broke the deadlock. During the discussion with Maharaja Adonna Lilla, Vlamingh finally agreed to reduce the price of the jewels to 6,000 taels, where the Dutch requested for 2,000 in cash and the rest to be paid in tin and in tolls. To sweeten the deal, the Dutch presented Maharaja Adonna Lilla with a table emerald ring worth f.268, (one of the many rings ordered by the late King that could not be sold), as a token of their hope and appreciation for his willingness to bring the matter to the Sultanah, for which he accepted kindly. Maharaja Adonna Lilla then ordered Vlamingh to keep this dealing a secret from the rest of the *orangkaya* so as not to arouse any suspicion. He told Vlamingh to make another round of visits to the *orangkaya* to request their help to bring the matter of the jewels to court at the next audience day on Saturday the 17th of September. The eunuch even taught Vlamingh the correct manner he should adopt whilst speaking to the Queen and the *orangkaya*. He advised the Dutch to speak to the Sultanah in a submissive manner while to the *orangkaya*, they should use beautiful words!¹⁰¹

The next audience day, the Sultanah summoned all the *orangkaya* to court and Her Majesty declared that she had agreed to accept the jewels at 6,000 tael, 1,000 in cash and the rest to be paid within three years.¹⁰² This amount of 6,000 tael had to be agreed upon by all the *orangkaya* including the Laksamana and the Lebe Kita Kali who had just returned from his elephant hunt. Despite some misgivings from the Laksamana and even from the Company's friend, Lebe Kita Kali, they agreed on the price by uttering of the word "*Daulat*" at the *balai*. Finally, both parties agreed upon a negotiated price.

On Tuesday, the 20th of September, Sultanah Safiatuddin made good her promise to pay the 1,000 cash. In an unprecedented move, both in the local court and for a Dutch envoy, she also made the Dutch "pay" for their part of the bargain. Partly due to her youth and partly feminine mischief, she playfully asked Vlamingh and others to "honour" her by dancing in front of her and her ladies-in-waiting (*state-juffrouwen*). Despite surely the discomfort and embarrassment, Vlamingh and other Company officials actually indulged the Sultanah. He reported that Her Majesty and her ladies were exceptionally amused by their hops and the court was filled with loud laughter and shouts.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ NA, f.599V. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Commissaris Arnold de Vlamingh.

¹⁰² NA, f.600V. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Commissaris Arnold de Vlamingh.

¹⁰³ NA, f.601R. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Commissaris Arnold de Vlamingh.

Conclusion

This “Jewel Affair” was significant because it tested the young Sultanah’s mettle in the early years of her reign in her dealings with the foreign elites. It was also a test of wills and the diplomatic skills of both the *orangkaya* and the Dutch Commissars, like Pieter Sourij and Arnold Vlamingh. They had no idea how the change in Aceh’s political leadership would impact their fortunes. This affair demonstrated that despite the difficult situation, both parties were able to avoid a potentially destabilising or threatening position. Both the Acehnese and the Dutch had to compromise on an acceptable price. On the part of the Dutch, there was also that paramount need to maintain the Company’s good relations with Aceh if the Dutch were to enjoy trade privileges in pepper and tin and toll-free trade and exclusive nation treatment at Sumatra West Coast.

In the precinct of the *balai*, the “Jewel Affair” revealed the presence of different foci of power and influence in the Acehnese court. One that was constantly shifting and contested. While the *orangkaya* thought that the resolution of this affair depended on them and the young sovereign, being a woman, needed to be instructed in such matters; it appeared that she too had her own ideas. The *orangkaya* were adamant not to pay a higher price for the jewels but she had the final say over the matter. Compromises, therefore, had to be made by everyone to preserve the Dutch-Acehnese friendship. Even though the *orangkaya* played an important role in the decision-making and were lobbied with gifts and “beautiful words,” the final authority laid in the Sultanah’s hands. In the end, her policy of accommodating the Dutch prevailed. As the following chapters show, she consistently pursued this policy throughout her reign.

However, the very fact that the Sultanah obtained the concurrence of the *orangkaya* showed that they were involved in the decision-making process. Indeed, the Sultanah tended to allow her *orangkaya* to lead in the preliminary stages of discussion. She stepped in to exert and stamp her final authority. Under her reign, the decision making process was collaborative, reciprocal through consensus-making *muafakat*, as opposed to the despotism practised by her father, Iskandar Muda. In this episode, the *orangkaya* had important inputs to contribute in the decision-making process giving a macro-perspective of how the jewels affected the finances of the kingdom. The young queen had her jewel experts, her *naleers* and the *shahbandar* to give independent advice about the worth of the jewels. The queen was not directly involved in the preliminary

rounds of the negotiating process, but she lent her stature to resolve conflicts when the discussions were seen to be going out of hand amongst her *orangkaya* and the Dutch. The Sultanah was careful and deft at keeping relations cordial and at an even keel especially when things were about to get out of hand. As mentioned, Sourij's anger and threatened walk out did not lead to a breakdown of diplomatic relations when he was stopped and invited to a banquet by the Sultanah. At opportune times, her views were conveyed through her eunuchs to the *orangkaya*. She apparently knew when to send her eunuchs out to the *balai* to soothe the tensions on both sides.

The Jewel Affair showed that the *orangkaya* was not a homogenous group as commonly believed. They were divided into a pro-Dutch and anti-Dutch faction. They were divided in the way they perceived Dutch intentions and the manner to which they should respond and deal with the Dutch officials. The faction led by the Kali supported the queen's undeclared plan in adopting a soft approach. Accommodating the Dutch, was important to maintain good relations, particularly when the Company was becoming increasingly stronger after their conquest of Melaka. The other faction led by the Maharaja and the Laksamana took the hard-line approach and would rather reject the jewels rather than be cowed by the Dutch. The Laksamana was strident and firm in disagreeing with the manner and the price demanded by the Dutch for the jewels. Yet, despite these differences, at another level, however, the *orangkaya* were actually unanimous and united in their objective to protect the kingdom's interest. To them, the purchase of jewels was an extravagance that the kingdom could ill afford since these jewels served no useful purpose. Even the Kali who appeared to be pro-Dutch was not happy that the Acehnese had to pay so much for the generally unwanted and useless jewels. In the end, what became clear was that despite all the disagreements, all factions including the Sultanah were able to come to a compromise for the sake of the interest of the kingdom. Perhaps at that point in time the balance was struck between meeting the need and the interests of the ruler, the elite and of course ultimately the kingdom. Despite the disagreement about the final price of the jewels, they rallied behind the Sultanah and declared their support for her at the *balai*. The Jewel Affair illustrated that the relations between the *orangkaya* and the Sultanah were complex and contested. It did not show the rise of the *orangkaya* as commonly believed. Neither did this illustrate a

weak Sultanah dependent on her elite. More importantly, it showed how relations were successfully managed despite disagreements.

Gendered perceptions such as the Queen being inaccessible and inconsistent because she was a woman were cleverly turned to an advantage. The “inaccessibility problem,” as described and identified by Vlamingh during the negotiations proved valuable since her actions seen as unfathomable to others, gave her a wide room for manoeuvre. Her “inconsistencies” typically considered as characteristic for a woman in decision-making was turned into an advantage of buying time for the Acehnese during periods of difficult negotiations.

Unlike her predecessor husband, Iskandar Thani, the Sultanah was more concerned for the health of her kingdom’s treasury.¹⁰⁴ She stopped the dangerous precedent started by her husband to accept payment for pepper in jewels instead of *reals*. Conspicuous consumption and extravagant display of wealth to gain charisma, prowess, and status worked against economical use of the kingdom’s resources. Extravagant rulers were not popularly accepted by the *orangkaya*, Sultan Sri Alam was killed¹⁰⁵ and Iskandar Thani was possibly poisoned due to his extravagant wasting of the kingdom’s wealth on expensive trivialities such as diamond jewellery to boost his ego and status. In contrast, to her male predecessors’ emphasis on material wealth to gain prowess, Sultanah Safiatuddin practical and pragmatic style shaped her reign.

As a female ruler in a largely patriarchal court, the Sultanah had to devise means to stay abreast of court happenings, be they rumours or real. In this context, the seemingly unimportant *capado*, the favourite of the Sultanah, Maharaja Adonna Lilla assumed an important role in this affair when he acted as the intermediary between the Sultanah, her *orangkaya* and the Company officials. Indeed Maharaja Adonna Lilla was the perfect conduit used by the Sultanah to engage the male sex and to serve as her eyes and ears in a largely male dominated *balai*. Sultanah Safiatuddin clearly managed to keep herself afloat during the early years of her reign. She had succeeded in devising a leadership style and a relationship with her elite that seemed to work. Nevertheless, this

¹⁰⁴ This may attest to Reid’s claim that in Southeast Asian societies, women were entrusted with the handling of money, buying and selling goods, promoting family business and making deals. Anthony Reid, ‘Charismatic Queens of Southern Asia’, *History Today*, 53.6 (June 2003), 30-35, p. 35.

¹⁰⁵ *Hikayat Atjeh*, Iskandar, p. 96. In the *Bustan*, he was killed. *Bustan*, Iskandar, p. 32.#

relationship was still a fledgling one. This was to be sorely tested in the decades to come.

CHAPTER 3

Sultanah Safiatuddin's Maturing Years: Politics of Consolidation

Part I - Dealing with the VOC

This chapter, dubbed the “Perak Affair” explores the dynamics between the Sultanah, her orangkaya and the VOC officials relating to one of Aceh's vassal states, Perak. The Perak Affair illustrates how VOC's incursions into Aceh's political and commercial spheres of influence affected traditional inter-state relations and Aceh's response. More importantly, this affair illuminates how the contests between the VOC and Aceh over Perak's tin trade have tremendous repercussions on Aceh's court politics. Just like the Jewel Affair, the Perak Affair, which covers Sultanah Safiatuddin's maturing years, details an important case study illuminating the leadership style of the Sultanah and the means by which she consolidated her position and survived these turbulent times.

The Vassal that Lasts: Relations between Aceh and Perak

According to Wolters, the map of early Southeast Asia was a patchwork of often overlapping **mandalas*. In each of these *mandalas*, one king, identified with divine and “universal” authority claimed personal hegemony over the other rulers in his *mandala* who in theory were his obedient allies and vassals.¹ In Indianized classical Southeast Asia, these centres were ruled by *chakravartin* or universal monarchs, “king of kings” and **dewa-raja* to whom other lesser kings ruling weaker states must pay tribute and homage. The success of the universal ruler or overlord depended on his ability to dispossess his rivals of their claims to space in their own right and bring

¹ Oliver W. Wolters, *History, Culture and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives*, revised edition, SEAP in cooperation with ISEAS, (Ithaca, N.Y. : Southeast Asia Publications, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1999) p. 27.

them under his personal influence.² Relations between states of unequal status; between centre and periphery lay within a *mandala*.³ When the Malay maritime polities of Southeast Asia embraced Islam, the concept of *chakravartin* was replaced by the idea of the **khalifah*⁴ a universal ruler ruling the Muslim **ummah*. In Islam, the *khalifah* could be only a shadow of the divine since divine power belongs to God alone as opposed to the Hindu concept of *dewa-raja* of possessing divine powers. According to Manguin, for the centre to achieve *primus inter pares* status, the universal ruler must possess some measure of legitimacy, charisma derived from prowess, divine radiance, soul-stuff or *sakti*. Only then, could he lure, retain and regulate overseas exchange at his port to provide foreign income and mobilize, manipulate and redistribute the subsequent wealth as a political weapon to extend his authority and attract a still larger clientele.⁵

Aceh conquered Perak twice - once in 1575, triumphantly, and again in 1620, traumatically. In 1575, when Ali Riayat Shah attacked Perak, the sultan's widow and her children, amongst others, were brought to Aceh. Her eldest son married an Aceh princess and later became the Sultan of Aceh taking the title Sultan Alauddin Mansur Shah (r.1579-1586). From 1620 onwards, however, Perak's fortunes turned and she became a vassal of Aceh instead. In 1620, the warrior Sultan, Iskandar Muda, invaded Perak, devastated it and placed on the throne his nominee, a captive Perak prince, who became sultan with the title Sultan Mahmud Shah.⁶ From then on Perak was a vassal-state of Aceh. Many polities were conquered and subordinated to Aceh when Iskandar Muda (r.1607-1636) ruled it.⁷ Both Iskandar Muda and his successor, Iskandar Thani, saw themselves as king of kings demanding homage and tribute from their vassals.

² Wolters, *History, Culture and Region*, p. 29.

³ Kobkua Suwannathat Pian, *Thai-Malay Relations: Traditional Intra-regional Relations from the Seventeenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries* (Singapore and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 52.

⁴ See Michael Laffan, 'Dispersing God's Shadows – Reflections on the Translation of Arabic political Concepts into Malay and Indonesian', unpublished paper written for the project "History of translations into Indonesian and Malaysian Languages. n.d. p. 3. See also Marshall G.S Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilisation*, trans. by Mastuti Haji Isa dan Rosiah Abdul Latiff, *Kebangkitan Islam*, Jilid I, (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2004), p.326.#

⁵ Pierre-Yves Manguin, 'The amorphous nature of coastal polities in Insular SEA: restricted centres, extended peripheries', *Moussons*, 5(2002), 73-99, pp. 77-78.

⁶ Barbara W. Andaya, *Perak, Abode of Grace*, p. 43.

⁷ By 1621, Aceh had become the undisputed overlord of the northern half of coastal Sumatra whose control included Pedir, Pasai, Deli, Aru, in the east and Daya, Labu, Singkel, Barus, Batahan, Pasaman, Pariaman, Tiku and Padang in the east. Iskandar Muda subjugated Johor in 1613, and other key tin-producing areas on the Malay Peninsula, Pahang in 1617 and Kedah in 1619. Lombard, in Winarsih, *Kerajaan Aceh*, p. 132.

The fate of Perak was an example of the changing fortunes of states in a regional context characterised by fluidity and impermanence. Perak – Aceh relationship was a microcosm of interactions between powerful and weak states in Southeast Asia. Yet whereas most such interactions continued to be volatile, the vassal-overlord relationship between Aceh and Perak remained constant and governed relations between the two kingdoms for the rest of the seventeenth century. The Perak Affair, elucidated below, reveals the tensions and complexities of traditional inter-state relations when these were intruded upon and then affected by new in-roads from the European Companies, in this case, the VOC. Unlike other dramas that unfolded in the region, where traditional powers and overlords crumbled to be replaced by new masters, the Perak Affair discloses a story of resilience, in which traditional power relations survived for decades despite continuous pressure of circumstances that might have been expected to change the political and commercial rules of the game.

The Perak Affair explores the dynamics of inter-state relations within the context of this overlord-vassal paradigm during the reign of Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah. To what extent did she continue the policies of her predecessors? Did Aceh decline under her rule, and did Aceh lose her vassal state and her overlord status because of this weakened position, as more commonly claimed? There is some support for assent to this question, both in sources of the time and in current historical orthodoxy. Balthasar Bort, Governor of Melaka, reported that by 1678, “Aceh is impotent and has no appearance of once more attaining considerable power.”⁸ Barbara Andaya claimed that the murder of the VOC representatives in Perak in 1651 (explained in detail below) laid bare the extent to which Aceh’s control had weakened since Safiatuddin’s succession. B. Andaya asserted “the Queen had for some time been aware of the decline in her prestige and had earlier refused the Dutch inspection of Aceh ships leaving Perak with tin on the grounds that it would prejudice her sovereignty and diminish her absolute power in Perak at least in the eyes of Perak subjects.”⁹ She argued that Safiatuddin was weak because she was unable to force Muzaffar Shah, the then Sultan of Perak, to surrender the guilty parties to the Dutch. R.O. Winstedt was slightly kinder in his assessment of the Sultanah since he suggested that although she lost all her other vassals she was able to hold on to Perak

⁸ Richard O. Winstedt, ‘A History of Perak’ *Journal of Malayan Branch of Royal Asiatic Society*, 12 (1934), 18-77, p. 23.

⁹ B. Andaya, *Perak, Abode of Grace*, p. 46.

as a vassal. Winstedt claimed, “partly female rule, partly the growing power of the Dutch and their protection of Johor and her allies led to the surrender by Aceh of all her conquest in the Malay Peninsula except Perak.”¹⁰ A closer examination of the events that unfolded between Aceh, Perak and the VOC, revealed from Company officials’ report, illuminate a more powerful Aceh, a stronger and more binding overlord-vassal ties than is more commonly believed: ties that continued to bind despite the challenges that tended to sever. Contrary to B. Andaya’s claim that vassalage to Aceh had brought no benefits to Perak,¹¹ this very tie helped Perak to continue as a major tin producer and to reap profits for many more years.

Ties that bind: Inter-state relations under Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Thani.

Before dealing with Aceh-Perak relations under the Sultanah, a brief background of Aceh’s relations with other powers under her predecessors is in order. This not only serves to compare the leadership and management styles in the conduct of foreign relations but to trace the continuities and changes in the traditional ties between Aceh and her vassal states.

Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Thani maintained the hierarchical traditional ties of vassal-overlord relations by binding these states to Aceh through a mixture of military coercion, charisma, divinely sanctioned power, legitimacy through conquest and kinship ties. They demanded tribute and loyalty but provided less patronage and protection in return and at times, these relations were more exploitative and destructive, especially in the case of Iskandar Muda. Iskandar Muda did not hesitate to decimate the population of those vassals whom he suspected of trying to escape his clutches. He also depopulated the conquered polities by transporting their populace to Aceh. Unfortunately, he left most of these hostages to die hungry in Aceh.

The Aceh Sultans were quick to capitalize on the coming of new powers to get rid of old rivals, but they were not quick enough to adapt traditional concepts guiding inter-state relations and embrace new ones. They had no qualms allying themselves with

¹⁰ Winstedt, ‘A History of Perak’, p. 23.

¹¹ B. Andaya, *Perak, Abode of Grace*, p. 48.

a Christian power (the VOC) to achieve their aim of getting rid of the infidel Portuguese.¹² Iskandar Muda initiated the Aceh-Dutch alliance against Portuguese Melaka and Iskandar Thani revived this initiative, but finally, Iskandar Thani himself refused to seal it. He was so angry when he discovered that the VOC, under Governor General Antonio van Diemen, had signed a Treaty of Peace and Friendship with Johor whom he considered as Aceh's vassal without getting his permission first. To him, not only had Van Diemen violated diplomatic protocol by allying the Company with his mere vassal first before inviting him to join this alliance to conquer Melaka; worse, he had embarrassed and humiliated Iskandar Thani in the eyes of other Malay kings. His letter to the Governor revealed clearly his anger and hurt for being so slighted and dishonoured.¹³

Iskandar Thani became fearful and suspicious of the VOC, thinking that the Company was trying to get Johor's help to conquer Aceh next. Johor, under its new and very able **bendahara*, was already trying to shake off Aceh's dominance and pursued a more independent policy. Perhaps emboldened by Dutch promise of protection, as outlined in the Treaty of Friendship¹⁴, Johor even tried to reclaim its ancient rights over Pahang, another of Aceh's vassal. Angered by Johor's impudence, Iskandar Thani sent an armada to Pahang to reinstate his claim and contemplated attacking Johor. It was in the midst of these uncertainties that negotiations for an Aceh-VOC attack on Portuguese Melaka took place. Iskandar Thani's anger knew no bounds when at that moment he found out about a Johor-VOC alliance. In his rage, he refused outright to help the Dutch. He would continue with a joint-attack only if the VOC severed relations with Johor and Johor sent a delegation to Aceh to ask for forgiveness. Already drawn into a draining and protracted siege with Portuguese Melaka, and failing to obtain Iskandar Thani's support, the Dutch used Johor as subsidiary forces to defeat the Portuguese, but at much costs.

Partly owing to fear and partly in recoil from a slight to his ego and honour, Iskandar Thani had passed on a chance to ally itself with the VOC to attack Melaka. In contrast, Johor, armed with a new protector, in lieu of the treaty of friendship and

¹² This was unlike the agony the early Christian powers in Europe had about the legality of allying themselves with Muslim powers.

¹³ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1640, pp. 6-8.

¹⁴ The Company had signed a Treaty of Friendship and Alliance with Johor in 1606 (before Aceh conquered Johor) and this Treaty was renewed in 1639.

alliance with the Dutch, managed to free itself from Aceh's dominance and even managed to claim Pahang, another vassal of Aceh as its own. Iskandar Thani's failure to discard his ego lost him the opportunity to strike a deal with the VOC that could put the new balance of power in Aceh's favour. Instead, he placed Aceh in a rather precarious position at the time of his death in 1641.

Sultanah Safiatuddin's Volte-face

Sultanah Safiatuddin clearly wanted to establish friendship and alliance with the VOC. She decided to make use of the treaty system to effect new kinds of relations, in contrast to the traditional use of aggression to maintain power and a hierarchical system of inter state relations. Aceh's interests would now have to be pursued and safeguarded by using new tools of diplomacy where relations were based on mutual interest. The Sultanah and her elites realized that in the context of the new realities facing them, supernatural and sacrosanct powers of legitimacy, royal lineage and kinship ties, though important, were in themselves insufficient to order inter-state relations. New bases of legitimacy, peace and order were needed to regulate international relations and to conduct trade.

Sultanah Safiatuddin lost two vassal states in the first year of her reign, not so much of her own doing, but more, I argue, to tie loose ends that had already begun to unravel under her predecessor's reign. A few months after she came to power, she signed a written contract of peace with Johor with the mediation of the Dutch. Peace was solemnly proclaimed in public at the Grand Palace. Regarding Pahang, she saw the situation there as an almost *fait accompli* since the Laksamana who was sent to Pahang by Iskandar Thani had betrayed him and offered his allegiance to Johor instead. Unlike her husband, who was obsessing over the "cursed *boedjangh" who turned traitor and was devising military means to return Pahang to his fold, Sultanah Safiatuddin reversed her husband's policy. In her letter to Antonio van Diemen, she explained that "since all the Great Men and inhabitants in Pahang have rebelled against me... and...the Bendhara of Pahangh has handed over the country to Johor...Pahangh is now a land over which the

Captain will dispose as he likes.” She only requested for her weapons, ammunition and people to be sent back to Aceh.¹⁵

The Perak Affair

A few years later, in 1644, she would face another challenge to wrestle another vassal from her hold - Perak. The VOC after conquering Melaka was determined to make the port a commercial success, or at least, to make it pay for its own upkeep.¹⁶ The Company officials wanted to ensure that they inherited what they believed were Portuguese rights - one of which was the surrender of half of Perak's tin to Melaka at a fixed price. The problem was that these so-called rights existed merely in theory. After the Dutch conquest of Melaka, the VOC officials realised that in reality, Perak was channelling lucrative tin to Aceh instead and the kingdom was reaping the profits of the tin trade by selling the highly demanded tin to other traders at her port, the English, Indians and Asians. The tussle between Aceh and the VOC over control of the tin trade in Perak was long and drawn-out but it was a contest between equals. Unlike Aceh's experience with her Johor and Pahang vassal states, the Sultanah was successful in keeping her traditional overlord-vassal relations with Perak. In a reversal of her predecessors' policies, this relationship was based not so much on coercion, soul-stuff or prowess but more on mutual benefit. The Sultanah gaining from Perak's continued tribute of tin for decades to come and Perak, enjoying Aceh's patronage and protection to continue her profitable tin trade.

The VOC's main instruments to control the tin trade on the peninsula were to pressure the tin-producing areas to sign contracts with the Company and, when necessary, blockade them. On the 11 July 1642, the Company signed a contract with Kedah with stipulations for Kedah to deliver half of its tin to the Company traders at a fixed price and to forbid all other foreign traders without pass from Company authorities from trading in its port. A similar contract was signed on the 20 October 1643, with Ujong Salang, and on the 1 January, 1645, with Bangeri. Only Perak refused to sign a

¹⁵ NA, VOC 1141, ff.146R-149R, f.147V.

¹⁶ See Sinnappah Arasaratnam, 'Some notes on the Dutch in Malacca and the Indo-Malayan Trade 1641-1670', in *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 10.3 (Dec. 1962), 480-490, p. 481.#

contract with the Company saying that they had no right to do so since Perak was a dependency of Aceh.¹⁷ Frustrated with their failure to obtain enough tin, Van Diemen, the Governor-General, blockaded the Perak River in 1644 and 1645, allowing only Aceh and Perak vessels to pass. The Company stated that they blockaded Perak to claim what the Dutch alleged was the Company's right to half the tin of Perak, a right they believed was formulated from the Portuguese and now they should inherit.¹⁸

This blockade was ineffective and fruitless. Perak and Aceh vessels continued to bring tin from Perak to Aceh, where traders from India, ever willing to pay higher prices, bought tin. These Indian traders established themselves at Sumatra north coast and transported tin as subjects of the Acehnese Sultanah under the very eyes of the Dutch ship captains. Tin was exported from the Malay Peninsula to Aceh where Indian ships were already waiting and then from Aceh, these were transported to the more western parts of Asia. On the 24 March 1645, the Company sent an envoy, Arnold Vlamingh, to Perak to negotiate a contract but the Sultan again refused to conclude a contract on his own authority and referred Vlamingh to the Queen of Aceh.¹⁹ Whilst the VOC opened diplomatic channels, they maintained their blockade throughout. The Governor of Melaka, Van Vliet, wrote to the High Council in Batavia maintaining that the blockade of Perak was important because Perak was the prosperity of Aceh. As long as Perak flourished, Aceh was Melaka's ruin. He complained that through the supply of cloth by the Indians via Aceh to Perak and then to other areas in the Peninsula, nobody wanted to come to Melaka. He feared that because of this, Kedah too no longer wanted to maintain their contract. Jan Harmanszoon wrote to the Governor General on 25 February 1645, that Kedah and Perak decided to supply each other with cloth.²⁰ In 1646, the Company received 300 *baharen* of tin, half of what they received in 1645, furthermore, Kedah had allowed foreign traders to trade in Kedah once more.²¹

Antonio Van Diemen realised that in order to get to Perak's tin, he had to first negotiate with Aceh, as its overlord.²² He appointed Arnold Vlamingh to head this

¹⁷ See *Bouwstoffen voor de Geschiedenis der Nederlanders in den Maleischen Archipel* ed. by J. E. Heeres and P. A. Tiele (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1890-1895), p. xi. See B. Andaya, *Perak, Abode of Grace*, pp. 44-45.#

¹⁸ Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, p. xi. See Irwin, 'The Dutch and the Tin trade', in Tarling and Ch'en, p. 268.#

¹⁹ Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, p. xlv.

²⁰ Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, p. xlvi.

²¹ Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, p. xlvi.

²² This was in part the mistake made by Van Diemen earlier, when he lost the opportunity to ally with Aceh (a clearly preferred choice) as opposed to Johor against the Portuguese. Iskandar Thani saw this as a breach of diplomatic protocol where a vassal was approached behind the back of its overlord.

mission. On the 23 June 1645, when Vlaming arrived in Aceh, he was well received as usual, but he discovered that the Acehnese were not happy with the Dutch because of the Perak blockade and their actions in Sumatra West Coast.²³ The Acehnese and the Asian traders, especially those from India, bought pepper from Sumatra West Coast and transported them to Aceh. These Indian traders brought their manufactured goods to Aceh in exchange for tin and pepper and from Aceh exported cloth to the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra West Coast. Due to the exclusive nation treatment privilege granted to the Company by the Sultanah in 1641, the High Council in Batavia ordered that pepper from Sumatra West Coast must be brought to Batavia first and as long as the Company ships were not filled, no foreign ships could be allowed to take pepper. This order was so strictly followed that Vlamingh received news that Aceh ships, even those belonging to the Sultanah were accosted and the pepper forcefully unloaded from these ships.²⁴ Despite the Company's violation of the contract, which protected Acehnese rights to pepper based on its overlord position, the Sultanah honoured her promise of granting the Company exclusive nation treatment. During her negotiations with Vlamingh, the Sultanah renewed Dutch privileges in Sumatra West Coast but until the end of his visit, Vlamingh failed to obtain any contract for Perak except for the vague promise from the Sultanah to order the Sultan of Perak to deliver a good quantity of tin to the Company.

Two years on, Vlamingh, who was then the Governor of Melaka, wrote to his successor Jan Thijssen, that he had not received a **kati* from Kedah and from Perak, not more than 10 bahar whilst the Indian traders continued to transport 48,8000 pound of tin to Surat and from Perak alone they obtained 1500 bahar.²⁵ Vlamingh proposed a radical measure to force Indian traders to pay tolls in Melaka first before they could go to the tin quarters. Vlamingh wanted a new trade network to be between Mataram, Melaka and Batavia to rival the Surat, Aceh and Sumatra West Coast network. The Dutch in Melaka would obtain rice from Macassar, pepper from Sumatra East Coast, to be exchanged with cloth obtained from Palimbang and Andragiri. Other foreigners were forbidden to trade.²⁶

²³ For a detailed narrative of Aceh-VOC relations pertaining to the Sumatra West Coast politics see Chapter 4.

²⁴ Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, p. xlvii.

²⁵ Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, p. i.

²⁶ Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, p. xlix.

In December 1647, Jochum Roelofssoon Van Deutecom, was sent to Aceh to address what the officials termed as the alarming situation where the Acehnese were making extraordinary profit and appeared not interested to continue with our friendship and alliance.²⁷ The Acehnese allowed Muslim traders access to trade and tin in Perak and had shut the Dutch out.²⁸ The Sultanah of Aceh, the Dutch claimed, had forced their junior trader Liven van Rossen to give a pass for free passage to a small Muslim ship that left Aceh for Perak and returned with tin and other goods to Surat which Arent Barends was helpless to stop. The Dutch were sure that the Sultanah herself was making great profits from the tin trade. Van Deutecom was accompanied by twenty-four soldiers for this mission in Aceh to ensure that everything was in good order and discipline. He was assisted by Jan Harmanszoon, the senior trader in Aceh, Johannes Sassan and the junior trader Liven van Rossen. After the usual customary reception, Van Deutecom declared the desire of the Company to maintain the friendship and alliance with Aceh till eternity. Having done this, he asked the Sultanah to grant the Company's requests to trade in Perak and to get tin and preferential treatment over Muslims. The Company "requested earnestly for the Queen to give her clear opinion and send a short dispatch so that the Company could see clearly that they were given better purchases and given the whole tin trade to the exclusion of all other nations" in return for the Company's continued friendship. If the Company's situation regarding the tin trade did not improve, the Company "resolves not to stand this anymore and will move our office and will do all in our power to stop the Muslim traders and block the Perak River so that no tin could be exported. This is fair for the maintenance of our rights and reputation."²⁹

To appease Van Deutecom, the Sultanah sent two Acehnese envoys to Batavia to negotiate the tin trade of Perak. Even after intense negotiations, the Acehnese envoys refused to promise that a yearly fixed quantity would be delivered to the Company, certainly not the 600 bahar as Deutecom demanded. They argued that this would hurt the interest of the Sultanah; furthermore, there should be free competition between them and the Dutch. The claim that the Company were securing the rights that once belonged to the Portuguese made no impression on the Acehnese envoys. In an amorphous and

²⁷ NA, f.733R. Memorije voor den E.Jochum Roeloffs van Deutecom Raat van Indie gaende de legatie aende Coninghinne van Atchin met de jachten Zeerob, ijrslingen ende de fluijt den Engel over Malacca waer naer sijn E. Sich sal hebben te reguleren.

²⁸ NA, f.733V. Memorije voor den E.Jochum Roeloffs van Deutecom.

²⁹ NA, f.734V. Memorije voor den E.Jochum Roeloffs van Deutecom.

fluid environment such as in the Malay world, there was no such knowledge of fixed “legal rights or obligations” even less of inherited rights of previous overlords.³⁰

Besides pressuring the Acehnese to grant the VOC exclusive nation treatment in Perak, the Governor General, Cornelis Van Der Lijn,³¹ warned all the Captains of Muslim ships who had landed in Aceh not to appear there again, nor could they frequent Perak, Kedah and Ujong Salangh and the surrounding areas. The penalty was confiscation of cargo unless they had obtained passes from the Dutch chiefs in Surat, Coromandel and Pegu. They would also be fined if they went to Aceh and other tin quarters or they would be detained and brought to Melaka.³²

The Company however had no legal recourse to stop Muslim traders from frequenting Aceh since Aceh had not signed any treaty that granted the Dutch exclusive nation treatment in Aceh. In 1648, however, the Dutch found the legal excuse to stop Indian traders, especially those from Surat to enter Aceh and other tin producing areas in the Malay Peninsula. On the 19-20th April 1648, the Dutch factory in Surat was attacked, plundered and some Dutchmen were killed. In July, the Dutch went to Surat with a big fleet of ships to exact indemnity. This resulted in a Treaty³³, forced on the Suratis, which stipulated that Muslims traders from Surat, Bengal and other places, must leave Aceh, Perak, Kedah and Ujong Salangh or their ships would be seized and confiscated by the Dutch.³⁴

Muslim traders would be kept out of Aceh and other tin producing areas by the Company blockading the Perak River, stopping trade in Kedah and preventing Surat vessels from coming to Aceh. The Company would no longer respect Aceh’s autonomy over her harbour and Surat ships plying her harbour would be forcefully stopped.³⁵ The Company foresaw that there was to be no more rival traders in the surrounding areas around Melaka or in Aceh and by end of 1648, they would be able to procure enough tin not only for the whole of Persia but also to get enough supplies for Formosa. The oppercoopman Huibrecht Van den Broek was sent to Aceh in May 1648 to empty the

³⁰ Rene J. Barendse, *The Arabian Seas: the Indian Ocean world of the seventeenth century* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), p. 92.#

³¹ Cornelis van der Lijn was Governor General in Batavia from 1645-1650.

³² Bouwstoffen, p. li.

³³ This treaty was signed on 18th September 1649 between the Company and the Mughal Governor of Surat, Miermosa. The Company seized two large ships belonging to the Mughal Emperor with a cargo valued at 1.5 million guilders. Arasaratnam, ‘Some notes on the Dutch in Malacca’, p. 487.

³⁴ Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, p. lii.

³⁵ Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, p. liv.

factory and to make an impression on the Sultanah. The Company hoped that this break of relations and the emptying of the factory, would make the Acehnese fearful and realise the advantage the Company's trade could yield for their kingdom. This plan however, was to go hopelessly awry.

Truijtmans Missions to Aceh and Perak 1649-1652

Governor General Cornelis Van Der Lijn appointed the oppercoopman Johan Truijtmans as the Commissar to Aceh to carry out the Company's plans. He arrived in Aceh on the 13th of September 1649. Truijtmans found five ships- two English, one from Gujerat, one from Masulipatnam, one from Bengal plus two other vessels, one from Maldives and one from Malabar.³⁶ Aceh's harbour was busy despite the blockade imposed a year earlier.

On his arrival, Truijtmans reported that the Acehnese were not in a happy mood at all. One thousand armed men guarded the Aceh River and the Acehnese appeared hostile even preparing for war. This distrust for the Dutch was apparent enough when the Acehnese stationed a number of guards at the company's lodge to monitor the company's servants closely.³⁷ This suspicion and displeasure were due to several reasons: Firstly, the Dutch blockade of the Acehnese river; secondly, the continued blockade of the Perak River whereby the Sultanah's own ships could not enter or exit; thirdly the unusual delay in the return of the Acehnese envoys sent by the Sultanah to Batavia to discuss the Perak issue and finally, the hostile actions committed on a Malabar ship at Aceh's harbour by the Dutch patrolling vessels.³⁸ The Acehnese intercepted letters written to the Dutch resident in Aceh, Philip de Salengre, from Melaka. Because of this, Salengre was called to court and interrogated. Although he tried to give a good interpretation of the letters, the Laksamana chided him by explaining that now more people in Aceh were able to read Dutch and that the letters were proof of the

³⁶ Rapport substanteel aen d' Ed Heer Cornelis van der Lijn Gouverneur Generale ende Heeren Raad van India, over d'expeditie in Aetchijn en de Coninglijk Majestijt aldaer, gevolchlijk ende repective onderhorige plaetsen van Ticu, Priaman en Indrapoura, bij heur subalte Gouveneurs ende subjecten alle op de Sumatra Westcust door den oppercoopman Johan Truijtmans op 13en Augustij Anno 1649 van Batavia naer derwaerts gecommiteert. NA, VOC 1171, ff.180-191, f.182V.

³⁷ Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, p. 483.

³⁸ NA, ff.182V-183R. Rapport substanteel aen d' Ed Heer Cornelis van der Lijn.

Company's unfair trading practices, such as forbidding traders from trading and not wanting to pay tolls.³⁹ The Sultanah had asked the English to translate some of these letters and Truijtmán learnt that, according to the Company's translator, Abdul Latiff and the Maharaja Sri Maharaja⁴⁰, the Company's friend, the English warned the Acehnese that Truijtmán's mission should not be trusted.⁴¹

Sultanah Safiatuddin granted Truijtmán an audience on the 19th of September, a mere six days after his arrival, much sooner than the usual norm of two weeks, attesting to the worry the Acehnese had over recent events. Yet, despite the suspicions and recent tensions, the Sultanah was as impeccable in her hospitality and received Truijtmán excellently.⁴² Truijtmán reported that they were fetched and accompanied to court by Bintara Blangh, Baljouw Sabandar, the Naleer and the two recently returned envoys from Batavia who came together with Truijtmán, Sri Bidia Indra and Tonadja Radja, the Dutch skipper, Resident Salengre and bookkeeper, Brittsen. Fifty-two servants carried the Governor-General's letter, placed on a gold plate and carried on an elephant with a palanquin and gifts to court. The Sultanah welcomed Truijtmán's delegation and treated them with elephant fights and stage plays, but since it was fasting month, no food and drinks were served. The Queen excused herself for this and hoped that the Dutch would not blame her for not treating them with food. Later in the evening, she treated the Company officials with more singing performances at Court that was alight with candles. She treated them with sumptuous food served in gold plates and honoured them with betel-box. Later that night, Truijtmán and company were royally sent back to their lodge on elephants and horses. The Sultanah even presented them with a few horses for their own use. Although no official discussions took place, the Sultanah, as customary, already set the setting for an easing of tensions and a more conducive platform for discussions by sweetening the Company officials' palette.⁴³ Besides this description of warm welcome and delightful entertainments, another significant entry in Truijtmán's report during that audience day was that the two envoys from the Perak Sultan were also there and the Perak envoys presented the Sultan of Perak's letter to her

³⁹ NA, VOC 1171, ff.196-238, ff.247V-250V, f.200V. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Oppercoopman Johan Truijtmán September – November 1649.

⁴⁰ It appears that the Sultanah appointed the Kali (a friend of the Dutch) to this position. It is not known what happened to the anti-Dutch Maharaja Sri Maharaja.

⁴¹ NA, f.202R. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Oppercoopman Johan Truijtmán,

⁴² NA, f.184V. Rapport substanteel aen d' Ed Heer Cornelis van der Lijn,

⁴³ This was in contrast to Iskandar Thani's very hostile and violently angry stance in his reception of Jan de Meere after hearing about the Dutch alliance with his vassal, Johor.

Majesty.⁴⁴ Another interesting entry was the information provided by Posje Meloor, the company's former translator, now employed as the translator for the English. Truijtman wrote that out of his own initiative and in secret, how Posje Meloor, who was at Court yesterday, overheard the letters from the Governor-General and those from Perak read aloud in Court to the *orangkaya*. Posje Meloor had clearly heard and understood that the Sultan of Perak, Muzaffar Shah, was extremely opposed to the blockade of the Perak River and he needed her Majesty's help to redress and give him assistance on this issue.⁴⁵

Another audience day passed (partly because of the fasting month), before Truijtman could discuss urgent issues with the Sultanah. In the meantime, just like earlier envoys, Truijtman prepared to visit the *orangkaya* with gifts to facilitate the discussion of important matters at court. One such *orangkaya* was the Maharaja Sri Maharaja's closest follower, Raja Binthara. The Maharaja asked the Company officials to pay him a visit to conduct preliminary discussions. Truijtman wrote that the meeting took place in the house of the Binthara in secret, without the knowledge of the other *orangkaya*, under the cover of darkness. The meeting cleared some major misunderstandings although Truijtman had to wait for the next audience with the Sultanah to present his requests. To dispel the Acehnese main suspicion and fear that the Company was about to wage war against the kingdom, Truijtman explained why the Company patrolled Aceh's harbour, something they had never done before. This was because the Muslims in Surat had attacked and murdered Dutch people and had destroyed the company's lodge.⁴⁶ Thus, the Dutch patrol ships were keeping a close watch on their Surat enemies and the blockade around Aceh's harbour was not meant to prejudice the friendship between the Dutch and the Acehnese kingdom. Regarding the blockade of the Perak River, Truijtman reassured Raja Binthara that the Dutch desired no other aim but to execute the good intentions and the order of the Queen, which she had given to the Perak Sultan to allow the Dutch to procure tin, which Truijtman claimed, had not been properly obeyed. The Raja Binthara replied in a very friendly manner that he was very relieved to hear this and would keep the Sultanah informed so that the Company's requests and business could be executed in a calm manner.

⁴⁴ NA, f.205V. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Oppercoopman Johan Truijtman.

⁴⁵ NA, f.208V. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Oppercoopman Johan Truijtman.

⁴⁶ Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, p. 484.

On the 2nd of October 1649, Truijtmán appeared in front of the throne of Sultanah Safiatuddin and respectfully requested in substance what he had mentioned to Raja Binthara before. Truijtmán wrote that Her Majesty was very annoyed regarding the affair in Perak and the blockade of the Perak River, “even though I have not mentioned about them yet, this was asked repeatedly by the Queen. Her Majesty had taken the blockade of Perak to heart and showed public displeasure and addressed the court in an angry and harsh manner.”⁴⁷ She asked, “How come the Governor-General has now besieged my land so much so that my own vessels could not be allowed to enter and exit the Perak River?” Truijtmán further noted that in the presence of the Perak's envoys that had arrived in Aceh a few days before him, she said that she would not allow all the company's requests.⁴⁸ She commissioned and nominated a certain notable named Sri Maradja Lella, who would go to Perak together with Truijtmán, the Perak's envoys and her *boedjanghs* with a written **estemie* to the Sultan of Perak, Sultan Muzaffar Shah within these five days to redress the problem. She requested Truijtmán to provide a pass for her ministers and three of her vessels that would depart to Perak. She also promised to provide a written *estemie* to exclude or deny all other foreign traders from trading in Perak and all those without passes except those from Aceh.⁴⁹

Truijtmán wrote that his final request to her Majesty was to return all the intercepted letters that were now under her keep. In order to settle this affair, Truijtmán suggested that these letters be brought to court and in the presence of all people in front of the throne be read in public by the translator who had falsely repeated these letters.⁵⁰ Truijtmán complained that because of this intercepted letters, the Acehnese were monitoring company servants much to the affront of Dutch friendship. The Sultanah answered that since his arrival, all these suspicions had been cleared, passed and had been forgotten. She informed Truijtmán that her guards were no longer monitoring the Company servants. Nevertheless, she continued, although these suspicions had been cleared, and the company officials were no longer watched, the Dutch were still closely monitoring the Acehnese in her own harbour. She stated that the cause of the Acehnese fear- the two Dutch ships, the *Delfshaven* and the *Macareel* which arrived in Aceh on the 17th of October, patrolling Aceh's harbour without them knowing why, had not been

⁴⁷ NA, f.186R. Rapport substantieel aen d' Ed Heer Cornelis van der Lijn.

⁴⁸ NA, f.186V. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Oppercoopman Johan Truijtmán.

⁴⁹ NA, f.187R. Rapport substantieel aen d' Ed Heer Cornelis van der Lijn.

⁵⁰ Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, p. 489

addressed by Truijtman.⁵¹ Truijtman related that the Sultanah took this matter regarding the patrol and blockade of the Aceh River with utmost seriousness. She told Truijtman that she would rather go to war if the blockade of Aceh continued and they would not tolerate any longer the blockade of the Aceh and Perak River.⁵² She was certainly not pleased with Company's actions against foreign ships trading at her port either. The Sultanah complained, "in front of our own eyes the Dutch had shot a certain Malabar vessel that was anchored at our harbour."

On the 7th October 1649, both parties put aside temporarily all tensions due to the end of the fasting month and the beginning of the celebration of the Muslim Hari Raya Aidilfitri. All in the kingdom were celebrating and as customary, four hundred buffaloes were slaughtered and sumptuous feasts prepared to mark the ceremony. The Dutch were included in the celebrations. Maharaja Palawan, who was the envoy to Batavia last year, presented Truijtman with a big cow as a present for treating him well in Batavia.⁵³

On the 12th of October 1649, the Sultanah replied to the various requests made by Truijtman. Her resolutions were, namely, that she would distribute/return the intercepted letters as was found. She wanted Dutch patrol ships at the Acehnese harbour that were keeping watch on the Gujarati Moslem traders, to be taken farther away. The Sultanah promised to help and continue to favour the Company Resident and other officials who would remain in Aceh. Finally, the Sultanah would write a letter to the Governor-General to complain about the blockade of Perak and the monitoring of Aceh's harbour so that a solution could be found and these matters redressed. The Sultanah registered her displeasure strongly to Truijtman regarding the Company's blockade of the Perak River and their patrols of her own River and she demanded restitution. The Sultanah decided to send the envoy Sri Bidia Indra to Batavia to negotiate about the grievances with the aim of resolving these problems.

The Sultanah and her *orangekaya* were not happy regarding Truijtman's refusal to grant the Sultanah several passes for her and her officials' vessels to Perak. This was a small request in return for the many grants the Aceh court had bestowed on the Company. In a private request from the Raja Binthara to Truijtman, the Binthara again

⁵¹ Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, pp. 489-490.

⁵² NA, f.187V. Rapport substantieel aen d' Ed Heer Cornelis van der Lijn.

⁵³ NA, f.224R. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Oppercoopman Johan Truijtman.

registered his unhappiness at Truijtmán's refusal to grant passes. During Audience Day, when the Sultanah requested for a pass for her *orangkaya* Sri Maradjia Lella and the other nominated persons to Perak with three vessels, Truijtmán remained unrelenting. He replied that the passes would be given but warned that it was the Governor-General's wish that only one vessel would be allowed to return whereas the other two vessels would have to remain in Perak.⁵⁴ Two *orangkaya* were especially not happy with the Dutch, the Laksamana and his supporter, Paduka Tuan. Throughout Truijtmán's stay in Aceh they had both refused to see him on the excuse that they were ill and they had been absent at court when the Company officials were there. They even boycotted the Sultanah's fishing trip, organised before Truijtmán and his delegates departed.⁵⁵

Truijtmán's departure did not leave a good taste at the Acehnese court. Whilst the Sultanah accommodated the Company officials, none was returned. Besides the unhappiness with the passes, the Sultanah had requested that as a first step to redress the anger over the Dutch patrol of Aceh's harbour, the two patrol ships should depart together with Truijtmán. During the last meeting with the Sultanah before his departure, the Sultanah asked why the ships had remained in her harbour especially when she no longer kept guard over the Company officials. To which Truijtmán replied that they were keeping watch of the Gujerati Muslims who were their enemies. The Sultanah asked, "if the Gujeratis were the enemies of the Dutch, why must you monitor our harbour?" Should you not blockade and patrol outside Surat's harbour instead, where your enemies are, not here to the aversion and terror of my people?" Truijtmán did not seem to sense the resentment against this action and the seriousness and urgency of the Sultanah's request. He merely replied that in case her Majesty was displeased, she should write to the Governor-General and informed him about it. Upon hearing this, the Laksamana and the Sri Paduka Tuan who finally decided to attend business at court regarding the Company's affairs responded by saying, "there is no sincere friendship when men seek strange ways to become enemies." They continued, "you should ask yourself why you need to blockade a friend's harbour and why we should continue to maintain that friendship, it is better to just say what your real intentions are." Here, the Maharaja Sri Maharaja interjected and dissipated the tension by some friendly remarks and reiterated that Truijtmán had already explained the Company's position clearly

⁵⁴ NA, f.237V. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Oppercoopman Johan Truijtmán.

⁵⁵ NA, f.236V. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Oppercoopman Johan Truijtmán.

enough. Truijtman reported that the Sultanah still treated him royally before his departure at court but she made her displeasure known by presenting him with a copper dagger. The Sultanah excused herself for the small value of the dagger giving Truijtman's hasty departure as the cause.⁵⁶

The final exchange between Truijtman and the *orangkaya* considered as the Company's friends was telling in revealing the tensions at court and how far the Acehnese viewed the Company with suspicion.⁵⁷ A day before Truijtman's departure, he together with the Resident Salengre, went to court to fetch the Queen's letter. There he met with the Company's friends, at the *orangkaya's balai*, the Maharaja Sri Maharaja⁵⁸ with his good friend, Radia Binthara and his son-in-law the Maradia de Radia, together with two or three **bintharas* and the appointed envoys Sibidia Indra and Radia Moedeliar. While they were sitting and eating, presented with the Queen's *suassa* betelbox, the Maharaja requested the Governor-General for a speedy return of her Majesty's envoys once the business between the Company and the Acehnese had been settled. He signalled to Truijtman how important this mission was in order to make or break the friendship between Aceh and the Company. He said, "now or never you must succeed, that the desirability between us must be handled, seeing that her Majesty more than ever, regarding Perak, henceforth, had allowed no other foreigners to trade there and that the tin in Perak remained only for her Majesty and the Company." The Radia Binthara added, "the affair now remains in God's hands and the outcome of this delegation whether it ends in the maintenance of friendship or in war, because we have contributed in all ways towards the conservation of this friendship."⁵⁹ The Maharaja concluded by reassuring the Company officials that they had the favour of the Sultanah and thus should not doubt whether she would change the pre-eminences granted to them.

When Truijtman left Aceh, he managed to secure some verbal promises regarding the Company's new prerogatives for the tin trade in Perak. The Sultanah had agreed that only the Company and Aceh could trade in Perak and henceforth no European and Indian traders were to be allowed in Perak. This provision was included in her written mandate to the Sultan of Perak. She then sent her own envoys to

⁵⁶ NA, f.248V. Dagh-Register gehouden bij den Oppercoopman Johan Truijtman.

⁵⁷ Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, p. 496.

⁵⁸ The Sultanah had appointed the pro-Dutch Lebei Kita Kali as the Maharajah Sri Maharajah in 1644. The Kali's son took over his position. It is not known what happened to the earlier Maharajah, probably he died. One problem with the VOC records is that they do not provide individual names, only titles.

⁵⁹ Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, p. 497.

accompany Truijtman to Perak to negotiate the contract with the Sultan. After which her envoys were to return to Aceh and then proceed to Batavia to conclude and ratify the contract. On the 11th of August 1650, Truijtman arrived in Perak and reported that the Sultan accepted the Sultanah's order. A contract was then signed between the Sultan and the Company representatives on the 15th August 1650. Governor General van der Lijn wrote to the *Heeren Zeventien* that the Sultan of Perak acted with pleasure and satisfaction and readily submitted to the disposition of the Acehnese Majesty. He added that the exclusion of all other foreigners in Perak as well as Sumatra West Coast granted by the Queen of Aceh was extremely favourable to the company.⁶⁰ In his Dagh-Register, Truijtman mentioned that although the Sultan of Perak generally agreed with most of the points, he was not happy with the Company's request to a fixed price of tin and toll-free privilege on tin.⁶¹ The Sultan stressed that this old custom must be respected. After nine days in Perak, Truijtman departed for Aceh on the 19th of August 1650 and arrived in September 1650.

Trouble in the Acehnese Court

After the seemingly smooth reception in Perak, Truijtman brought the Sultan's letter to the Sultanah. When he arrived, he found the Acehnese once again in a state of agitation and confusion. This was because the yachts *Delfshaven* and *Macareel*, were still blockading and patrolling Aceh's harbour keeping watch over what the Company claimed were Surat ships. This action had an adverse effect on Aceh trade for that year. Truijtman reported that the trade had greatly changed because of the suspension of activities of Muslim traders, bringing about scarcity of cloth and an increase in price.⁶² The Acehnese were also angry because Dutch officials mistreated their envoys to Perak by accusing them of not having proper passes and by the Company's continued blockade of the Perak River.

Because of this trouble and humiliation, the Laksamana and the Paduka Tuan decided to make their move against the Company and the faction of the *orangkaya* keen

⁶⁰ *Generale Missiven*, Vol. 2, 1639 to 1655, p. 457.

⁶¹ NA, VOC1175, ff.305-320. Origineel rapport van den oppercoopman Johan Truijtman in dato 13 Jan 1651. Bijlagen tot vorenstaend rapport, 1651. NA, ff.321-328, f.307R.

⁶² NA, ff.307R-307V. Origineel rapport van den oppercoopman Johan Truijtman.

to maintain Company's interest in Aceh, a few days before Truijtmán's arrival. Truijtmán reported that he heard that they publicly reproached the Maharaja Sri Maharaja and accused him of aspiring to be after the throne using the Dutch as accomplices.⁶³ Truijtmán related that the Laksamana and his followers were trying to strip the Maharaja Sri Maharaja of his position as the first in rank in the Council by spreading lies about him to arouse the fear and suspicions of the Sultanah and the rest of the *orangkaya*.⁶⁴ Truijtmán wrote, in the presence of the Queen, the Laksamana libeled his enemy. Nevertheless, the Maharaja remained calm and unbelievably patient, stoically enduring this incident. The Acehnese court was waiting for the Governor General's letter and his advice regarding the problem in Perak. Truijtmán believed that with this letter from the Governor, all the accusations and lies concocted against the Maharaja could be proven wrong and he could once again be elevated at court. As for now he continued to be suspect. Indeed, Truijtmán reported that just before his arrival, the Maharaja had gone on an elephant hunt. It was believed to make it easier for him not to face the Dutch delegation and be put in a difficult position.⁶⁵

A few days after Truijtmán's arrival, the Governor General's letter and gifts were brought to court on audience day with the Queen. Truijtmán reported that he found a very hostile court and the Maharaja's followers were very silent.⁶⁶ Where a little diplomacy and sensitivity could have helped ease tensions, Truijtmán was instead arrogant and defensive. Being the merchant that he was, he immediately proceeded to demand new privileges. He wanted royal consent for the purchase of some elephants and requested the customary visits to the *orangkaya* so that he could discuss Company's business. His note in his Dagh-Register, demonstrated his total lack of diplomatic finesse and sensitivity, "Wholly unexpectedly," he wrote, "Her Majesty promptly denied this request and with such violent demeanor." The Sultanah also postponed Truijtmán's visits to the *orangkaya* as a sign of displeasure and to delay the execution of the Company's business.⁶⁷ Truijtmán concluded that all the resistance and hostility from the Acehnese was due to the "malicious party" at court. He continued to report that the Queen gave "frivolous" reasons and "futile objections" to his request to purchase

⁶³ NA, f.308R. Origineel rapport van den oppercoopman Johan Truijtmán.

⁶⁴ NA, f.308R. Origineel rapport van den oppercoopman Johan Truijtmán.

⁶⁵ NA, f.308V. Origineel rapport van den oppercoopman Johan Truijtmán.

⁶⁶ NA, f.308V. Origineel rapport van den oppercoopman Johan Truijtmán.

⁶⁷ NA, f.309R. Origineel rapport van den oppercoopman Johan Truijtmán.

elephants, saying that during the time of her father Marhom Makota Alam, the Company never bought nor exported any elephants. Furthermore, she argued that she had given the Company enough privileges in Sumatra West Coast and Perak to the exclusion of all other foreign traders, European and Indian. The Sultanah concluded that the Company officials should be contented and should not ask for new demands yearly. Truijtmán did not believe the Sultanah; instead, he saw these as mere excuses. The real important reason, Truijtmán suspected, was the Muslim trade from Masulipatnam and Bengal whose traders since time immemorial had bought a great number of elephants yearly, which brought great profits to the Acehnese Queen and her *orangkaya*. In addition, they received much profit from the important toll and other heavy duties imposed on this trade.⁶⁸ Besides the Sultanah's outright rejection of Truijtmán's new requests, Truijtmán had to face more problems. Truijtmán complained that the "the malicious faction" led by the Laksamana, seeing their persuasions were taken into consideration by her Majesty, spoke out against the company's rising position. They advocated that the Sultanah and the rest of the *orangkaya* should annul even the company's existing prerogatives, giving the reason that the whole court had never consented to these privileges in the first place. He added that the Dutch had proven themselves unworthy of such privileges by their evil deeds that now, it was time for the Dutch to make their way out.⁶⁹

By this time, Truijtmán's patience had run out and he was spitting venom at the anti-Dutch faction in his notations in his Dagh-register, calling the Laksamana base and vile and his followers-crazy-headed and spiteful (*dol-koppigen wrevel moedigen*). As for the Sultanah, Truijtmán wrote that she was to be pitied/deplored because she appeared to have given the Laksamana faction so much hearing that at a certain time Her Majesty's would have no own respect.⁷⁰ She gave so much faith to their bad proposals that she would be persuaded to do things, he continued. He warned the Sultanah of his intention to absent himself for two times from court as a sign of his displeasure. Truijtmán believed that this threat would give Her Majesty more time and faith to think about the affair.

⁶⁸ NA, VOC1175, ff.305-320. Origineel rapport van den oppercoopman Johan Truijtmán in dato 13 Jan 1651. NA, ff.321-328. Bijlagen tot vorenstaend rapport, 1651. Bijlagen tot vorenstaend rapport, 1651, NA, ff.323V-324R.

⁶⁹ NA, ff.310R-310V. Origineel rapport van den oppercoopman Johan Truijtmán.

⁷⁰ NA, ff.310V-311R. Origineel rapport van den oppercoopman Johan Truijtmán.

In the meantime, the Maharaja and his followers did not sit still. Not a day passed, Truijtman wrote, when the good party did nothing. The work was advanced through messages sent secretly by messengers on horses to the Maharaja. As a result, the threats that were spun by the malicious party ended. Truijtman did not describe how the Maharaja was once more favored at the expense of the anti-Dutch faction. Perhaps, the Maharaja's return from his hunt accompanied by a long row of elephants for the Sultanah helped him to regain his respect and prestige from her and the other elites. He was no longer held in suspect. But even in his absence, and even when the court was dominated by the Laksamana and his followers, the Sultanah maintained her favor for the Dutch, proving Truijtman wrong. True, the Sultanah had rejected the Company's demands for new privileges, but she remained firm in accommodating the Dutch regarding the tin trade in Perak. She confirmed her earlier promise of excluding all other traders in Perak except for the Acehnese and the Dutch. The Queen specified that no other vessels would go to Perak but the Company's and the Queen's and two each from her *orangkaya*. The Sultanah ratified the 15th of August 1650 contract and allowed new concessions regarding the tin trade. She agreed to allow the fixing of the price of tin at 31¼ in *spetie* per bahar (the market price fluctuated between 31-43 per bahar).⁷¹ She did not allow, however, toll-free privileges for the Company in Perak, a privilege that the Sultan of Perak himself was not willing to give since this was his and his *orangkaya*'s main source of revenue. The Sultanah was "wholly horrified" by this request and she sustained that this would greatly prejudice her sovereignty and lessen her authority in the eyes of her Perak subjects. She said that the Dutch should not complain about this since now they could obtain most parts of the tin.⁷² She also refused to allow the fixing of the amount of tin the Company could obtain. Truijtman, with the wise counsel of his good friend, the Maharaja, decided not to press this demand. The Maharaja explained to Truijtman that the Sultanah did not want to stain her worthiness as a queen by promising something she doubted, what more something she could not deliver.⁷³ She could not promise an amount since this did not stand in the fields in Aceh nor in the wind but was found in the mountains in Perak where whether in dry or wet years nobody could be certain of its produce.

⁷¹ NA, f.315R. Origineel rapport van den oppercoopman Johan Truijtman.

⁷² *Generale Missiven*, Vol. 2, p. 463.

⁷³ NA, f.313R. Origineel rapport van den oppercoopman Johan Truijtman.

After this episode, gone were all the venom and criticisms of the Sultanah. Truijtmán reported that the Company not only had the Queen's will and generosity but also enjoyed her good meaning.⁷⁴ He added, "although the *orangkaya* could sustain their influence, she still had enough authority to decide over our affairs, although her authority over Perak and the Malay people may have declined." Sultanah Safiatuddin, wrote Truijtmán, said in her own words: "Commander, we shall give the order to Sultan Muzaffar Shah that only the Dutch and Acehnese could trade and export tin from Perak as much as they could obtain." She also said, "since you came here with your family last year to stay, you could see for yourself our good intentions."⁷⁵ The Sultanah continued, "It would be good if you and your family could come here to stay. We shall write to the Governor General so that the Muslims could come here to trade and would not be expelled. If there were new troubles then we would take care of it. I will recommend to the Governor General that I would rule my land in peace as my predecessors had done."⁷⁶ Truijtmán reported, from here on, the displeasures ceased, the old friendship continued and the different settlements were concluded under the recommendation of a good and sincere Queen. The Dutch were allowed to use the old English quarters for their new lodge.⁷⁷ The Sultanah then sealed this agreement with her blessed words *Zalla Talla* (Insya Allah/God Willing) and this was confirmed by all the *orangkaya* together with all their followers with the word "*daulat*"⁷⁸ in recognition of her sovereignty. In his report to the *Heeren Zeventien*, the Governor General wrote, only from the good pleasure and affection from the Queen herself that Commissioner Truijtmán received respect and good treatment and only later the whole court happened to agree.⁷⁹ Truijtmán concluded his report of this episode by noting that his respect at court had been restored and Her Majesty had addressed his just complaints over things of importance so as not to subvert their reciprocal and trustworthy old alliance arising from some evil intent of some people with small abilities.⁸⁰ Truijtmán boasted that his actions and threats had resulted in the Sultanah's rejection of the "audacious (*stouten*) Laksamana who had come to the extreme."

⁷⁴ NA, f.313V. Origineel rapport van den oppercoopman Johan Truijtmán.

⁷⁵ NA, f.314R. Origineel rapport van den oppercoopman Johan Truijtmán.

⁷⁶ NA, f.314V. Origineel rapport van den oppercoopman Johan Truijtmán.

⁷⁷ NA, f.312R. Origineel rapport van den oppercoopman Johan Truijtmán.

⁷⁸ *Doulat* or *daulat* means the sovereignty or authority of a ruler. If this word was uttered by subjects, it means acceptance of the ruler's sovereignty or command.

⁷⁹ *Generale Missiven*, Vol. 2, p. 463.

⁸⁰ NA, f.311V. Origineel rapport van den oppercoopman Johan Truijtmán.

Truijtman's conclusions could not be further from truth. His assessment of the Sultanah proved to be biased, judging her to be weak and under the influence of the "malicious faction" when she had denied his request and describing her as strong when she continued to accommodate Company's interests. Despite the strong resentment against the Dutch at court and the absence of the Maharaja, she was able to hold her own and stuck to her stance of the dangers of escalating tensions with the Dutch and the importance of maintaining good relations with the Company. She did not annul any of the privileges granted to the Company as suggested by the Laksamana. Neither did she grant all of the demands of the Company after the return of the Maharaja. Indeed, she might have had a say in the plan of temporarily absenting the Maharaja on an elephant hunt whilst the anti-Dutch faction were venting their displeasures. She perhaps had been active in liaising with the Maharaja whilst he was away to ensure that by the time of his return with a row of elephants to boot, he would be rehabilitated and honored and the anti-Dutch faction weakened. After the Maharaja's return, he and his followers supported the Sultanah and the contract was ratified.

To demonstrate that all was well, the Sultanah presented Truijtman with three bahar pepper and two bahar tin and instructed her four Council members of the *Rijxraad*, the Governor of Elephants and other officials at court, eleven in total, to extend an exceptional welcome to Truijtman, which according to Truijtman, they did one after another. Sultanah Safiatuddin herself, with her usual impeccable hospitality, closed the above affair by treating him in an extraordinary manner. She invited Truijtman for the second time to the innermost court and seated him in front of the throne. Before a sumptuous meal was laid, he was treated to a very beautiful Javanese dance, in which 26 young girls and 28 young boys took part expensively dressed and made up. There after, Truijtman continued, when he was about to depart, Her Majesty's letter and gifts were reverently presented.

Truijtman sailed to Perak on the 9th of November, 1650 and arrived in Perak on the 6th of December. Notwithstanding the Sultan being sick, the Queen's *estemie* was brought to the Audience Hall by Acehnese *boedjangh* and was accepted. After some discussions with the Perak *orangkaya*, they refused to agree to the fixed price of tin at 31¼ per bahar but instead wanted it increased to 40 per bahar. They were also not inclined to expel the Muslim traders who had resided in Perak. Here, Truijtman reported that the Acehnese *boedjangh* returned to Aceh to ask for advice. It appeared that after this

second consultation with Aceh, the Perak court elite finally agreed that the Muslims traders and residents in Perak would depart from there and that the price of tin was to be fixed to 31¼ per bahar tin.⁸¹ After this agreement was struck, Truijtmans departed from Perak to Melaka and then to Batavia. Despite these concessions, the three-year siege of Perak continued.

The Governor General reported to the *Heeren Zeventien*, despite the initial hostilities faced by Truijtmans from the Laksamana and his followers, never an envoy of the company was so well received in Aceh. He continued that the court was very pleasant and charming and the Sultanah was honourable and generous presenting gifts for the Governor-General, 46 bahar tin and for Truijtmans 3 bahar pepper, 2 bahar tin, a dress, a sword and a *keris* together with the Queen's letter to the Governor General.⁸² Her Majesty continued to govern a calm government; she was affectionately disposed to the Company and had effectively shown her interest in the company's welfare regarding the trade in Perak. In addition, she was keen to continue the friendship and alliance, so long maintained that no differences between the Company and her Majesty remained.⁸³ The Queen even proposed that our envoy go with his family to Aceh to take residents there. More importantly, the Governor continued, the Sultan and the *orangkaya* of Perak accepted the Queen's *estemie* and confirmed the previous articles of 15 of August 1650 contract regarding Perak's tin trade.

The above assessment was in contrast to what Truijtmans confided to the *Opperhoofd* (Head Resident) in Bengal. He wrote, the Acehnese friendship remained as treacherous and unstable as their character. We can justly perceive that no matter how much courtesy and humility we show from our honest alliance, this arrogant people appear to become more bold and spiteful. He warned that it was important to lift the exceptional great anger, envy and discords under the *Rijxraaden* and the *orangkaya*, who sufficiently could rule and exceed one above the other in power, since these discords were not good or to the advantage of the Company. Her Majesty, he noted, was driven like the wind which often resulted in obstacles that otherwise could be easily executed.⁸⁴

⁸¹ NA, f.317R. Origineel rapport van den oppercoopman Johan Truijtmans.

⁸² *Generale Missiven*, Vol. 2, p. 463.

⁸³ *Generale Missiven*, 1651, p. 519. NA, Generale Missiven Manuscript, ff.91R-91V.

⁸⁴ NA, ff.326R-326V. Truijtmans assessment of the Acehnese in the conclusion of his letter to the Opperhoofd in Bengal.

*More Troubles at Aceh's Court*⁸⁵

True to Truijtmán's warnings, the VOC officials in Batavia received news from a freeburgher vessel that the whole court of Aceh was in an uproar. The Laksamana, with two or three of his accomplices together with some members of the council had rebelled against the first Councillor, (*oppersten rijxraet*) Maharaja Sri Maharaja, and publicly accused him of wanting to seize the throne with the help of the Dutch.⁸⁶ This caused such a great revolt at court under the *orangkaya* and their followers that foreigners had no audience or access to the court for a long-time and it was uncertain whether the Queen was sick, dead or alive. The Governor reported that the Laksamana with his followers, through sly practices, had gained sufficient control of the court, that in the mentioned confusion, Maharaja de Raja, son-in-law of Maharaja Sri Maharaja, who was riding an elephant to court was shot to the head and died. Maharaja Sri Maharaja, with the help of some people remained alive but he was stripped of his weapons, elephants, his charges and authority and was emplaced to live as a private person. The Laksamana cruelly tormented the envoys, Sibi d'Indra and Radja Modliaer who were in Batavia during the previous year (1650), and accused them of conspiring with the Dutch to sell Aceh to the Company. He accused them of trying to bring soldiers and ships to Aceh to install the Maharaja Sri Maharaja as King. Finally, they were set free but all their followers, women, children and slaves were confiscated and like the Maharaja Sri Maharaja, were installed but without any authority. There was still no news about whether the Queen was alive or not.

The Massacre of VOC officials in Perak

Shortly after this revolt in the court of Aceh, officials in Batavia received news from Melaka about the massacre of Company officials and servants in Perak.⁸⁷ The

⁸⁵ I believe that this revolt took place between the end of 1650 to early 1651, since this revolt took place shortly after Truijtmán's departure from Aceh on the 9th of November 1650 and before the Perak massacre of April 1651.

⁸⁶ This news was received on the 13th and 25th August 1651, *Generale Missiven*, 1651, pp. 519- 520.

⁸⁷ *Generale Missiven*, 1651, p. 519. NA, *Generale Missiven Manuscript*, f.92V- f.93R.

**ondercoopman* Philip de Salengre, the company's resident in Aceh, stated in his letter⁸⁸ that five different vessels from Perak were in Aceh at present and he learned from them that the Dutch in Perak were building a very big house which appeared to be more of a fortress made not only of wood but stone. The Sultan of Perak then sent a vessel to Aceh to request that the Queen gave the order to chase the Dutch out of these quarters. Salengre believed that since the Sultan was an honourable soldier and a trustworthy subject, the Sultanah would surely grant his request. Salengre suspected that the Queen would send a special vessel to Perak with the order so that the Sultan would be bold and he could do something against the Company. Salengre however, could not ascertain whether these murders were by those from Perak only or whether they got the permission and help from Aceh. He however, suspected that without the given consent from Aceh, the Perak people would not have dared to undertake this action.⁸⁹

Ambush of VOC officials in Perak

After the contract regarding Perak was concluded in 1650, the **coopman* Michiel Curre, who had resided for some years in Perak, was commissioned in April 1651 to go there with the task of building the company lodge. Michiel Curre, together with his wife were sent to Perak carrying the governor of Melaka's letter to the Sultan. From early advice, the Governor of Melaka was already apprehensive over the situation in Perak. Shortly after the departure of Commissioner Truijtmán from Perak, troubles began to break out, caused by some foreigners who had stayed there for a long time and were not willing to leave. It also appeared that because of the problems over some provisions in the contract, the company obtained little tin. The Sultan and *orangkaya* in Perak who signed a contract with Truijtmán last year appeared to be very unwilling to accept and execute the contract. They were unhappy about the clause requiring them to expel Muslim traders who had resided there for a long time. Furthermore, the authority and influence Aceh had over Perak was so great that they were able to effectively direct affairs to their benefit but none for the company. For example, one of the Company's soldiers who was sick and walking on the street was attacked by an Acehnese *boedjangh*.

⁸⁸ This letter was dated April 1651; it arrived in Melaka on 2nd of July and later arrived in Batavia on the 25th of August 1651.

⁸⁹ NA, Generale Missiven Manuscript, f.93V.

He threw the soldier to the ground and with his foot on the soldier's chest, the *boedjangh* made threats. He also threatened another *ondercoopman* Nicolas Mombers whom he later murdered. This was because a certain Kling from Choromandel had told the Acehnese *boedjangh* that Nicolas Mombers had a lustful or carnal (*vleeselijke*) conversation with his concubine. The Acehnese *boedjangh* escaped these crimes without any punishment. All these incidents made the Governor of Melaka uncertain about the situation in Perak.⁹⁰

On the 6th of May 1651, the yacht, *Grijpskerken*, involved in the siege of Perak, initially reported that all the company's crew from the **chialoup* the *Velsen* and *Waterhont*, thirty Dutch men, together with the *coopman* Curre and his wife were massacred and the goods from the company's warehouse were looted. Later, it was discovered that the *coopman* Curre and his wife were protected by a few of the Perak *orangkaya*. It was reported that this cruel act was in retaliation to the Dutch officials' building of a fortress instead of a lodge and had secretly brought a chest of canons on land. The Governor in Melaka could not ascertain the truth of these reports since no Perak person wanted to speak to them although the Company had flown a white flag at the Perak River. The Governor then decided to send a certain Muslim to Perak with the letter to the Sultan to confirm what happened, what he wanted to do next and to wait for his answer. While waiting for this answer, on the 2nd of July a certain Muslim trader arrived in Melaka bringing a letter from Curre, dated 16 of June 1651 from Perak. He reported how the massacre begun in Perak.

He wrote that from time to time the Sultan had listened to malicious rumours that the company were building a fortress and brought canons on land. The king accepted these rumours without ascertaining the truth. In April 1651 when Curre was bringing the Governor's letter to court, some Malays from the court attacked him. Eight soldiers who defended him were thereafter attacked by a mob. The soldiers, together with other people from the *Velsen* and the *Waterhont* and another small vessel were all massacred, including all the other Dutchmen who were present there except Curre, his wife, one Assistant, one carpenter, two sailors, four hired help from Melaka, the carpenter's wife and their three children escaped death. Altogether twenty-seven men died, the remainder were all placed in different houses of the *orangkaya* - Curre in the house of the *Orangkaya Besar*, his wife and assistant at the *Shahbandar's* and the rest at

⁹⁰ *Generale Missiven*, 1651, pp. 511-512.

other places.⁹¹ Curre reported that he did not know whether it was the Sultan who did not want to co-operate with the Company or whether this order for the murder was obtained from Aceh. He also did not know whether the King had begun to regret this act after discovering that there were no canons brought to land. Therefore, an investigation must be carried out and if the murder was planned then the punishment of the murderers would be justified.⁹²

Commissioner Truijtmán was appointed for the third time to Aceh to find out who the real mastermind of the Perak murders was and to defer to the High Court in Aceh to prove the Company's innocence and their unwillingness to break the alliance and friendship with the crown of Aceh. Truijtmán was also tasked to investigate the current state of the kingdom, whether the Sultanah was still alive and her earlier authority still intact or whether the kingdom as rumoured, had been usurped by the Laksamana.⁹³ How much responsibility did she bear for the Perak murders? If she was responsible, then she had made the Acehnese enemies of the Dutch.⁹⁴ If treated as enemies, her harbour would be blockaded, foreigners expelled and nobody would be allowed to enter until things were back to the Company's full satisfaction. Furthermore, those in Perak who committed the murders would expect punishment from the Company depending on whether the Court of Aceh was wholly ignorant or innocent. If the Acehnese court was innocent, then it was Perak who had now made themselves not only formal enemies of the Dutch nation but had also rebelled against their Acehnese overlord. The Acehnese then, as overlords, must give the Company the assurance that the Company officials imprisoned be released, Company's losses compensated, murderers and their accomplices be punished by corporal punishment if necessary, be it the *orangkaya* or the Sultan himself and trade to be continued. All these, as far as the Company was concerned, were necessary to maintain justice and respect.⁹⁵ The Governor General was however not sure of the outcome of these measures against Aceh, especially how these might affect the Company's privileges at Sumatra West Coast.⁹⁶ Because of the need to preserve the Company's privileges in Sumatra West

⁹¹ *Generale Missiven*, 1651, pp. 511-512

⁹² *Generale Missiven*, 1651, p. 513.

⁹³ *Generale Missiven*, 1651, p. 514.

⁹⁴ *Generale Missiven*, 1651, p. 515.

⁹⁵ NA, *Generale Missiven Manuscript*, f.94V.

⁹⁶ NA, *Generale Missiven Manuscript*, f.95R.

Coast, he recommended a more conciliatory stance when dealing with the Acehnese. Truijtmán was to be responsible for the success of this mission.

Sultanah Safiatuddin's Maturing Years: Politics of Consolidation

Part II- Dealing with her Orangkaya

Truijtmán's Mission to Perak and Aceh to settle the problem of the Perak Murders

Truijtmán departed from Melaka on the 4th of September 1651 with four companies of soldiers, seven vessels armed and manned. He arrived in Perak at the end of September 1651 and asked for the release of the Dutch prisoners and the sending of the Sultan and the Temenggong to Melaka.⁹⁷ Again, the Company had failed to follow Malay diplomatic protocol and predictably, those from Perak gave the reason that this could not be done unless they received permission and orders from Aceh. Truijtmán thus departed from Perak on the 11th of October 1651 for Aceh and arrived on the 28th of October 1651. The Acehnese were ready for the Dutch delegation's arrival. They were met with people running and the showing of joy and within four days (which was deemed extraordinary by the Dutch considering the usual delays), Truijtmán together with the Governor General's letter and gifts, were fetched to court to have an audience with the Sultanah. The Company officials who were previously uncertain whether the Queen was dead or alive found her in good health. Truijtmán reported to the Governor General that the whole court was on the firm belief, or that they pretended and maintained that they did not know about the affair in Perak. He found a new "reformed" (*gereformeerde*) court that was constituted after the Laksamana's coup against the Maharaja. The Maharaja Sri Maharaja who was earlier stripped of all his authority remained disgraced. His son-in-law, the Governor of Elephants, and their followers who were friends of the Dutch were massacred. The Raja Binthara, the Maharaja's right hand man, had died, and the envoys who recently went to Batavia, Sri Bidia Indra and Raja Modlier were stripped of all their houses and slaves on the accusation

⁹⁷ NA, Generale Missiven Manuscript, f.749R.

that they and their accomplices had sold Aceh to the Dutch. Truijtmán, suspected that this new court would not last long and would be transformed in a short time.⁹⁸

Despite the court transformation where most of the more influential *orangkaya* were anti-Dutch, Truijtmán reported that he was well treated.⁹⁹ This was in stark contrast to his earlier treatment where the Laksamana roundly told him that the Company should be shown the door. In part, this conduct could be explained due to the critical juncture where both sides were threading on thin ice where a small trigger could lead to an outbreak of war between the two nations. No matter how resentful some of the *orangkaya* were of the Company officials, an outright war with the Company might be detrimental to the interest of the kingdom. Although, those in the Council presently disagreed with the Sultanah's accommodative stance to the Company, it appeared that the Sultanah was once again in-charge and that despite the rising tensions with the Dutch demanding redress, the soothing hands of the Sultanah was needed to smooth relations. After the usual greetings and ceremonies, Truijtmán wrote that he requested for a prompt resolution and insisted that those who were responsible for the murder of the Dutch servants in Perak be punished to the Company's satisfaction without the need to break the Company's alliance with the Acehnese kingdom. Within a mere two days, Truijtmán received the resolution at court and on the 11th of November had another audience with the Sultanah.¹⁰⁰ Truijtmán wrote, the Sultanah, seated on the throne declared publicly, “*Mahamulia gives *kurnia and grace, upon the request of the Governor General to punish the murderers in Perak. An *estemie* was prepared and handed to her two *boedjanghs* who would accompany Truijtmán to Perak and hand the *estemie* personally to the Sultan of Perak, Muzaffar Shah. Sultanah Safiatuddin summoned him, upon the receipt of her order, to release all Dutch prisoners and hand them to Commander Truijtmán. The Dato' Temenggong and the Shahbandar to be stripped of their offices and their followers who murdered the Dutch officials be put to death together with a Kling who murdered a Dutch *ondercoopman*. The Orangkaya Besar would

⁹⁸ *Generale Missiven*, 1651, p. 569. Truijtmán did not explain why he suspected that this new Council would not last.

⁹⁹ NA, ff.748-762, f.750R. Rapport van de besoignes en verscheijde quade rescontre in d'Atchinse, Perahse en Quedase verrichtinge bij den Oppercoopman J. Truijtmán als Commissaris voor de derde mael gecommitteert aen d'Atchinse Majestijt ende gestelt to Commandeur over de Revengie vloot tegens Perah 5 September anno 1651 aen d' Edele Heeren Carel Reniersen and the Raad van India, December 1652.

¹⁰⁰ NA, f.750V. Rapport van de besoignes.

succeed the Temenggong and another capable person would replace the Shahbandar. In addition, the Acehnese *boedjangh*, who mistreated the sick Dutch soldier, should be punished by having his hands and feet amputated.¹⁰¹ The Sultanah however, requested that the Sultan of Perak be excused and took him under her protection. This was because he was related by blood to her dead husband.¹⁰² But if he was found to be the instigator of the murder, he would be removed from his position and replaced.¹⁰³ The costs of punishment and the building of a new company's lodge that was destroyed would be borne by those from Perak themselves.¹⁰⁴

Truijtman reported that his mission in Aceh was a success since he had managed to obtain a resolution that conformed closely to the Governor General's request.¹⁰⁵ He continued, besides her two *boedjanghs*, the Sultanah appointed two other notable Acehnese to bring her *estemie* to Perak to ensure that her orders would be promptly obeyed to the Company's satisfaction. Contrary to Truijtman's confidence, the sending of her own representatives, more significantly, demonstrated the Sultanah's desire that the settlement of the Perak problem remained in the hands of her representatives. The Sultanah said, "Commander, you should not wage war against those in Perak because it is my land, I myself will punish those who have caused trouble and no other. That is a promise, because I am powerful enough to do that. You should not do anything against my consent in my land and you should not incite anything against me that might bring about a war with the Dutch."¹⁰⁶

On the 18th of November, Truijtman received the Queen's *estemie* at the *balai* in the presence of the new *Raaden*, together with two Dutch officers, Philip Salengre and provisional lieutenant Paulus Ketesar. The *estemie* was read loudly and clearly and sufficiently translated. Truijtman wrote that by the 21st of November, it appeared as if this affair had been resolved. The Sultanah treated him honourably and presented him with a gold *keris* and 5 bahar pepper and recommended that Truijtman visit her *Rijxraaden*

¹⁰¹ According to the report sent by the Governor General to the Heeren Seventeen, these orders showed the Queen's diligence and determination to punish criminals. *Generale Missiven*, 1651, p. 570.

¹⁰² According to B. Andaya, this Sultan was from Siak by birth but was brought up at the Acehnese court. He then married a Perak princess and installed as the Sultan of Perak (1636-d.1654) with the title Sultan Muzaffar Shah. B. Andaya, *Perak, Abode of Grace*, p. 20.

¹⁰³ *Generale Missiven*, 1651, p. 571.

¹⁰⁴ NA, f.751R. Rapport van de besoignes.

¹⁰⁵ NA, f.751R. Rapport van de besoignes.

¹⁰⁶ NA, f.751R-f.751V. Rapport van de besoignes.

and her court often (which was again deemed unusual since it was rather difficult to gain an audience or visit the *orangkaya*). She wanted Truijtmán to return to Aceh to report on the events in Perak before he went back to Batavia.¹⁰⁷

Truijtmán also received the Queen's letter in reply to the Governor General. Before Truijtmán departed, the Sultanah reminded him again,

Commander you should listen to what I have to say, the land of Perak is my own land but the tin that is found in Perak is in part for the Dutch and the people that live there. It is a rough and proud people full of spite, who well deserve the punishment. Especially since these past few years they have not properly paid their homage and come to court here like how they would usually do, or had been done. Although the Dutch have blockaded their river, notwithstanding this, I request that you do not spoil this land where the Dutch could draw the most fruits.¹⁰⁸

Sultanah Safiatuddin made successive verbal commands that no war was to be waged in Perak and for the land not to be ruined and for the punishment to be meted out by herself. The Sultanah was determined that the problem in Perak would not result in the rupture of the alliance she had carefully cultivated with the Dutch, worse an outbreak of war between the two nations. Truijtmán was rather sure of this since he noted that in her affection and in her arguments for peace there appeared to be no difference between her heart and her countenance notwithstanding the Acehese cunning and hypocrisy which they sowed and which generated falsehood and deceit. But he concluded, all must be patient to discover the true outcome of this affair.¹⁰⁹

According to Barbara Andaya, the Sultanah's declaration to the Company officials that the people of Perak were proud and rebellious showed the weakness of the Sultanah, that it was impossible for the Acehese court to force Sultan Muzaffar Shah to surrender the guilty Orang Besar to the Dutch.¹¹⁰ Based on the above reports by Truijtmán and the Resident in Aceh, de Salengre, Aceh still had some influence over Perak and those from Perak still looked up to Aceh for help and advice and they were

¹⁰⁷ NA, f.751V. Rapport van de besoignes.

¹⁰⁸ NA, f.752R. Rapport van de besoignes.

¹⁰⁹ NA, f.752V. Rapport van de besoignes.

¹¹⁰ B. Andaya, *Perak, Abode of Grace*, p. 46.

still bound by overlord-vassal ties, no matter how tenuous. The Sultanah's so-called inability to surrender the guilty party need not necessarily attest to her weakness or that of the Acehese court. On the contrary, it was a likely tactic employed to delay the surrender of the guilty and to protect the elites of Perak. The Sultanah might also be covering Aceh's complicity (if any) in the murder affair by saying that the Perak people had been disobedient and had not sent their envoys when Salengre had reported that five Perak vessels were in Aceh to ask for help and advice. This was to absolve Aceh of all blame. It was unlikely though, that the Queen ordered this murder since she was consistent in wanting to maintain good relations with the Dutch. It was likely that the Laksamana faction from the Aceh Council had instigated these murders as a lesson to the Company for its arrogance and incessant unreasonable demands. This was done however, covertly, by means of a proxy war in a distant state. Nevertheless, even though the Laksamana faction gained the upper hand in this struggle, they were either not strong enough to get rid of the Sultanah or she had entrenched herself well enough to survive the *orangkaya's* factional struggles. The Laksamana and his followers certainly needed her as an authority once again to sooth matters when the Company representatives came to seek redress and compensation.

More troubled currents in the Perak River

Truijtmán departed from Aceh on the 22nd of November 1651 and arrived in Perak on the 6th of December accompanied by two Acehese *boedjangh* who held the Queen's *estemie*. After six days in Perak, Truijtmán tried to get the first point mentioned in the Sultanah's *estemie* to be expediently executed, i.e. to secure the release of the prisoners. They were *Coopman* Michiel Curre and his wife, their three Malaccan hired helpers, some of their slaves except for the two young sailors who worked in the tin mines, one being dead and the other sent to Melaka.¹¹¹ This first point of the *estemie* was promptly obeyed. The second and most important point regarding the deportment of the Temenggong and Shahbandar believed to be party to the murders was not so easily executed. Truijtmán recorded in his report that before his arrival, two Acehese *orangkaya* had arrived before him, sent by her Majesty with three armed *gorabs* to Perak in

¹¹¹ NA, f.752V. Rapport van de besoignes.

order to investigate about this affair.¹¹² These Acehnese *orangkaya* and the Sultan invited Truijtmán to sail upstream to be at the first fort in order to witness the capital punishment of the aforementioned officials and their helpers. Truijtmán then advanced with seven Dutch vessels and on the 20th of December, and had a meeting with the Acehnese *orangkaya* under that fort by the Perak River. After a long meeting, it was agreed that within three days the Sultan's final Resolution regarding the punishment of the murderers would be brought and would be made known to Truijtmán. He thus remained in his vessel there to wait for the Sultan's Resolution. Truijtmán then related that after a day passed, "these murderous Perak people" with the knowledge or even management of the hypocritical Acehnese mediators, broke all talks and attacked the Dutch at the fort where several more officials lost their lives.¹¹³ Truijtmán had to summon the rest of the Dutch soldiers stationed well below the Perak River immediately. However, because of the high water at that time, the vessels could not sail up-river, what more set foot on Perak. No other help was in sight since provisions and soldiers could come from Melaka only after twenty-nine days. But luckily for Truijtmán and company, since it was in the rainy season the Dutch was safe since this would greatly hinder the Perak people from destroying the Dutch. Unfortunately, though, because of the rainy season, the Dutch troops were afflicted with sickness such as *beri-beri* and except for the strong, the remainder of the people died.¹¹⁴ The Dutch were held at the Perak River for fifteen days. The Company put up a white flag and an agreement was reached where the Company continued with their siege and the Perak people retained their possession of the three forts. Truijtmán concluded that judging from the numbers of ammunition and rifles used, he suspected that those from Aceh (also based on news received from Kedah) had contributed not a little and had given order from their place.¹¹⁵ By this time, the exhausted Truijtmán wrote that even though he was tasked to investigate the truth about the Perak murders and did not intend to succumb to this unfortunate occasion, vowing not to return until this affair was finished, he confessed that he could do no more. After receiving the awaited order from the Governor in Melaka, he took the return journey to Aceh.

¹¹² NA, f.753R. Rapport van de besoignes.

¹¹³ NA, f.753V. Rapport van de besoignes.

¹¹⁴ NA, f.754R. Rapport van de besoignes.

¹¹⁵ NA, f.754V. Rapport van de besoignes.

Truijtmán departed from Dindingh on the 21 Feb 1652 and arrived in Aceh on the 8 March and four days later, he had an audience with the Sultanah at court. Truijtmán complained bitterly how those from Perak not only had not done what Her Majesty promised and the mission had failed, they actually committed new acts of hostility against the Company officials.¹¹⁶ The Sultanah then ordered one of the appointed Aceh's representatives who was sent there, together with her two *boedjanghs* and some other Acehnese who had returned from Perak, shortly before Truijtmán's arrival in Aceh, to stand and explain their stand. Coopman Curre, was also called before Her Majesty to make his statements but Truijtmán reported that this did not happen because of the presence of the *orangkaya* who disliked the Dutch. These acts of cruelty, Truijtmán concluded, were put to work by the newly reformed (*gereformeerde*) or reconstituted court in Aceh who induced those from Perak to commit these murderous deeds against the Dutch.¹¹⁷ It appeared that the new Acehnese court not only had advised those from Perak but had actually assisted them to commit this deed. Truijtmán noted that shortly after the Acehnese revolt, the massacre of the Dutch in Perak followed. After which there was recourse of three hundred armed Acehnese soldiers with four canons with other sorts of ammunition and rifles of war that were brought to Perak from Aceh via Deli. Truijtmán confirmed that he received this information from a certain Kling named Maracq Yunos who appeared to be sent from Perak and Kedah. Truijtmán believed that one of the more important reasons for the murders was to give the Company a bad taste from the Perak's fruits. He also reasoned that these *orangkaya* had instigated these incidents in Perak because of the Acehnese fear for the Company's power.¹¹⁸ What was the Sultanah's role in all this? Interestingly, Truijtmán mentioned nothing about the Sultanah's complicity nor did he reveal any of his suspicions about her role in his reports. However, according to the report of the Governor-General in Batavia, Carel Reniers, Sultanah Safiatuddin herself had not respected her words and denied that she had given the order to bring the *Temenggong* and *Shahbandar* to justice. She had asked to punish only other lower ranking persons involved in the murder, such as the Kling who had earlier murdered the company's servant in Perak.

¹¹⁶ NA, ff.754V-755R. Rapport van de besoignes.

¹¹⁷ NA, ff.756R-756V. Rapport van de besoignes.#

¹¹⁸ NA, f.755R Rapport van de besoignes.

Finally, the resolution concluded in the Acehnese court was to let the dead remain dead (to let bygones be bygones) so that they could now henceforth live with each other in peace and the Dutch to continue with trade as before. The Acehnese argued that the Company officials had pestered the Perak people enough and had given them enough cause for them to take matters into their own hands. The Dutch had not only blockaded the river without reason, but had also belittled and disrespected the Acehnese crown. Besides these, the Company had built a stone house higher and more notable than the Sultan's palace, which had pierced the eyes of his subjects. Indeed, they had built a castle or a strong fort rather than a house and had also smuggled canons on land. Through all these odious business of the Company's, they had embittered the elite and the common man in Perak that finally brought the murders.¹¹⁹

Truijtman was convinced that these recent events proved his suspicion about Acehnese famous deceit and hypocrisy. He claimed that the recently despatched *estemie* to the Sultan of Perak was sent in falsehood. Even though the Sultanah sentenced the two Perak officials, the *Temenggong* and the *Shahbandar* with their helpers and the Kling with capital punishment and demoted some of her own officials, Truijtman believed that these were not sincere and true.¹²⁰ He concluded that the Company would get no resolution in this affair due to Acehnese falsehood.¹²¹ In despair, he requested the Governor General¹²² to allow him to leave Aceh. After much delay, Truijtman was finally allowed to depart, but still laden with gifts from the Sultanah of 36 bahar pepper and Her Majesty's letter to the Governor General on yacht the *Saphier*. On the 23rd March 1652, Truijtman departed Aceh's harbour to sail to Kedah and report on the events there. So he concluded this affair, he wrote, with the discovery of the Acehnese falsehood and the failed Perak exploit.

¹¹⁹ *Generale Missiven*, 1639-1655, vol. II, p. 643.

¹²⁰ NA, f.755V. Rapport van de besoignes.

¹²¹ NA, f.756R. Rapport van de besoignes.

¹²² Joan Maetsuycker was the Governor General in Batavia from 1653-1678.

The Governor General, Joan Maetsuyker, reported that there was a great calm amongst the *Rijksraaden* after the Laksamana's coup and the death of Maharaja di Raja, the son-in-law of Maharaja Sri Maharaja. The Sultanah survived this ordeal safe and sound and appeared again on the throne as usual. However, on a certain audience day, the Laksamana with a great number of armed men had come to court to kill the highest pontiff (*oppersten paep*) a great officer of Her Majesty. This individual whom the Dutch addressed as the *oppersten paep* most probably referred to the highest religious authority figure in Aceh, the Sheikh al-Islam who happened to be Sheikh Syaiful Rijal. Sultanah Safiatuddin appointed him to this position when al-Raniri left Aceh in 1644.¹²⁴ It so happened that on that day the Sheikh was absent. It was not certain whether he had prior knowledge of the Laksamana's intention. This caused great alarm at court. The Laksamana openly defended his action of attempting to kill the Sheikh by accusing him of committing adultery (*boelerende*) with the Sultanah and that he was after the throne.¹²⁵ The *orangkaya* Council accepted the decision for the Sheikh to be executed.¹²⁶ But at this critical juncture, only Sultanah Safiatuddin's serious and earnest intervention saved the Sheikh. Safiatuddin swore an oath in public that she never had any sexual intercourse with the Sheikh. She also threatened to set fire in the palace and to burn herself alive. The Sheikh's life was saved. This time, the Laksamana's bid failed. The Governor concluded his report by stating that the Acehnese kingdom was walking on stilts. Nevertheless, he continued, they remained brave and proud and to be feared, for shortly with one or the other rogue element, they would try to attack the company by promoting their interests and the Company might be belittled by these affronts as by those that happened in Perak and Kedah.¹²⁷

¹²³ This crisis happened in 1652 as reported in *Generale Missiven*, 1653, p. 647.

¹²⁴ If it was indeed Syaiful Rijal who was murdered then this explains the mystery that still surrounds this *ulama*. Many historians such as Azyumardi Azra and Peter Riddle claim that very little is known about this individual because his writings have not survived. This is strange indeed since the writings of earlier *ulama* such as al-Raniri and Abdul Rauf survive. If he was murdered in 1652, then this explains why there were no *kitab*s in his name.

¹²⁵ *Generale Missiven*, 1639-1655, vol. II, p. 647. This highest priest was referred to as the Queen's *mingon* (sweetheart).

¹²⁶ Maetsuyker did not detail who in this *orangkaya* Council agreed to this execution and whether they formed the majority in the Council.

¹²⁷ See Irwin, 'The Dutch and Tin Trade in Malaya', in Tarling and Ch'en, p. 284.#

The Laksamana's disgrace did not bring about an end to the troubles at court. The group demoted by the Laksamana's earlier coup (the Company's friend, Maharaja Sri Maharaja and his followers) staged a counter-coup. This group, as reported in the Dagh-Register was led by the Paduka Maha Menteri, assisted by the Maharaja Sri Maharaja, Maharaja Adona Lella and Sri Paduka Tuan.¹²⁸ The catalyst was believed to be the sacking of Paduka Tuan as the Governor of Elephants and the removal of all his relatives from court. Maharaja Lella replaced Paduka Tuan as the Governor of Elephants. It was also rumoured that the pontiff (the Sheikh), with the help from Maharaja Lella would be made King. After seven days, a group of armed men came to court and forced the Sultanah to deport and replace Maharaja Lella with an Intchi Rembau, Panglima of Deli. The group of four men without the permission from Sultanah Safiatuddin, indeed, with her expressed forbidding, forced the officials in power to commit the massacre of the Sheikh and his twelve men. The Sultanah was then forced to distribute the Sheikh's belongings especially the *kris* etc. to their concubines. The Sultanah then honoured the revolt group with elephants and granted them entry into court.¹²⁹ The Dagh-Register report here was clearly unsatisfactory and it cannot be clearly ascertained in what manner the Sultanah was forced to distribute the Sheikh and his followers' belongings and to whom although the Dutch alleged that these were their "concubines". It is not so surprising though, that the Sultanah honoured the group who executed this counter-coup since this group supported her policy of accommodation with the Dutch. Nevertheless, she clearly opposed their murder of the Sheikh. It appears from this incident that the elite of Aceh was more fractious than originally appeared since besides the pro and anti Dutch factions there was another faction led by the Sheikh.

There are no other references to these internal disturbances in the Aceh court since the Company officers were more focused on the next course of action - to salvage the Company's reputation because of the beatings and humiliations they received in these small polities. It is safe to conclude, however, that from 1653 onwards, although there was a power struggle between the different factions of the *orangkaya*, the Sultanah's royal position was not challenged. The most potentially fatal charge used by the Laksamana and the Maharaja against the Sheikh, i.e. usurpation of the throne, if proven,

¹²⁸ *Dagh-Register*, 1653, pp. 39-40. A similar entry was made in the *Generale Missiven*, 1654, p. 688.

¹²⁹ *Dagh-Register*, 1653, p. 40.

would be tantamount to **derhaka*, the highest sin a subject could commit to his ruler. There is no evidence to suggest whether the Sheikh did try to capture the throne or otherwise but he paid for this with his life. The Sultanah's position was seriously threatened though, during these tumultuous times when the Laksamana accused her of adultery, the most fatal charge that could be inflicted on a queen and for that matter the highest religious figure such as the Sheikh al-Islam. Surprisingly, neither the Laksamana nor the Maharaja faction claimed the throne or deposed the Sultanah. The Sultanah managed to avert this disaster by her decisive action of making a public oath and threatening to burn herself. This must have proved her innocence in the eyes of her subjects. After 1653, it became clear that the disturbances that threatened the Acehnese court were over. The faction that supported the Sultanah to execute her policy of accommodation with the Dutch to maintain peace and friendship with the VOC, i.e. the Maharajah Sri Maharajah and his followers gained ascendancy.

To go to war or not go to war?

Whilst the sentiment in the Acehnese court favoured peace and accommodation with the VOC, this feeling was not reciprocated in the VOC camp. One issue stood out in the 1653 and 1654 reports of the Generale Missiven – how best to respond to the humiliations and losses the Company had suffered, i.e. to go to war or not go to war with Aceh. Given the murders of Company officials in Perak and Kedah, indignities and insults suffered by Truijtmann and his delegates in Perak and Aceh, the desire for revenge was understandable. One point of view amongst Company officials stated that war with Aceh was not undesirable because after the conquest of Melaka, all trade went to Aceh.¹³⁰ The Indian merchants brought cloth to Aceh and this attracted other traders there to exchange their wares for these cloths. The cloth sold in Aceh was much cheaper than cloth sold in Melaka by the Company.¹³¹ Furthermore, war was justifiable because of the inhuman acts committed by those from Perak on Company officers who were then protected and defended by those from Aceh. Without war with Aceh, the

¹³⁰ *Generale Missiven*, 1653, p. 687.

¹³¹ In 1660, Aceh was so full of cloth that one bale of Guinea cloth as good as the one sold by the Company fetched only 48-50 reals whilst the usual price was 80 reals. Balthazar Bort, *Report of Governor Balthazar Bort on Malacca*, p. 132.

Company could not forbid the Gujaratis, Klings, Bengalis and others to sail to Aceh nor could they claim the old Portuguese rights in Melaka which they believed they inherited.

The anti-war argument stated that war with Aceh would bring more trouble because this would alienate the Indian traders, whose supplies of cloth were still needed to generate exchange. The blockade of Aceh's harbour might not bring a corresponding benefit to Melaka since the trade from Aceh could instead be diverted to Tennasserij, situated around 60 to 70 miles from Pegu or between Pegu and Aceh. This was an area of great traffic where Indian traders supplied the whole area and its surroundings with cloth and other merchandise in exchange with elephants brought overland from Siam together with tin.¹³² In addition, the Company had only enough strength to blockade Aceh's harbour and not the surrounding areas and when this blockade was weak, the Company would not be able to monopolize and centralize trade in Melaka. The Governor-General, Joan Maetsuyker, confessed that the monopoly would be weak if the foreign traders did not see Dutch weapons or might and their right to wage war on Aceh.¹³³

Besides the above reasons the Governor was also afraid that war with Aceh would bring benefits to the English instead. For example, an English yacht belonging to Mr Winter from Masulipatnam returned there from Aceh with 16 elephants, benzoin, camphor, tin and gold.¹³⁴ He was well received in Aceh though he was denied trade at Sumatra West Coast. The Governor was afraid that the English might return to Sumatra West Coast if the Dutch waged war with Aceh. "Now that we are at peace with the English nation, we fear that they would go to Aceh, and if troubles between us and Aceh remain, then it would be to our disadvantage."¹³⁵ The Dutch feared that the English would fish in their troubled waters and they had no legal justification to prevent English traders from trading in any port that had not signed the exclusive nation treatment agreement with the Company - Aceh was one such kingdom. In addition, due to the peace between the Dutch and English, the Indian traders found an ingenious way to continue to circumvent the Company's blockade. They loaded their cargo on English ships or they employed Englishmen to man their ships and flew the English flag. The English issued passes freely to these Indian traders to frequent ports in Aceh and other

¹³² *Generale Missiven*, 1653, *Generale Missiven Manuscript*, f.100V.

¹³³ *Generale Missiven*, 1654, p. 688. The blockade of Aceh continued until 1660.

¹³⁴ *Generale Missiven*, 1654, p. 688.

¹³⁵ *Generale Missiven*, 1654, p. 752.

parts of Southeast Asia and the Company faced the dilemma whether to honour these or not.¹³⁶ Thus, the Company concluded that war with Aceh was not advisable.

Joan Maetsuyker also reported that besides English yachts, many Muslim ships from different places had once more frequented Aceh this year despite the Company's threats unlike the previous year (1652).¹³⁷ At that point, in time, there were already eight Muslim ships in Aceh, one belonging to the governor of Masulipatnam.¹³⁸ The Company remained gravely concerned about the Muslim traders, since more and more traders arrived and they supplied the surrounding lands with cloth and all other merchandise that it would be very difficult for Melaka since there was no sale of cloth here.¹³⁹ Bengal ships brought nine elephants from Kedah, in return for cloth. Twenty-six vessels from Perak were said to have sailed to Aceh loaded with tin. The Governor began to wonder whether "our siege of Perak is in vain; that this could be stopped and more money is spent on more advantageous things."¹⁴⁰ Even with the blockade, a great many vessels with tin had gone to Aceh.¹⁴¹ It appeared that those in Perak had enough opportunities to take care of their needs and necessities without any need to break away from the blockade since they found a new way to transport these supplies into Perak from Kedah. Three Muslim ships were found in Kedah, two from Masulipatnam and one from Bengal with passes from respective countries and they easily obtained tin from Perak overland.¹⁴² A similar situation faced the Company in Aceh, despite the blockade of the Aceh River, a year later, thirty-six vessels with tin from Perak arrived in Aceh. In Aceh's harbour, the Company found three ships from Surat, four from Choromandel, one from Maldives, one belonging to the Sultanah of Aceh herself, two from Macassar and one freeburgher ship from Cambodia.¹⁴³

¹³⁶ Arasaratnam, 'Some notes on the Dutch in Malacca', p. 488.

¹³⁷ Arasaratnam and Raychaudhuri stated that Indian trade with Aceh increased in the 1660's. Aceh continued to be frequented by Indian traders who sold cloth there and bought tin and spices. Indian traders began to use Aceh as their centre for the Southeast Asian trade. But, evidence here shows that Indian traders had used Aceh as centre of trade and that trade between these traders and Aceh had increased a decade earlier - in the 1650's. Arasaratnam, 'Some notes on the Dutch in Malacca', pp. 488-489. Tapankumar Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel, 1605-1690. A study in the interrelation of European commerce and traditional economies* (s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1962), pp. 123-124.

¹³⁸ *Generale Missiven*, 1654, p. 752.

¹³⁹ *Generale Missiven*, 1654, p. 752.

¹⁴⁰ *Generale Missiven*, 1655, p. 775.

¹⁴¹ *Generale Missiven Manuscript*, 1655, f.47V.

¹⁴² *Generale Missiven*, 1654, p. 752.

¹⁴³ *Generale Missiven*, 1655, p. 819.

Joan Maetsuyker concluded his reports to the *Heeren Zeventien* by stating that he had already made his objections regarding the English yachts and the great Muslim traffic to Aceh, which had caused the trade in Melaka to be stagnant. He wrote, it appeared, that “we have no other means than to have a justified war against Aceh but we are sending our resolution with these returned ships to inform Uw Edele and we will wait for orders because this is an affair of great importance that need great consideration. In the meantime, we wait for the expected Acehnese envoys to appear so that we could build more trust.”¹⁴⁴ The Sultanah and the *orangkaya* had showed inclination towards peace and accommodation. She sent her letters and gifts to both Batavia and Melaka.¹⁴⁵ Sultanah Safiatuddin had specially sent Abdul Latiff, their best translator and other representatives of quality so that there would be no occasion for us to take revenge on the recent disrespect done to Truijtmán in Aceh.¹⁴⁶ Although the murderers in Perak had not yet been surrendered, peace was more achievable now with the death of the alleged instigators of the murders, Sultan Muda, Dato’ Bendahara and Temenggong of Perak, in 1653 and the Shahbandar was now provisionally placed as head of state.¹⁴⁷ Batavia too was ready for peace with Aceh. The Governor General reasoned that even if they preferred to besiege Aceh to stop the great traffic of Muslim trade, it would still be difficult to keep the English out because this would cause displeasure and trouble. “If we go to war with Aceh a great door would be opened for the English nation so that they would undercut our privileges in Sumatra West Coast and in Aceh which could not be easily repaired.”¹⁴⁸ He then decided to send Dirk Schouten, the Company’s bookkeeper General, via Melaka to Aceh, an experienced hand in these quarters who spoke the Malay language well.¹⁴⁹ He was to go with the yacht the *Jonge Prins* and *Alkmaer*. His tasks were as follows: To get the Sultanah to punish the guilty in Perak as promised. To renew and grant privileges on a permanent basis regarding the tin trade in Perak, and pre-eminence and freedom at Sumatra West Coast. To pay reparation costs for the murders in Perak. Finally, to request the Sultanah not to allow the English and the Portuguese to trade in Aceh and other places under her control.

¹⁴⁴ *Generale Missiven*, 1655, p. 775.

¹⁴⁵ *Generale Missiven*, 1655, p. 818.

¹⁴⁶ *Generale Missiven*, 1655, p. 819.

¹⁴⁷ *Generale Missiven*, 1654, pp. 751-752.

¹⁴⁸ *Generale Missiven*, 1655, p. 821.

¹⁴⁹ *Generale Missiven*, 1655, p. 822.

Since both parties were cavorting for peace, it did not take long before another treaty was signed in 1655 between Aceh, Perak and the Company. Amongst the provisions were the cessation of all hostilities and payment of indemnity of 50,000 reals for damages caused to the Company's lodge in 1651. Since the punishment of the Perak murderers was still not carried out since 1651, this provision was again included in this 1655 Treaty. Sultan Muzaffar Shah, whom Sultanah Safiatuddin had taken under her protection, had died of smallpox in 1654 and was replaced by his young son, Sultan Mahmud, still a child and an orphan.¹⁵⁰ The Sultanah presented him with a gold *keris* among other things in recognition of his succession to the throne but since he was still young, his elderly aunty, Sultanah Amina Todijn, was appointed as Regent.¹⁵¹ The alleged accessory to the murder, the Shahbandar was to be executed, however, the former Temenggong (another alleged accomplice), who now replaced the Dato' Bendahara after his death, was to remain in this post.¹⁵² He was allowed to remain in this post despite the Company's protests. The Perak Council gave the Company land to build a new lodge. The other clauses of the 1650 Treaty, where the Company would obtain half of Perak's tin at a fixed price remained in place. The naval blockades of Aceh and Perak, however, continued.

The Tussle for Tin Continued

Five years later, the Treaties signed still remained on paper. The Bendahara dominated the Perak Assembly and his hostility to the VOC made it impossible for the Dutch to get its quota of tin. The Company pressed for another Treaty and this was duly signed in 1659 between Aceh and the VOC.¹⁵³ The same provisions were reiterated where the Company demanded compensation for loss of lives and goods in 1651, half of

¹⁵⁰ His mother had died shortly before Sultan Muzaffar Shah and according to the indigenous source, *Silsilah Melaka Kerajaan Negeri Perak* (Genealogy of Melaka and the Government of Perak); the Sultanah of Aceh adopted this boy-king. B. Andaya, *Perak, Abode of Grace*, p. 47.

¹⁵¹ Unfortunately, no more information was available regarding this elderly aunty and whether she was appointed by the Sultanah of Aceh.

¹⁵² B. Andaya, *Perak, Abode of Grace*, p. 47.#

¹⁵³ *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum* ed. by J. E. Heeres and F.W. Stapel ('s-Gravenhage: M. Nijhoff, 1907-1955), pp. 151-155.

the tin produce to be shared with Aceh and exclusive nation treatment. New provisions were – to the disadvantage of the Company, the Sultanah of Aceh would now forgive the anti-Dutch Bendahara and permit him to remain in his position. The Shahbandar however, was not so lucky since the Sultanah summoned him to Aceh for a trial.¹⁵⁴ The Sultanah generously granted fifty bahar of tin in compensation for the Company's goods stolen in Perak in 1651, to be obtained from Perak itself. The price of tin was fixed earlier at 31 and 1/4 real for the Company but since the indemnity payment had a balance of 44,000 reals, the price of tin sold to the Company would be 30 real until the debt was paid for. Under this contract, the Company failed once again to obtain toll-free privilege, the Acehnese arguing that this customary right could not be violated.¹⁵⁵ The Company officials declared that "herewith all the above articles are settled irrevocably and shall endure as long as the world, ...amen."¹⁵⁶

One year later, this contract was again duly broken. In 1660, the *Alkmaer* brought 122 bahar of tin to Melaka but Aceh obtained 585 bahar.¹⁵⁷ Smuggling continued to the profitable markets of Aceh and Kedah. The English envoy, Henry Garry, came to Aceh from Surat bringing presents for the Sultanah and he departed with 200 bahar of tin.¹⁵⁸ Joannes Massys bringing only fifty-one bahar of tin for the Dutch, complained that Aceh still got all the tin. The Dutch sailed to Perak to enforce the Treaty rights but as soon as they left, Perak broke them again. Aceh's agents took away *all* Perak's tin on the pretext that they belonged to their Queen. The Dutch tried to stop three Perak vessels carrying one hundred and eighty bahar of tin from going to Aceh but the Sultan declared that they were his own emissaries. On the 30th of October 1662, the Resident Gabriel Bruyl reported that the English had persuaded the Queen to order the Sultan of Perak to help them export sixty bahar of tin. In 1663, the Company had to abandon Perak's indemnity and paid about 34-36 reals per bahar as against the 30 reals promised because the Acehnese bid as high as 42 reals.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ *Report of Governor Balthasar Bort on Malacca 1678* trans. by M. J. Brenner. Introduction and Notes by C.O. Blagden *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 5 (1927), Pt. 2, p. 139.

¹⁵⁵ *Report of Governor Balthasar Bort*, p. 139.

¹⁵⁶ *Report of Governor Balthasar Bort*, pp. 140, 147. Whilst the Dutch wanted privileges to be granted to them on a permanent basis, the Dutch revoked privileges given after death. The Dutch had granted the right to export 30 bahar of tin from Perak to Paduka Tuan, Governor of Foreigners in Aceh. This right ceased to exist after his death.

¹⁵⁷ Winstedt, *A History of Perak*, p. 31.

¹⁵⁸ Winstedt, *A History of Perak*, p. 31.

¹⁵⁹ Winstedt, *A History of Perak*, p. 34.

The Company's fortune, however, took a turn for the better in the next decade (1664-1675). In July 1663, the Company resolved to close factories in Aceh, Perak and Ligor.¹⁶⁰ Lucasz., the Resident of Perak, reported that the Queen of Aceh, dismayed at the closing of the Company's lodge at her capital had now written to Perak to allow the Dutch to trade as friends adding that although they had quit Aceh, she knew no reasons for hostilities. Perak too began to make its own overtures to the Company. In 1663, when the anti-Dutch Bendahara died, his successor decided to adopt a more independent policy for Perak by playing the Dutch against the Acehnese.¹⁶¹ The Perak people grew tired and bitter because of the continuous blockade and incessant interference from outside powers. The now mature Sultan Mahmud himself started to favour the Company and he sent a delegation to Melaka to invite the Company to reopen its lodge. He told the Dutch that he would sell all tin to them and sever ties with Aceh if the Company could protect him.¹⁶² In March 1663 when Aceh demanded the customary annual tribute accompanying their homage (40 bahar of tin), Perak envoys replied that because of the perpetual blockade by the VOC, according to the Treaty Aceh had contracted, they could not afford it. If Aceh resorted to force, they would ask Johor to be their suzerain.¹⁶³ Perak also made overtures to the anti-Dutch Sultan of Kedah to seek an alliance. The Sultan also began to sell tin to the Sultan of Bantam and the Johorese.

This change of favour however, did not bring any significant result to the Company's tin trade. In 1667, a rebellion took place against the pro-Dutch Bendahara because his opponents maintained that he had sold too much tin to Melaka. Although this rebellion was quelled, this Bendahara died in 1674 and the Governor in Melaka started complaining once more that the Company received a mere two hundred bahar when Perak produced seven to eight hundred bahar a year.¹⁶⁴ The anti-Dutch faction still wielded formidable influence. A new Bendahara was appointed in 1674 and unlike his predecessor; he emerged as leader of the anti-Dutch faction. In 1678, Balthasar Bort as Governor of Melaka, reported that although he insisted on 600 soldiers for the port he noted that the power of Johor was much reduced and Aceh was impotent and had no

¹⁶⁰ Winstedt, *A History of Perak*, p. 34.

¹⁶¹ B. Andaya, *Perak, Abode of Grace*, p. 48

¹⁶² B. Andaya, *Perak, Abode of Grace*, p. 48.

¹⁶³ Winstedt, *A History of Perak*, p. 31.

¹⁶⁴ Irwin, 'The Dutch and Tin Trade in Malaya', p. 286.

appearance of once more attaining any considerable power. The Kings of Perak and Kedah were of small account. Only European foes were to be feared here. Perak was still Aceh's vassal but her suzerain demanded little tin.¹⁶⁵ Bort, however, had underestimated these Malay polities' ability to thwart and cause damage to the Company. In 1685, the Dutch Resident and eleven more officials were killed in Perak and the Company officials accused the Bendahara of engineering this. According to Barbara Andaya, the Sultan opposed this attack yet the Company received no redress. This was because the Bendahara, also the Sultan's brother-in-law, married to Sultan Mahmud's sister, was more powerful. His position was only rivalled by the **saudagar raja*, an Indian named Sedelebe. By 1686, he was in charge of virtually all the tin trade in Perak.¹⁶⁶

By the turn of the century, the VOC had to admit defeat in their effort to monopolize the tin trade of Perak. In 1681, the Dagh-Register recorded that trade had dwindled. By 1680, as a result of peace between the English and the Dutch, competition was once again faced from the English, besides the perennial problem of rivalry from the local, Indian and Portuguese traders. By this time, these traders were undercutting the Dutch at will.¹⁶⁷ "Smuggling" was rampant in Aceh and Kedah.¹⁶⁸ The scourge of piracy in the 1690's compounded these problems faced by the Company. In 1689, a Panglima Kulup, deemed to be a pirate, burnt the Dutch redoubt in Dinding Island.¹⁶⁹ The Company withdrew the blockade of the mouth of the Perak River in 1689 because it served no useful purpose.¹⁷⁰ After the Dutch departure in 1690, Perak was free from trade restrictions and outside threats.¹⁷¹ In September 1694, the still outstanding debt of f.130,885 due from the Sultan and nobles of Perak was written off by the Council of Batavia as bad debts.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁵ Winstedt, *A History of Perak*, p. 38.

¹⁶⁶ B. Andaya, *Perak, Abode of Grace*, p. 50.

¹⁶⁷ Irwin, 'The Dutch and Tin Trade in Malaya', p. 286.

¹⁶⁸ Winstedt, *A History of Perak*, p. 52.

¹⁶⁹ B. Andaya, *Perak, Abode of Grace*, p. 50.

¹⁷⁰ Irwin, 'The Dutch and Tin Trade in Malaya', p. 287.

¹⁷¹ B. Andaya, *Perak, Abode of Grace*, p. 52.

¹⁷² Irwin, 'The Dutch and tin Trade in Malaya', p. 285.

Conclusion

According to B. Andaya, the history of Perak in the seventeenth century was one dominated by Perak's failed search for a new powerful friend, a search for a new relationship that would replace Aceh. Vassalage had brought no benefits and with Aceh's decline, it could no longer enforce its former control.¹⁷³ Evidence showed a different picture. At least before 1670, Aceh had important leverage against the Company for the trade in Sumatra West Coast and Perak on the basis of its overlord rights in these territories. The VOC's unwillingness to go to war with Aceh meant that they had to continue to negotiate for concessions and accept compromises. Perak was able to benefit from this situation since Perak was not alone to fend for itself. Perak was able to use Aceh as an ally and a protector. Perak evoked the traditional overlord-vassal relationship and used Aceh as a protector not because Perak was forced to submit to Aceh but because Aceh was useful to protect the tin trade and this relationship largely worked. This patron-client relationship conducted under Sultanah Safiatuddin was a symbiotic and mutually beneficial one, unlike the more predatory vassal-overlord relations enacted under her predecessors. The Sultanah emphasised her role as the benign protector of her vassals and subjects as illustrated in her determination not to concede toll-free privileges to the VOC since this would be taking the bread out of her subjects' mouths. She did not evoke her right as a conqueror and subduer to demand tribute and loyalty but elicited loyalty reciprocally.

After managing to keep afloat in the first few years of her reign, Sultanah Safiatuddin experienced many crises and turbulence in the subsequent decades of the '40s and '50s. Not only was her position threatened but even her life. Nevertheless, by mid 1650s, she emerged unscathed and managed to consolidate her throne. She did this through a mixture of measures- by distancing herself from the initial in fighting amongst her *orangkaya*. To "bend with the wind" as described by Truijtmann but not as a sign of weakness but I suggest as a means of being flexible and to try to work with the faction that emerged as the winner at the time such as the Laksamana faction. She continued however, to work to facilitate the faction that supported her policy, such as the Maharajah faction. Even though at times she appeared to be submerged, she was able to weather the storm and prevailed in the end. She used her father's stature and harked

¹⁷³ B. Andaya, *Perak, Abode of Grace*, p. 48.

back to her father's reign but she developed her own personal style. Besides the Sultanah's political sagacity (after all she was Iskandar Muda's daughter and Iskandar Thani's widow), another factor worthy of note that explains why the kingdom did not degenerate into chaos was the role of the *orangkaya* such as the Laksamana who realised the need to maintain order for the sake of the kingdom. Just as in the case of the "Jewel Affair" where the *orangkaya* finally conceded to the Sultanah's policy of accommodating the Dutch on the purchase of the jewels, the Laksamana had to agree with the treaty provisions granting the VOC trading privileges to avoid a potential conflict.

CHAPTER 4

Final Years of Sultanah Safiatuddin and the Rule of her Successors: Politics of Resilience and Response in Sumatra West Coast¹

Introduction: Early East-West Encounters

The Perak Affair supports John Wills' view that in the course of the seventeenth century, Aceh was by far the most effective state in the region in maintaining independence and a trading network and in engaging and counteracting the Europeans.² It also supports Van Leur's argument that Western dominance was not yet in place. Van Leur stressed the ability of indigenous institutions to absorb and adapt to new influences. In contrast to Eurocentric historians, who viewed natives as passive, he saw the importance of local agents and internal forces in stimulating change³. During the early encounters, the VOC was learning the ways and structures of indigenous polities, without being able to manipulate them for the company's benefit.⁴ The Sultanah and the Aceh elite, on other hand, could work the traditional system of patron-client relationships to maintain its hold in Perak.

A different story seems to arise in connexion with the pepper trade and the Company's relations with Aceh and its subordinate states on the Sumatra West Coast (henceforth SWC). The Treaty of Painan of March 1663 and another Treaty signed in April 1668 placed a number of these states under the protection of the Dutch.⁵ According to Kathirithamby-Wells, the decline of Aceh made the VOC protectorate possible. She argued that the Dutch capture of Melaka in 1641 severely eroded Acehnese commercial supremacy and political importance, boosted Dutch prestige and damaged Aceh's bargaining powers to such an extent that Sultanah Safiatuddin Shah was obliged to adopt a conciliatory policy. Kathirithamby-Wells claimed that her reign saw the steady decline of Acehnese power

¹ The Sumatra West Coast (SWC) refers to the coastal areas on the western side of the island of Sumatra starting from Aceh Dar-al Salam in the north to the area of Bencoolen in the south.# Please refer to map in Appendix 2.

² Wills, 'Maritime Asia', p. 98. Although Wills made this claim, he did not elaborate his argument.

³ See J.C. Van Leur, *Indonesian Trade and Society, Essays in Asian Social and Economic History*, (The Hague, W. van Hoeve Ltd., 1955).

⁴ In Newbury's view, the most effective impositions of authority developed when the imperialists clearly understood and took advantage of these very same local and regional political structures. See Colin Newbury *Patrons, Clients and Empire: Chieftancy, and Over-rule in Asia, Africa, and the Pacific* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) p. 70.

⁵ Kathirithamby-Wells, 'Acehnese Control over West Sumatra', pp. 473, 478.#

overseas and the increasing powers of the *orangkaya* at home.⁶ The sultanate's territorial reach diminished or became less effective as a result of internal weakness and external commercial pressure from the Dutch. The improved conditions for the Dutch were due largely to the decline of Acehnese trade and the related decrease of trade with foreign Muslims resulting from Dutch attacks on their shipping.⁷ Kathirithamby-Wells pointed out that the Sultanah gave the Dutch a nominally free hand on the west coast by her *firman* of 1641, permitting the Dutch officials to transact directly with the rajas - a course of action she viewed as a departure from established procedure. Kathirithamby-Wells stated that although it was difficult to judge the sincerity of the Queen's motives in conceding the demands, the Sultanah found it difficult to force the local chiefs to comply.⁸ Kathirithamby-Wells concluded that in the second half of the 17th-century, the SWC, with Dutch assistance, forcibly cast off its Acehnese overlord and voluntarily refurbished its ties with Pagarruyong, capital of the Minangkabau kingdom. The inhabitants took advantage of an opportunity to cast off what they saw as foreign authority, which, despite its long established connections with the area, had remained indifferent to the populace.⁹

To what extent, however, did these treaties change in the distribution of power in North Sumatra? Did Dutch ascendancy in the Straits bring about a decline of Aceh's authority in SWC? Did events in SWC show European commerce and might displace indigenous institution, or the survival and continuity of local norms? Alternatively, could Wills' paradigm of interactive emergence be applied here as well as in Perak, where local Asian powers and European forces mutually adapt in their efforts to counter and respond whilst protecting their interests? According to Jan Van Goor, in highly personalized small states such as those in the Malay world, inter-generational rivalry and unstable sharing of power were the norm. In such a situation, it was common for one rival or the other to call for Dutch assistance as they had called earlier local maritime overlords.¹⁰ These alliances tended to be as transient and as fluid as the politics surrounding them. In Colin Newbury's

⁶ Kathirithamby-Wells, 'Acehnese Control over West Sumatra', p. 465.

⁷ No evidence is given for this assertion.

⁸ Kathirithamby-Wells, 'Acehnese Control over West Sumatra', pp. 466-467.

⁹ Kathirithamby-Wells, 'Acehnese Control over West Sumatra', p. 479.

¹⁰ Jan van Goor, 'Sea power, Trade and State-Formation: Pontianak and the Dutch', in *Trading Companies in Asia, 1600-1830*, ed. by Jan Van Goor (Utrecht: HES Uitgevers, 1986), 83-106, p. 84.

view, the most effective impositions of authority developed when Europeans understood and took advantage of these very same local and regional political structures.¹¹

Newbury and Kathirithamby-Wells saw European Companies actively taking the lead, while local polities remained as pawns in these encounters. Newbury showed Europeans exploiting local institutions. Wells saw only local disintegration and Western triumph, claiming that the VOC were successful in controlling local leaders, shipping and trade by the mid-seventeenth century. Judging from the evidence outlined below, however, I argue that the west coast inhabitants, rather than being merely sandwiched between the Acehnese and the VOC, were creating their own opportunities to obtain a better political and commercial deal for themselves. Indeed, VOC involvement in west coast politics, marked by the signing of the Painan Treaty in 1663, did not signify an end of Acehnese control and the beginning of VOC's domination. On the contrary, it launched a contest for influence and power among multiplying elites and stakeholders, while power became more diffused. Aceh's so-called decline did not make the SWC polities surrender to the VOC for protection. Rather, the company's keenness to get involved in local politics in order to protect their commercial interests made the VOC an alternative power in regional politics. Local leaders, who were extremely competitive and factionalized, could use the VOC to support their ambitions, especially in rivalry with ruling elites who were supported by Aceh but who might not be from the local ruling families. A few even sought to regain lost status and inheritance. The willingness of the elites to acquire new patrons and the VOC's desire to obtain new clients explains Aceh's loss of control over some of these west coast states. The Painan Treaty was a first step perhaps but not yet a definite one. The Treaty did not end Aceh's control over the SWC areas but it witnessed the beginning of a long drawn out struggle for power between Aceh, the VOC and the local elites.¹²

Early relations between Aceh and Sumatra West Coasts under Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Thani

The incentive for Acehnese control over the west coast during Iskandar Muda's period was, as in earlier times, pepper and gold. Iskandar Muda stationed **panglimas*, of Acehnese origin, at the main centres of production and export: Tiku, Pariaman, Salida and

¹¹ Newbury, *Patrons, Clients and Empire*, pp. 12, 70.

¹² W.J.A. De Leeuw, *Het Painansch Contract*, (Amsterdam: H.J. Paris, 1926) p. 82.

Inderapura. Under a harsh system whereby Iskandar Muda claimed 15% of the gold and pepper produced and fixed the price of the rest, the success of this monopoly depended on the *panglimas* and how harshly they were punished for disobeying Iskandar Muda's orders. Europeans, meanwhile, traded at Kota Raja (Banda Aceh) under royal licence. Exclusive privileges and permission to trade elsewhere were extremely difficult to secure. According to Kathirithamby-Wells, Iskandar Muda resisted the pressure of European powers for commercial concessions and thus preserved his empire from the inroads of colonial exploitation. She observed that it was tragic in some ways that his 1629 defeat at the hands of the Portuguese, during the siege of Melaka, should have dealt so severe a blow on his confidence. In 1632, in return for an alliance against the Portuguese he signed away to the Dutch some of the very concessions that he had withheld prudently for so long from them. By this agreement, Iskandar Muda allowed the Dutch toll free trade for several years in the whole kingdom including SWC, plus freedom to participate in the Perak tin trade.

Kathirithamby-Wells claimed that the privileges granted on the same grounds in 1638 by Iskandar Thani proved, in the context of his subsequent liaison with the Portuguese and his abstention from attacking Melaka, a worthless sacrifice.¹³ In addition to exclusive trade for an indefinite period other privileges constituted a surrender of royal prerogatives. The west coast pepper collected as tribute by the Sultan could henceforth be fetched directly by the Dutch and paid for at the capital. Similarly, payment for the remaining pepper was no longer to be made locally but at Aceh. The local elite did not welcome the change; those at Tiku, Pariaman and Inderapura resisted the delivery of pepper unless the king's tolls and duties were paid locally. The inability of the Dutch traders to produce a written document from Iskandar Thani was the only pretext by which the *panglimas* could deny them.

The Sultanah's predecessors provided these inroads into SWC, paving the way for a deeper penetration of Dutch influence and control. The concessions were granted not because Aceh was weak, but to incite the Dutch against the Portuguese. Meanwhile, the VOC's willingness to interfere in local politics made the company attractive to local elites with ambitions of their own. As early as 1619, some local elites in SWC offered to transfer allegiance to the VOC in return for protection and freedom from the Acehese yoke: the futile attempt by the ruler of Inderapura to seek Dutch protection is an example. At other times, anti-Aceh sentiment took the form of monopoly evasions whenever Acehese

¹³ Kathirithamby-Wells, 'Acehese Control over West Sumatra', p. 465.

vigilance was relaxed. The predatory and exploitative attitude of Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Thani drove local elites to search for another patron.

Aceh's relations with Sumatra West Coast under Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah

When Safiatuddin came to power, she had to deal with the VOC's increasing interest in obtaining pepper, with its attendant pressures in SWC. To show that she welcomed company officers she issued a *firman* concerning privileges her predecessors had promised verbally.¹⁴ She awarded exemption from toll for one ship, the *Groll*, trading in Tiku, Priaman, Inderapura and Padang annually, though other ships had still to pay in *ryx* dollars.¹⁵ This grant *limited* the blanket grant promised by Iskandar Muda to the Dutch where the Company could trade toll-free for several years in all his dominions. She conceded, however, her late husband's promise of exclusive trade in the places specified. This was one of the top demands of the company, who knew that verbal promises could be changed or conveniently forgotten.¹⁶

Despite the 1641 contact, Pieter Sourij, who visited Aceh from May to August 1642, complained that traders from Bengal, Dabul, Masulipatnam and Arakan were still "infecting" the SWC. In 1641, when Sultanah Safiatuddin ascended the throne, Gujerati merchants were the most powerful traders in Aceh. Company officials complained that Indian traders evaded tolls by shipping goods in small bulk. They were unhappy that the Sultanah had granted them exemption for only one ship. They wanted the Indians expelled so that they could take over cloth deliveries to exchange for pepper instead of having to pay in gold.¹⁷ Besides the

¹⁴ 'CXXXVI-Atjeh-Sumatra Westcoast, Februari-Maart, 1641', in *Corpus Diplomaticum*, ed. by J. E. Heeres, Vol. 1, pp. 345-346. This same act originally written in Malay and translated in Dutch could also be found in the Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1640-1641, pp. 423-425. This act of goodwill from the Queen was reinforced in her first letter to the Governor-General in Batavia Antonio van Diemen. This letter was translated from Malay to Dutch and the main contents could be found in Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1640-1641, pp. 428-430.

¹⁵Ibid, p. 346.

¹⁶ When, for instance, the company had tried to pin Iskandar Thani to enforce his promise of exclusivity, he side-stepped with the explanation that it had been a custom in these places to trade with merchants from all nations and that this practice would continue. He assured the Dutch that they would face no problems if they joined the queue together with the other traders. NA, VOC 1136, f.1209R.

¹⁷ NA, *Dagh-Register* gehouden van Pieter Sourij, May-August 1642, f.579R.

Indians, both European companies faced other local rivals, such as those from Johor and Macassar.¹⁸

Seven years later, on the 2nd of October 1649, Johan Truijtman visited Aceh and made similar complaints.¹⁹ In an audience with the Sultanah, he asked for her written *estemie* to be given to her *panglima* at SWC to confirm the company's earlier privileges there. He complained that the Dutch had received no pepper from Sillida and Inderapura and very little pepper from Tiku and Priaman.²⁰ He demanded a fixed price for the company's cloth in exchange for pepper. Next, Truijtman requested execution of a promise, made the previous year, to exempt one ship from toll to the amount of 1070 bhar pepper in Tiku. This request raised the ire of some of the *orangkaya* present but according to Truijtman, the Maharaja Sri Maharaja and the Sultanah promised they would accommodate these requests.

Encouraged, perhaps, Truijtman made his third request, which was for exemption from toll for the pepper trade of the whole of the SWC. This time, the Sultanah reacted swiftly; Truijtman described her utterance as hard, violent, loud and grave. She said, "How could I accept a condition never before applied that could take the bread out of the mouths of my people? I will follow the old customs..." Hereupon, the *orangkaya* rose together as a sign of concurrence, and gravely called out "*daulat*". The privilege would amount to some 8000 reals. The Sultanah, however, clarified that regardless of the amount, her people should enjoy their rights. The custom should remain indefinitely. In case the Dutch feared that her *panglima* in SWC would not acknowledge the Company's privilege, she would re-issue the written order annually.²¹ She would not grant a permanent fixed sum toll-free to the Company.

Truijtman reported that the Sultanah made known her own displeasures with the Dutch over the Company's actions in Tiku. A Genoese ship flying a Dutch flag robbed an Acehnese vessel loaded with pepper.²² Although the quantity of pepper was not yet known, the Sultanah was extremely unhappy, because of the loss of her subjects, namely two Muslim traders. Being more used to giving complaints rather than receiving them, the Dutch Commissioner could merely mumble that the Governor-General would handle the business

¹⁸ William Foster, *The English Factories in India 1618-1669* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1927), p. 169.

¹⁹ See earlier chapter on "Perak Affair" for details.

²⁰ Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, p. 487.

²¹ NA, Rapport substanteel aen d' Ed Heer Cornelis van der Lijn, f.185V.

²² NA, Rapport substanteel aen d' Ed Heer Cornelis van der Lijn, f.186R.

regarding the incident at Tiku.²³ Members of the anti-Dutch faction, unhappy over her offer to renew existing Dutch privileges, raised a protest and even the Maharaja Sri Maharajah became silent. The Raja Binthara, the Maharajah's follower, however, interjected that it was the Sultanah's right to determine the matter as she wished.

On the 12th of October 1649, the Sultanah replied to Truijtman's requests. She would make the contract with the company to fix the price of cloth in exchange for pepper at SWC. Not only would she give a written **firman* to her *panglima* at SWC, she would send two qualified persons there with Truijtman to execute the contract. She would send a written *firman* to the *Panglima* of Tiku to *kurnia* the Company the rest of the 1070 bhar pepper toll-free. She would write to the Governor-General explaining her refusal of permanent exemption from toll for the whole of SWC. She would leave restitution by the Genoese to the discretion of the Governor-General.

Her resolutions showed that the Sultanah was keen to maintain friendly relations with the Company and accommodated them on several demands, despite protests from the Laksamana and his followers. But she was adamant on key points. Toll exacted on pepper trade in SWC was the main revenue for the Sultanah and her *orangkaya* and this right had to be protected. True to her word, the Sultanah sent *firman* to the *panglima*, reiterating the promises made to the Company. After initial resistance from Tiku and Priaman, a contract was signed in Tiku, 6 Nov, 1649, by envoys of the Acehnese Crown, Sribidia Indra and Radia Moedeliar and *oppercoopman* Joan Truijtman, Henrick Creijerszoon and *ondercoopman* Joannes Waghter. Another contract was confirmed in Priaman on 9 Nov. 1649. The contracts in substance stated that as long as there was trade between the two parties, the price of cloth supplied by the Company in exchange for pepper at SWC would remain fixed. All foreign nations were to be excluded from SWC except for the Company and Aceh.²⁴

Six years later, in 1655, despite the Dutch company officials' pressures to gain trading concessions, they still complained about the damage Muslim trade did to the VOC.²⁵

²³ Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, p. 490.

²⁴ Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, pp. 501-503. See also Heeres, *Corpus Diplomaticum*, pp. 528-529.

²⁵ Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, 1655-1674, Vol.3, pp.19, 23. The Dutch reported that the Muslim merchants from Surat, Maslupatnam and Pegu were able to sell their cloth at very low prices in Aceh which were in turn bought by the local Asian traders in exchange for their own products such as cloves. A great number of Chinese wares brought from Johor, Patani and Melaka were also traded in Aceh.

They also faced competition from the English at SWC from 1658.²⁶ The Dutch patrolled the coasts, emptying foreign vessels of pepper on the justification that the Sultanah had promised them exclusive trade.²⁷ Their incessant demands and high-handed acts inspired local anger that culminated in the imprisonment of the *coopman* Van Voorst and other Company officials in Priaman, Tiku and Sillida. The Dutch believed this was instigated by the Acehnese since some of the Dutch prisoners were brought to Aceh.²⁸ In 1657, the Dutch strengthened their factory at Sillida, and then went to Priaman, where all negotiations for the exchange of prisoners were fruitless. They decided to patrol off Priaman instead.²⁹

Balthasar Bort led a delegation to Aceh in 1659 to settle these differences and to reconfirm company privileges at SWC. Another agreement between the company and the Sultanah promised that the *panglima* responsible would pay the Company 49518 ¼ reals for damages incurred by the Company in 1657. This agreement also reconfirmed the Company's exclusive privilege in SWC and the yearly toll-free grant of now 1200 bharen pepper to be obtained from Priaman in the first year, Tiku in the second and Sillida in the third.³⁰ After departing Aceh, Bort went to SWC and concluded a treaty with Sillibar in 1660. Bort then went to Inderapura, Padang and Tiku and concluded similar treaties and placed a Resident in each place to foresee trade. He reported that he found the *panglimas* willing to trade with the VOC but they could not afford to pay debts.³¹

From 1655-1659, the VOC's intensified blockade of Aceh and Perak harbours in retaliation at the Company officials' murder in Perak had a temporary dampening effect on Aceh's trade with the Gujaratis. But after the signing of the 1659 peace treaty between Aceh and the VOC, the merchants who were forced to go to Melaka returned to Aceh to trade.

²⁶ In 1658, the English decided to reverse their policy of withdrawal. Three Dutch ships tried to prevent the "Mayflower" from being loaded with pepper. Failing to do so, the Dutch then seized fifty bhars of pepper from the ship. Foster, William, *English factories*, pp. 181, 207, 255. See also Report of Messrs Zouch, Exton and Mason concerning the injuries of the Dutch East India Company towards the English East India Company, 19th January 1661, Court Minutes of the EIC, pp.77-81, p.77.

²⁷ The Dutch went to Inderapura to collect pepper but they found an English ship there and unloaded their pepper, see J.L. Van Basel, 'Begin en voortgang vaqn onzen handel en bezittingen or Sumatra's Westkust', *Tijdschrift voor Neerland's Indie*, 9.2 (1847), 1-57, p. 17.

²⁸ Heeres, *Corpus Diplomaticum*, p. 152.

²⁹ Basel, 'Begin en voortgang', p. 16.

³⁰ Heeres, *Corpus Diplomaticum*, p. 154.

³¹ Basel, 'Begin en voortgang', p. 17-19.

The VOC's trade in Melaka was again badly affected.³² Company officials also complained that as a result of the great Muslim traffic in the textile trade, the Company's own textile trade had suffered.³³

So, far from giving the Dutch a free hand on the west coast, the Sultanah actually limited the VOC's privileges. Her resistance to the blanket privileges indicated her desire to protect subjects of subordinate states. By allowing her subordinates at SWC to trade with the VOC directly, she dismantled the policies of Iskandar Muda that had caused much local resentment. Although she gave her *panglimas* a freer hand to trade with the VOC she did not tolerate *panglimas* who contravened her commands especially when this might hurt Aceh's strategic interests. When Bort went to Aceh in 1659, the Sultanah allowed the Dutch to build a temporary lodge in Padang. The Dutch, however, schemed to build a permanent lodge. The Panglima vetoed a lodge of any sort for fear that the Company might fortify the factory there.³⁴ With this attempt botched, company representatives raised a temporary wooden lodge further south at Sillida. When the Sultanah learnt about this, she became very angry. The Company reported that those in Padang had disallowed them to build a lodge in Padang so they went to Sillida instead. Gabriel Bruyl, the then Resident in Aceh, wrote to Groenewegen at SWC that the Sultanah had summoned those from Padang to Aceh to register her anger at having her orders disobeyed. She also sent an *estemie* to Sillida to punish the Panglima for allowing the Company to build a house to stay there yearly when she only gave license for the Company to trade in Sillida and build factory for a month or two in a year. He was replaced by a new *panglima*. The Sultanah ordered Groenewegen to move from Sillida. She would only allow the Dutch to build a more permanent lodge at Tiku or Priaman. These were Acehnese strongholds and closer to Aceh's capital, thus the Dutch could be closely monitored.³⁵ The Company finally decided to establish their lodge at Pulau Chinco, which later became the Company's headquarters for SWC, an island off Padang which was not only healthy but well away from the Acehnese.

³² Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, 1655-1674, vol. 3, p. 324.

³³ Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, 1655-1674, vol. 3, p. 337.

³⁴ Two village heads from Padang met Groenewegen and told him that they did not object to the Company's lodge in Padang, on the contrary they welcomed it but it was the Panglima who objected. Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1663, p.85.

³⁵ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1663, pp. 83-84.

VOC and the SWC polities: From Traders to Protectors?

The *De Remedie* sailed into Batavia in 1663 with a letter from Jan Groenewegen, dated 24th February to the Governor General reporting on the happenings at SWC. Groenewegen wrote about his secret meetings with the Rajas there in 1662 about putting themselves under VOC protection.³⁶ Three *orangkaya* from formerly Minangkabau-ruled Bajang - Radja Poety, Sultan Mamoulia and Maradia Lella - appeared with Dato Pekepia in Sillida in January 1663 and promised the Dutch, in unbreakable friendship, to deliver their pepper to no one else but the Company.³⁷ Unhappiness with what they claimed was Acehnese domination, which they considered foreign, was compounded by the heavy taxes and oppressive behaviour of the Acehnese *panglima*.³⁸ A provisional agreement was concluded with Groenewegen who was the Company's *coopman-resident* at SWC, to be ratified in Batavia later.

This "secret" negotiation was well-known to other local elites. A few weeks later when Groenewegen visited Tiku, the **penghulu* Orangkaya Suri Radja representing Duabelas Kota (federation of twelve cities) declared that he too wanted to sign an everlasting contract with the Company to overthrow the Acehnese yoke. Similarly, when Groenewegen visited Padang, the Penghulu Orangkaya Ketjil welcomed Groenewegen to stay at his house and to discuss the possibility of putting Padang under the Company's protection and to chase the Acehnese Panglima from there. Sultan Muzaffar Syah, his son, Muhammad Syah and son-in-law, Raja Sulaiman met Groenewegen in Sillida to offer to sign a similar contract.³⁹

In July 1663, the provisional contract became the Painan Treaty, formerly ratified between representatives from Bandar Sepuloh, Inderapura, Tiku and Padang, Governor-General Joan Maetsuyker and the Council of the Indies in Batavia. Main provisions were for exclusive trade - banning the English under threat of fined or chastisement; exemption from tolls except for the usual **ruba* and other anchorage fees to local rulers; non-interference in religion;⁴⁰ and the Company's right to build a lodge. The locals were to get rid of the foreign

³⁶ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1663, p. 81.

³⁷ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1663, p. 82.

³⁸ Those in SWC paid homage to aceh-1 peteh (2stuivers) per house yearly. Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1663, p. 88.

³⁹ Mohammad Dahlan Mansoer and others, *Sedjarah Minangkabau*, (Djakarta: Bhratara, 1970), pp. 93-94.

⁴⁰ Steenbrink argued that "the fact that some contracts safeguarded the privileges of pagans or Muslims reveals a lenient (and therefore possibly weak) position of the Company". The Company's influence on the local population was strongest in Sri Lanka, Malabar and Moluccas where a paragraph on religion was always included. Relations with the rulers of Sumatra according to Steenbrink were still superficial in the 17th-18th centuries, which was why religion was not discussed. See Karel Steenbrink, *Dutch Colonialism and Indonesian Islam: Contacts and Conflicts 1596-1950*, trans. by Jan Steenbrink, and Henry Jansen, 2nd rev. edn (Amsterdam:

Acehnese yoke and to expel all Acehnese. They would be under Company protection against all enemies from the sea but not from land. The Company would try its own officers and determine the price of gold.⁴¹

The important questions here are - why did the VOC shift policy in the 1660s and why did SWC rulers approach the Company to offer allegiance? Local elites took this initiative, contrary to the common belief that the VOC and the Acehnese deprived them of agency.

According to Kathirithamby-Wells, the shift in Dutch policy was conducted, initially at least, in strict secrecy, to match alleged Acehnese duplicity over the Perak tin trade. The cordial relations which then existed between Aceh and Perak and Aceh's friendly reception by Aceh of foreign Muslim traders at Perak generated well founded suspicions of collusion.⁴² The steady decline of Aceh under Dutch pressure contributed to the shift. Kathirithamby-Wells continued that the Sultanah was anxious to save the remnants of once flourishing trade from total destruction by the Dutch. Aceh's internal administration was weak, with Safiatuddin Syah getting on in years. The Queen was helpless in the face of dissension among court officials and unreasonable Dutch demands which she was no longer in a position to reject. In a conciliatory policy, she tried placating the Dutch officials with gifts, royal honours and unusual friendliness.⁴³ The final reason given by Kathirithamby-Wells was the progressive strengthening of the VOC's position after 1650, when officials became obsessed with the idea of cornering the bulk of the westward flow of pepper and gold, which hitherto had been a strictly guarded Acehnese monopoly. With the intention of being close to the main sources of both products, the company proposed to establish its main factory at Padang.⁴⁴

There is little evidence to show that Aceh was declining. By 1660, the Company was perhaps tired of depending on Aceh in SWC, as shown in successive failures to enforce the privileges granted to them. The Company officials were unable to procure even the 1200 bharen toll-free pepper promised to them in any one of the places stipulated. They complained that they could not get even half of the amount in Sillida and had to try to

Rodopi, 1993), p.66-69. The Painan Treaty which explicitly called for non-interference in religion showed that the VOC's influence was still very much restricted to commerce.

⁴¹ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1663, pp. 88, 349-350.

⁴² Kathirithamby-Wells, 'Painan Treaty', p. 470.

⁴³ Kathirithamby-Wells, 'Painan Treaty', p. 472.

⁴⁴ Kathirithamby-Wells, 'Painan Treaty', p. 473.

procure the rest from Tiku.⁴⁵ The Acehnese *panglima* in SWC also prevented the Company from trading gold, on the grounds that the Sultanah had not granted the Company access to gold in her dominions. The Dutch countered this by citing the 1659 Agreement, which they interpreted as covering not only pepper but gold and other goods. In the last two years the Company officials reported that the Acehnese had engrossed about 400 cattles of gold (about 720 Dutch pounds). The Dutch were eager to get their hands on this gold which, they deemed as a “remarkable trade” because for about 1 tael heavy inland gold, they could get much more cloth than they would get for 1 bahar of pepper.⁴⁶

With frequent set-backs, local Company officials, especially under Groenwegen, had begun to side-step Aceh. For example, after some Dutch officials were taken prisoner in Sillida, Tiku and Priaman in 1657, the Company tried unsuccessfully to retaliate in Tiku and Priaman and strengthened the factory in Sillida. The VOC was also perhaps encouraged by the initiatives of some local elites in trying to make their independent deals. Steps to conclude contracts without Aceh’s knowledge would certainly incur the wrath of the Acehnese. Outright war against Aceh was against Company’s policy and for locals the attempt to overthrow Aceh’s overlordship was risky. These, rather than attempted emulation of Acehnese duplicity, were the reasons for acting covertly.

The Painan Treaty signified the beginning of the contest for political and economic control between the Acehnese, the VOC and the local elites. Affairs in SWC, where local elites were vying for power and wealth, were conducive for the Company to shift policy, from dependence on the Acehnese to patronage in its own right, acquiring clients to protect Dutch interests. In common with the traditions of a region where stranger-kings were rife, and the practical advantages of favouring distant, manipulable rulers, SWC elites increasingly preferred the Dutch to the Acehnese.⁴⁷ The VOC wrested vassals from Aceh and worked towards control of SWC’s trade. However, as with other contracts signed, the Company needed a few more decades to begin to translate the terms of the Painan Treaty from paper to reality.

⁴⁵ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1663, p. 83.

⁴⁶ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1663, p. 82. 1 cattie was 20 taels and 1 tael was 104 Japanese condryns.

⁴⁷ David Henley, “Conflict, Justice, and the Stranger-King Indigenous Roots of Colonial Rule in Indonesia and Elsewhere,” in *Modern Asian Studies*, 38, 1, (2004), pp.85-144, p.87.

Safiatuddin and her *orangkaya* resented events at SWC. Even before the Painan Treaty, the Sultanah courted the English and Siam to counter-balance Dutch incursions in Perak and SWC. Although the English presence in Sumatra was negligible and intermittent, the Sultanah wrote to Charles II on the 12 October 1661⁴⁸ to renew what she deemed as ties of friendship from the time of her father.⁴⁹

She urged the English to continue to send their ships to Aceh as they did in the past for the sake of lasting friendship. As proof of her friendship, she mentioned the privileges she had granted to Henry Gary, who had resided in her kingdom for the past eighteen months. She had allowed him to construct a warehouse at the port and granted permission to English merchants to trade in Aceh. Furthermore, she allowed three English ships a year to trade in Aceh and its dominions. She informed the king that she had done all she could, but his subjects were unable to trade in her dominions because the “accursed” (*celaka*) Dutch apprehended them. She besought Charles to safeguard English traders from harm.

Safiatuddin clearly wanted to use the English as a bulwark against a possible attack by the VOC and invited the English to establish their presence in Aceh. This plea however, did not appeal because trade in Aceh for the English was already dwindling and the English were not willing to be drawn into a brawl between the Acehnese and the Dutch. The Sultanah's attempts to renew her alliance with Siam in 1662 produced no results.⁵⁰ The Acehnese even sent envoys to their old arch-enemy, Johor, apparently with no results either.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Translation of letter from Queen of Aceh to Charles II is found in C.O. 77, vol. viii, pp. 192, 194, 196, Public Records Office (now The National Archives). See Foster, *English factories, 1661-1664*, p. 83. For the letter in Malay, see Annable Teh-Gallop, 'Gold, Silver and Lapis Lazuli: Royal letters from Aceh in the 17th Century', unpublished paper presented at the First International Conference of Aceh and Indian Ocean Studies, Banda Aceh, 24-26 February, 2007.

⁴⁹ English trading relations with Aceh first began when James Lancaster brought a letter from Queen Elizabeth to the Sultan and landed in Aceh in 1602. See A. K. Das Gupta, 'Aceh in Indonesian Trade and Politics 1600-1641' (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Cornell University, 1962).

⁵⁰ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1663, p. 208. The VOC officials made notes of this exchange of envoys between Siam and Aceh in 1662 but no more details were provided regarding the mission.

⁵¹ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1663, p. 433. No more details were given here either.

The signing of the Painan Treaty made little initial difference. In July 1663, Groenewegen and the SWC representatives returned to SWC from Batavia to find more troubles erupting in their territories. Aceh, discovering “betrayal” by vassals, was extremely suspicious of the VOC’s next moves. News from Perak that the VOC intended to close its factories in Aceh and Perak encouraged the Acehnese to believe that the VOC might wage war on them. A letter from Groenewegen in Pulau Chinco to the Governor General mentioned how the Sultanah sent an *estemie* to the *panglima* in Tiku, and all other lands where she had appointed her *panglimas* in December 1663, to inform them that the Dutch had broken away from Aceh and Perak. Therefore, they must be vigilant against Dutch activities in Bajang and the Queen’s lands must be maintained and kept in submission. This news alarmed the pro-Dutch faction in Sungei Pagou and they pleaded with Groenewegen not to let them down. They informed him that their Panglima and the Acehnese representative had asked them to go to Aceh to explain.⁵²

While attempting to stem Dutch encroachments in SWC, the Sultanah tried to improve relations with the Company. On the 26th of August 1664 two *boedjanghs* of the Sultanah arrived in Melaka bringing her letter and gifts. The Sultanah wrote that she was very surprised at the Company’s decision to empty the factory in Aceh and Perak and that for two years now, no Dutch envoys or ships had been to Aceh. She informed the Governor of Melaka that the Company officials who were still in Aceh were in such a state that Resident Bruyl, had to borrow 450 tael derham from her. The Dutch did not respond. The Acehnese *boedjanghs* were treated well⁵³ but evidence that the Company was sidestepping Aceh to concentrate on SWC without Aceh’s mediation now seemed irrefutable.

Nevertheless, the Dutch were to discover that even though the local elites invited their protection in return for trade, the Company could not reap the benefits easily. By sidestepping the Acehnese, the VOC lost the advantage of a single authority, albeit a troublesome one, in dealing with the SWC polities and instead encountered a fluid environment, hard to understand and harder still to master. Power in SWC had multiple centres.⁵⁴ Local rivalries added to the complexity and fragility of the political situation. The VOC’s attempt to boost local rulers encouraged more jostling for power. The absence of a

⁵² Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1664, p. 45.

⁵³ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1664, p. 443.

⁵⁴ For a detailed study on nature of Minangkabau authority, see Timothy Barnard, *Multiple Centres of Authority: Society and Environment in Siak and Eastern Sumatra, 1674-1827* (Leiden: KITLV Press, Leiden, 2003).#

dominant foreign presence facilitated internecine wars, which the Dutch were unable to suppress until the end of the century. Instability intermittently stopped trade, while different factions used the Acehnese and the VOC as supporting powers in their conflicts.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to detail the political goings-on and the changing fortunes of the VOC in the small polities of SWC, such as Inderapura⁵⁵, Kota Tengah, and Barus⁵⁶. Nevertheless, a brief case-study of Padang could help illustrate the fluidity of the political situation and the absence of a hegemon. Padang echoed the other polities.

Troubles in Padang

The VOC faced obstacles even in areas, distant from Aceh, which were originally inclined to ally with the Company. In most of these areas, politics were characterized by the competition for power and wealth between leaders who were pro-Company and those who were still loyal to Aceh. The Company's fortunes ebbed and flowed depending on who gained the upper hand. In Padang, the Company officials found the *orangkaya* very divided, the powerful group being pro-Aceh. The deaths of two leaders who had signed a contract with the Company brought about a grave deterioration of the VOC's affairs. Groenewegen sent a small force but failed to chase the Acehnese away. The Dutch reported that the pro-Aceh faction were promising money to those who could help expel the Company from Padang.⁵⁷ The Company officials were in a dilemma since they were not inclined to force the Padang inhabitants to adhere to the contract yet they were not willing to leave since Padang was an important place, closely watched by others as an example. It was only a year later that the pro-Company faction managed to gain power there, and even to bring another troubled area, Kota Tengah, to their side. The Dutch reported that the Padang heads even pawned their wives' jewellery to lure Kota Tengah with gifts.⁵⁸ Padang became the Company's main administrative centre in 1666. The Company however, failed to extend its

⁵⁵ For a detailed account of the history of Inderapura see J. Kathirithamby-Wells 'The Inderapura Sultanate: the foundations of its rise and decline from the 16th - 18th century', *Indonesia*, 21, April (1976), 65-84.

⁵⁶ See Jane Drakard, 'An Indian Ocean Port: Sources for the Earlier History of Barus', *Archipel*, 37 (1989), 53-82, p. 73.

⁵⁷ Letter from Jacob Cauw from Padang to Governor General, dated 9 November, 1664. Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1664, p. 550.

⁵⁸ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1665, p. 238.

influence in Acehese strongholds such as Tiku and Priaman. As Groenewegen reported in 1665, Jacob Corneliszoon, who was in charge in Tiku, was murdered with two other soldiers.⁵⁹ The Company retaliated by burning houses and vessels. The Company stationed two yachts near Tiku and Priaman and no passes were given in Batavia to those who wished to visit these places.⁶⁰ Groenewegen's death in December 1665 was another setback for the Company and its allies.⁶¹

Evert Michielse replaced Groenewegen and later Abraham Verspreet took over his position. Verspreet landed in Padang with ships and soldiers to wage a war on all the places who were anti-Dutch like Pauw, Priaman, Tiku, Kota Tengah and Oelakkan. Besides the leaders from Padang, Ambon and Raja Bugis joined Verspreet. A letter from Padang to Governor Maetsuyker reported that the Acehese from Priaman and Tiku were destroyed; and that Orangkaya Kecil became Governor of Padang, Raja Bugis King of Oelakkan and Raja Ambon Panglima of Priaman, while Pauw and Kota Tengah were subdued to the Company.⁶²

However, not all was as reported. A letter from Jacob Pits, mentioned that no matter how they dissembled, the hearts of Tiku and Priaman were with Aceh.⁶³ As long as Acehese remained in these areas they swore with their mouths but never with their hearts.⁶⁴ Troubles for the Company recurred in Kota Tengah and Priaman. The promotion of Padang under the VOC interfered with trade in these areas and they became centres of fierce opposition to the Company by the late 1660s. The Company's SWC allies wrote to the Governor General appealing for soldiers. One other reason for these renewed troubles was the arrival of Raja Palawan from Aceh - not from the sea but from the eastern landward side of SWC, presumably to avoid clashes with Dutch naval patrols. He spread the news that the Sultanah intended to send forces within three months to bring all her former vassals under her control.⁶⁵ He declared that the *ulama* in these areas had now allied with him against the enemies of religion.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1665, p. 48.

⁶⁰ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1665, p. 312.

⁶¹ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1666-1667, p. 8.

⁶² Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1666-1667, p. 175.

⁶³ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1666-1667, p. 404.

⁶⁴ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1668-1669, p. 278.

⁶⁵ See Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1665, p.239.#

⁶⁶ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1670-1671, p. 69.

Religion was important. Aceh had played a big part in the dissemination and development of Islam in west Sumatra. An important religious centre such as Oelakkan in the west coast had numerous Acehnese residents, whose expulsion, as demanded by the Company, provoked outrage. Verspreeet described Oelakkan as fanatically Muslim and very inclined towards the Acehnese.⁶⁷ Indeed, one of the obstacles encountered during the initial treaty negotiations with Barus in 1668 was local opposition to the VOC's demand that all Acehnese be expelled from Barus.⁶⁸ Like Oelakkan, Barus was also another important religious centre that had close connections with Aceh from as early as the latter half of the sixteenth century. In the first half of the seventeenth century, Barus was presumably home to many religious exiles escaping the persecutions of Nuruddin al-Raniri in Aceh.⁶⁹ Hamzah Fansuri, the important Sufi religious figure and poet in Aceh was said to have come from Barus.

This arrival of Raja Palawan caused disturbances in Kota Tengah, where about half the Council members rebelled against the Company. The rebel leaders were Bendahara Raja Macatta (Mahkota), Raja Setia Wangsa and Maharaja Lilla. Jacob Pits went to Kota Tengah with Sultan Muhammad Syah of Inderapura and Panglima Raja of Padang to investigate and faced demands that the Company expel its Panglima Orangkaya Putih and have their houses and properties burnt. In the end, the Company closed its lodge brought all its goods to Padang.⁷⁰ Kota Tengah was subdued by Padang and Company soldiers only in 1680.⁷¹

VOC as the new overlord?

In SWC, the Company did not attempt to replace Aceh as the overlord and protector of its former vassals - first, because of the existence of pro-Aceh factions and secondly because of religious opposition to the Company in the *ulama*, which appeared to have some clout.⁷² VOC strategy was to replace existing overlords by reviving the old kingdom of

⁶⁷ Hendrick Kroeskamp, *De Westkust en Minangkabau 1665-1668* (Utrecht: Drukkerij Fa. Schotanus & Jens, 1931), p. 88.

⁶⁸ There were many Acehnese residents in Barus, some of whom married members of the local nobility. Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, p. 138.

⁶⁹ Drakard, "An Indian Ocean Port", p. 73.

⁷⁰ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1670-1671, p. 71.

⁷¹ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1680, p. 712.

⁷² After 1666, opposition against the VOC grew and anti-Dutch protests on the west coast were frequently described in the VOC records as having a 'Muslim' character and this religious sentiment strengthened the

Minangkabau. The VOC made the first contact with the Minangkabau ruler, Sultan Ahmad Syah, in 1665, whose claim to overlordship, unless neutralised, might prove dangerous to the VOC's prospects of subjugating the west coast to control the pepper and gold trade.

Despite the contractual language of the Painan Treaty the VOC essentially regarded west coast Sumatra as conquered territory.⁷³ Verspreet however, recognising religious opposition to the Company as invariably linked to local support for Aceh, considered, in a letter to his superiors in Batavia, dated 23 May 1667, the desirability of finding a way to soften Muslim resentment at subservience to the Hollander.⁷⁴ He proposed to recognize the Minangkabau king as sovereign in exchange for his renunciation of any intention to tax the people of the west coast or to act independently of the Dutch. According to Drakard, implicit in Verspreet's plan was the idea of placing a Muslim overlord between the Company and the people of the west coast.⁷⁵

This plan was accepted and Verspreet and his successor, Jacob Pits, were recognized as the Minangkabau king's representative, *stadthouder* or *wakil raja* (deputy raja).⁷⁶ Verspreet reported that the king's name immediately eased the flow of trade. The Company faced no more difficulties and obtained 400 tael of pure gold from the inhabitants.⁷⁷ According to Drakard, Verspreet distinguished formal authority from actual power: real must back nominal sovereignty.⁷⁸

The Dutch appeared to have hit upon a remarkable and unique solution by reviving this old shadowy kingdom in the clouds and using its former relations with the west coast polities as a source of legitimacy while executing its own policies.⁷⁹ The Company officials learnt later that other parties could play a similar game. Local protagonists also used the king's name to dignify themselves. For example, in June 1667, Verspreet travelled to Batavia with two Minangkabau envoys carrying a letter, ostensibly from the king. Upon their return, the envoys brought back letters and gifts from the Governor General for the king. They

Acehnese link in anti-Company activities. Jane Drakard, *A Kingdom of words-Language and power in Sumatra* (London: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 55.

⁷³ Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, p. 110. Also, Drakard, *A Kingdom of Words*, p. 69.

⁷⁴ Kroeskamp, *De Westkust*, p. 97.

⁷⁵ Drakard, *A Kingdom of Words*, p. 69.

⁷⁶ According to Drakard, Verspreet correspondence with the Minangkabau court has not survived but Verspreet's new position and authority was described in his own account. Drakard, *A Kingdom of Words*, p. 70.

⁷⁷ VOC 1264, 1688, f.288R, quoted from Drakard, *A Kingdom of Words*, p. 72.

⁷⁸ Drakard, *A Kingdom of Words*, p. 73.

⁷⁹ According to Drakard, a survey of published letters of the VOC in the seventeenth century suggests that west coast Sumatra was the only region where VOC representatives used this term to designate their own role. Drakard, *A Kingdom of Words*, p. 70.

went instead to Bendahara Putih, a leading chief of one of the highland communities, who, it turned out, was the real author of the purportedly royal letter to Batavia.⁸⁰ According to Drakard, in selecting the Minangkabau court to act as a powerful local intermediary, the VOC entered into a perplexing and often frustrating alliance.⁸¹

By the 1690s no place in SWC was really calm. On Batoe, Raja Ibrahim, head of Tiku, son of the former Padang Panglima, murdered Johannis Sas and three soldiers before taking refuge in Aceh. In Baros, the son of the pro-Aceh Raja DiHulu murdered a Dutch surgeon and problems between diHulu and his co-ruler, DiHilir, continued.⁸² Although the English could not make much headway in Priaman and had to establish their base further south along the west coast in Bencoolen, the Orangkaya of Manjutta welcomed them with open arms. Although the Sultan of Inderapura had been the Company's ally for a long time, the Dutch had little trust in those from Inderapura. Pau remained at war with Padang.⁸³

The editors of the *Corpus Diplomaticum* (collected contracts and treaties signed between the VOC and local rulers) commented that 'in no other region of the Company's operations were so many sacred agreements sworn, violated and resworn as on the west coast of Sumatra.'⁸⁴

English Settlement in SWC: From Factories to Forts

The VOC was still unable to exclude the English and Asian traders from SWC. Before 1680, the Dutch had made more inroads into local commercial and political affairs in the Indies than the English. This situation changed in the 1680s when the EIC began to think in terms of fortifying their factories or settlements in Asian ports and using force.⁸⁵ After eighty years of having a settlement in Bantam, the English lost their footing in the region and also their largest single source of pepper in 1682.⁸⁶ Pepper was not only important as an article of trade. It was also a vital element in resisting Dutch monopolistic

⁸⁰ Drakard, *A Kingdom of Words*, p. 74.

⁸¹ Drakard, *A Kingdom of Words*, p. 64.

⁸² Basel, 'Begin en voortgang', p. 51.

⁸³ Basel, 'Begin en voortgang', p. 53.

⁸⁴ Heeres and Stapel, *Corpus Diplomaticum*, BKI, 91 (1934), p. 423.

⁸⁵ I. B. Watson, discussed this policy of fortification and the idea of force in the EIC relations with India in the introduction by Patrick J.N. Tuck, ed., *The East India Company*, 4, p. viii.

⁸⁶ A. Farrington, 'Negotiations at Aceh in 1684: An Unpublished English document', in *Indonesia and the Malay World* 27.77 (1999), 19-33, p. 19.

ambitions and a matter of national pride.⁸⁷ With the closure of Bantam to the English Company, the English began to cast their eyes on the only other free port in the region where they could obtain pepper without Dutch restrictions - Aceh.

In a letter to the President and Council at Fort St. George from London, the Directors of the Company stated that for the purpose of having a "settled head factory" for the South Sea and pepper trade, they knew no better place than Aceh or the Princess Island.⁸⁸ They were uncertain about Princess Island since the Dutch had challenged Grantham there and he had been instructed not to open hostilities. As for Aceh, although it had long been a port where the English obtained pepper, relations had been at best lukewarm. The English, despite the offers from Sultanah Safiatuddin in 1661, had not grasped the opportunity to build a factory, partly owing to their inability to compete with the Surat merchants who sold cloth and bought pepper in Aceh, and partly to Dutch restrictions and the primacy of the factory in Bantam.

After twenty years, the English finally decided to take up Sultanah Safiatuddin's offer. Given the changed circumstances, the English this time wanted more than just a factory – they sought a fortified settlement. The EIC Directors wrote to Sultanah Zakiatuddin Shah (1678-88), on 1 October 1684, requesting permission to trade.⁸⁹ The Directors argued that it was to the interest of the English and the Acehnese for the English "to settle a standing factory" at Aceh or near Aceh where they could defend themselves against the designs of the Dutch and to preserve their trade in case the Dutch attempted to blockade Aceh's harbour. With the English pending "fortified settlement", the Directors pointed out, the Dutch could not blockade Aceh since this act would be tantamount to declaring war on the EIC and the English King.

The London Directors, however, left the Madras Council to take charge of this matter,⁹⁰ with instructions to strike an agreement with the Queen of Aceh in the name of the EIC, not the English nation.⁹¹ The Council sent Ralph Ord and William Cawley to Aceh,

⁸⁷ Farrington, 'Negotiations at Aceh in 1684', p. 19.

⁸⁸ BL, IOR: E/3/90 f.445. Letter dated 16th March 1684 from London to President and Council at Fort St. George.

⁸⁹ BL, IOR: E/3/90 f.376.

⁹⁰ BL, IOR: E/3/90 f.445. Another letter was sent on the ship "Dragon" dated 24th September 1684 to the Captain at Aceh, f.346.

⁹¹ Letter to the Agent and Council at Fort St. George, dated 19th October 1683 in Despatches from England; 1681-1686, Records of Fort St. George, p. 58.

where they stayed from October – December 1684,⁹² and found that during the previous decade Aceh had become a popular port for emerging country trade partnerships between Indian merchants, free residents in Madras, private merchants, adventurers and entrepreneurs. Richard Mohun, a former member of the Madras Council on private trade in Aceh in 1684, reported to London that the English could procure good loadings of pepper from Sumatra.⁹³

The Acehnese elite welcomed the English representatives with the usual hospitality.⁹⁴ The representatives described the procedure for landing, the procession to court with presents for the Queen, attending audience day with the Queen on Saturdays and the discussions and lobbying of the Aceh *orangkaya*. The main difference described here was the number of *orangkaya* who appeared to form the Council. Instead of four, there were twelve.⁹⁵ The most senior was the Orangkaya Maharajah. At his house, Ord and Cawley explained that after the King of Bantam had given their port to the Dutch, the English had decided to bring their profitable trade to Aceh. The Maharajah replied that the Acehnese had always regarded the English as friends, notwithstanding their absence for many years. He welcomed their return. It was here that the envoys broached the subject of a fort: the Madras President no longer wished to have an English settlement without building a fort for protection. They gave the examples of Macassar and Bantam where the English factory and goods were damaged when the rulers deferred to the Dutch. The only free port left was Aceh and Ord and Cawley did not hesitate to point out to the Maharajah that in all probability the Dutch would try to ruin Aceh too. Thus, Ord reasoned, a fort would not only protect the English but also deter the Dutch. The Maharajah replied that he had to report this request to the Sultanah and the rest of the *orangkaya* first. Besides the Maharajah, the next important *orangkaya* appeared to be the Shahbandar and the Panglima Bandar, who was in charge of foreigners.⁹⁶

⁹² The diary of Ord and Cawley is found in the Original Correspondence of the EIC archives. BL, IOR: E/3/44, ff. 171-181. This whole diary has been reproduced by Farrington in his article. Citations from the diary is taken from this published version.

⁹³ BL, IOR: E/3/44 no. 5612, Mohun to Sir Josiah Child, dated Aceh 24 June 1684, see Farrington, 'Negotiations at Aceh in 1684', p. 32.

⁹⁴ This diary is especially significant because it gives a detailed narrative of court procedures and negotiations in Aceh in the 1680's. This serves as a useful comparison to the time under Sultanah Safiatuddin since after the Dutch closed its factory in 1663, there were no envoys exchanged between the Dutch and Aceh. This diary is also the only most detailed and comprehensive account of the English encounter with the Aceh court.

⁹⁵ Farrington, 'Negotiations at Aceh in 1684', p. 25.

⁹⁶ Judging from the important ranking of the *orangkaya* in charge of foreigners, this might imply that trade with foreigners was still high in priority for the kingdom as it was during the reign of Safiatuddin.

After two months, by the 3rd of December, the English began to get impatient with the delays and met the Orangkaya⁹⁷ to enquire about the Sultanah's reply. The Orangkaya said that there was no reply from the Sultanah yet but the President's letter had been translated. The Orangkaya pointed out that there was no mention in the letter about the building of a fort in Aceh. Ord answered that the letter was meant only to give the English representatives' credentials whilst the requests would be made verbally. The Orangkaya asked why was it necessary for the English to request a fort now whereas they had never wanted this before. Ord reassured the Orangkaya that the English had no intention of conquest, unlike the Dutch, but wanted to avoid what happened at Bantam. The Orangkaya replied that in Aceh, unlike Bantam, the Dutch were mortal enemies and every Acehnese would rather die than allow the Dutch a footing in the kingdom. He declared that even though the Dutch had the greatest force, they had yet not been able to inflict anything on the Acehnese. To which Ord replied that this was true in the past, but now they could lay siege and, since Aceh was dependent on imported rice, could starve the port-city. The Orangkaya repeated that they would rather die than surrender. Ord replied that he had no doubt as to the honour of the Sultanah and the elite but the commoners would certainly surrender when they got hungry. The Orangkaya finally replied that the Acehnese would leave this situation in God's hands, who they trusted would help them in times of need.

This exchange could have given the English a clear indication of where the Acehnese stood. On the 9th of December, the English asked the Shahbandar about the requests. The Shahbandar replied that the Sultanah's final answer was that the English had asked for too much, which was against the indispensable rules of the kingdom. She added that even if the President of Madras had filled her kingdom with gold she could not grant him permission to build a fort or house with stone and bricks. The English however, were welcome to build a factory with planks.

Ord's and Cawley's mission was not fruitless. Zakiatuddin gave the English permission to fortify her dominions at SWC, either at Priaman or Tiku, though she would not place this grant in her *firman*. Besides Priaman, the English were already exploring other areas for a possible settlement. Meanwhile, chiefs in Bencoolen invited the English to establish a settlement there. The English knew that a quite a large supply of pepper from

⁹⁷ Unfortunately, they did not mention which Orangkaya they met for this discussion. Most probably it would be the Maharajah, the most senior ranking official in the Council.

Bantam was collected near Bencoolen at a place called Silebar.⁹⁸ After receiving the invitation, Ord, arrived in Bencoolen and, after signing an agreement to settle an English fort, left a Mr. Benjamin Bloome in charge. The settlement did not get blessings from London. On the contrary, the London Directors wrote that a “fatal error” was made in breaking their orders regarding Priaman. They were angry that ships, money and men were spent to found a settlement at such “an unhealthful” place as Bencoolen.⁹⁹ They objected to this place because it was too near Batavia, and therefore indefensible if a war broke out. Furthermore, Bencoolen had no trade for European goods, and, whether because of fear for the Dutch or otherwise, little pepper for the English. The directors reiterated that they had always wanted the seat of the pepper trade to be in Priaman or Aceh, among other reasons because these places were farthest from Batavia.¹⁰⁰ But precisely because Bencoolen was so disadvantageous, the Dutch saw no reason to spend money to wrest it from the English. So the sickly crew called the Priaman Company was left in peace to build the first fortified English settlement in Sumatra, York Fort.¹⁰¹

In the 1690’s, the EIC gradually consolidated its position in south-western Sumatra from its base in Bencoolen. In 1691, the Dutch failed to exert influence at Silebar and other southern areas in the name of the Sultan of Bantam. The English factory here and the region of Bencoolen were strengthened. Two more English settlements appeared – in 1695 in Triamang and in 1697 at Kattaun and Sablat.

⁹⁸ Marsden, *History of Sumatra*, p. 451.

⁹⁹ BL, IOR E/3/91. Letter sent on “Loyall Merchant” and “Pink James” to Our Chief and Council at Bencoolen, dated 3rd August 1687, ff.351-356, f.352.

¹⁰⁰ BL, IOR E/3/91. Letter sent on “Loyall Merchant” and “Pink James” to Our Chief and Council at Bencoolen, f.356.

¹⁰¹ For a detailed description of how York Fort was constructed and the deplorable conditions the soldiers faced, see A. G. Harfield, *Bencoolen: A History of the Honourable East India Company Garrison on the West Coast of Sumatra, (1685-1825)* (Hampshire: A & J Partnership, 1995), pp. 1-15.

Conclusion

To what extent Aceh lost her vassal states in SWC is not an easy question to answer, owing to the lack of information on Acehnese activities from Dutch sources. Partly because the VOC closed its factory in Aceh in 1663, officials reported sparingly on the Acehnese. Compared to the situation in Perak, the VOC made some significant gains in some of the polities at SWC, and managed to establish bases in Padang and Pulau Chinco, while Aceh lost the dominant position enjoyed under Iskandar Muda. Many scholars have perceived these changes as signs of Aceh's decline and of the failures of female rule. But Aceh's position was becoming untenable even before Saftiauddin's accession. Local leaders at SWC resented the Acehnese yoke. Iskandar Muda's recourse to violence as a means of control was a sign of weakness rather than strength. Where politics and alliances were fluid and loyalties shifting, territorial domination through coercion was illusory. Personal bonds forged based on reciprocal emotional, kinship and religious ties tended to engender more lasting loyalties than force. Aceh, for instance, was more successful in Perak because Aceh supported Perak's own royal family and did not attempt to place its own representatives on the throne. Of course, the Aceh royal family had kinship ties with the Perak royal family but Aceh under the Sultanah ensured that her candidate for the throne was not a puppet, and had support in Perak.

The narrative of east-west interactions at SWC is not a simple one of western ascendancy and indigenous decline. Power was contested and shifting. The VOC's increased influence and intervention in the SWC polities were the result of the initiatives and negotiations of both the Dutch and the local elites to advance mutual interests. The VOC's effort to use the indigenous system in SWC for its own ends achieved limited results. While obtaining sufficient local brokers and allies to procure pepper, the VOC also alienated groups whose interests they jeopardized. Whilst some saw the VOC as a useful ally because of its might, the VOC could not evoke a sense of spiritual loyalty or bonds as sovereign lords. In their attempt to revive the old Minangkabau kingdom, the VOC entered into a shadowy and confusing world that they found hard to fathom. Indeed their political dependency could be said to have increased when they tried to reinterpret and abuse the reciprocal rules of overlord vassal relations.

By the end of the seventeenth century, the political and commercial power of the kingdom of Aceh Dar al-Salam might have been restricted to the north of Sumatra, indeed only to Banda Aceh; however, Aceh's spiritual and cultural ties to these areas endured. At least there is enough evidence to re-examine the claim that Aceh declined by the mid-seventeenth century and lost its SWC vassals owing to weak female rulers. Aceh under the four Sultanahs did not make deals with the VOC that could jeopardize the kingdom's independence as happened in other areas in the archipelago. Internal disputes, succession troubles and the need to control their territories and vassals were reasons that made other local monarchs bargain away their sovereignty. For example in Mataram, Amangkurat I (1646-1677) appealed to the VOC to suppress rebels and regents and gave the Company great privileges in return for military support.¹⁰²

The description of Aceh in the last decades of the century by the likes of Bowrey, Dampier and de Roy is invaluable. It does not paint a picture of a declining kingdom, which succumbed to European incursions, but one that was remarkably resilient. Ord's and Cawley's exchange with the Orangkaya Maharajah reveals an individual who was not only proud to be an Acehnese but was willing to defend independence till death.

¹⁰² Nagtegaal, 'The Dutch East India Company', p. 66.

CHAPTER 5

Features of Female rule in Aceh

Part I: From *Ira et Malevolentia* to *Pax et Custodia*

Aceh under female monarchs: Ways of Seeing

Chapter 1 of this thesis shows that the succession of the first female ruler of Aceh was sanctioned by *adat* and Islam. The elite also supported the second female ruler, Nakiatuddin Syah. Although there was some opposition to the accession of the third and fourth female rulers, the third ruler, Zakiatuddin Syah, ruled peacefully till her death in 1688. The reign of the last queen, Kamalat Syah, though peaceful, saw growing opposition from a group who regarded female rule as forbidden in Islam. Pressures from this group and a *fatwa* purportedly produced from the Shariff of Mekah stating that a woman cannot rule in Islam led to the deposition of Sultanah Kamalat Syah in 1699.

This raises important questions about female leadership from the viewpoints of religion, *adat* and patriarchy: Where did the Sultanahs fit in the narration of kings and the formulation of kingship? This chapter examines how indigenous writers depicted female rulers and to what extent European sources confirmed or echoed their views.

A brief introduction on the literature regarding female status and roles in general in the Malay world is in order, followed by an examination of Malay and Muslim ideas on leadership.

Status of Women in the Malay World

George Coédès listed the importance of the role conferred on women and of relationships in the maternal line as characteristics illustrating the unity of the region he termed "Farther India". O.W. Wolters remarked on the concept of cognatic kinship as a well-represented feature of social organization in the region.¹ Anthony Reid argued that women's relative autonomy and prominence in marketing, agriculture and ritual represented one aspect of a social system where a distinctive Southeast Asian pattern was

¹ O.W. Wolters, *History, Culture and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982), p. 17.

especially evident.² Studies in other disciplines, however, especially literature and anthropology, stress tensions between religion and other aspects of culture.³ Their conclusions are ambivalent: that women were accorded low status when viewed from Islam, and represented as weak when viewed from *adat* laws. There has been very little historical study of the subject. I hope to suggest that in historical context – at least, in the context explored in this thesis, which deals with female rulers in seventeenth-century Aceh, women’s status and roles are surprisingly complex.

Unlike in the west, studies of gender and femininity in Southeast Asia began only in the 1990s. Reid’s work and Andaya’s historical survey, though providing an extremely useful overview, are general in nature⁴ and disagree about the impact of religion and custom on the position of women. Barbara Andaya argued that world religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam relegated women to domestic space, reducing their power and their public roles.⁵ Malay Muslim literature, Andaya contended, stressed the need for a woman to be obedient and loyal to her husband whilst Hinduism demanded total sacrifice, manifested in the practice of **sutti*.⁶ Reid stated that even the gradual strengthening of the influence of Islam, Christianity and Buddhism in over the last four centuries had not eliminated a common pattern of relatively high female autonomy and economic importance.⁷ Reid pointed to the high value of daughters in Southeast Asian families, including Malay ones; men’s recognition of women’s sexual potency; easy divorce and remarriage for women; and the important reproductive role in childbearing, food and clothing, which accorded them magical and ritual powers.⁸ Cheah Boon Keng⁹ surveying powerful and influential women at court concurred. One thing is clear from scattered epitaphs that mention queens regnant, travellers’ observations, court narratives, folklore and European records from the

² Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, Vol. 1*, p. 146.

³ For a summary of these studies, see Appendix 1.#

⁴ See Reid, *Age of Commerce* and Barbara Andaya, *The Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University Hawaii Press, 2006).

⁵ B. Andaya, *The Flaming Womb*, p. 85.

⁶ Barbara Andaya, “The Changing Religious Role of Women in Pre-Modern Southeast Asia,” in *Representations of Gender, Democracy and Identity Politics in Relation to South Asia* ed. by Renuka Sharma (New Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1996), p. 114.

⁷ Reid, *Age of Commerce* Vol. 2, p. 629.

⁸ Reid, *Age of Commerce* Vol. 1, p. 149.

⁹ Cheah Boon Keng, ‘Power behind the Throne: The Role of Queens and Court Ladies in Malay History’, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 66 (1993), Part 1, pp. 1-21.

sixteenth century onwards: politically influential women and female monarchs were not rare in this region, especially in Malay/Muslim Southeast Asia.¹⁰

Leadership in the Malay/Muslim World

In lands spatially and culturally distant from the heartland of Islam, as in Central Asia, Islamic traditions tended to absorb local and regional idiosyncrasies and these in turn determined perceptions of leadership and the role of women and their status.¹¹ Similarly, in the far-flung regions of insular Southeast Asia, writers faced different political realities from those of mainland Islam.¹²

Still, Southeast Asia had been always exposed to outside influences through trade and migrations. The spread of new political, religious and technological innovations brought new ways of seeing and experience. Islam, the widely accepted religion in the Malay world in the early modern era, was especially important for Aceh since the kingdom was seen as staunchly Islamic and played a major role as an Islamic centre of learning in the seventeenth century.

So it is worth looking at how the Acehnese elite negotiated their Islamic tenets with *adat* on rulership and women's status. There are two key texts. The *Kanun Syarak Kerajaan Aceh*¹³ laid out rulers' responsibilities as well as the candidate's qualifications discussed in Chapter 1. The ruler must uphold Islam, do good deeds for the benefit of the kingdom and its subjects, prosper the kingdom through trade, be vigilant of all court officials, mediate between court officials who slander and bicker with each other, protect the rights of the poor, punish those who disobeyed laws, sack officials who do wrong and forgive those who fail innocently. The *Taj us-Salatin*¹⁴ stated that a ruler must be knowledgeable and courageous with a high degree of moral fortitude for he should uphold justice and resist worldly temptations.¹⁵ In the tradition of absorbing and

¹⁰ Nisriwani Yahya and Syed Zulflida Noor, eds., *101 Puteri Dunia Melayu: Sejarah dan Legenda*, (Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Muzium dan Antikuiti, 2003).

¹¹ Fatima, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, p. 21.#

¹² Fatima, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, pp. 88-178.#

¹³ Abdullah Sani Usman, *Kanun*, p. 39.

¹⁴ An examination of the structure and writing style of the *Taj us-Salatin* revealed that the text, perhaps consciously, copied the style and political writing tradition of the Islamic world.#

¹⁵ *Taj us-Salatin*, Khalid, p. 59.

reflecting foreign influences in the local context, it was relatively easy to adopt mainstream Islamic doctrines,¹⁶ which, while elaborate on the favourable traits kings should possess, were silent on the prerequisites of a good queen and implied that a leader should necessarily be male.

Though the Quran and *hadith* do not state that women are forbidden to rule, Aisha's legacy shaped early Islamic views. Her disastrous participation in the first civil war, resulting in not only her defeat but carnage amongst Muslims, was used as an exemplar of how women's involvement in politics would only lead to disaster. Despite her prestige as the beloved wife of the Prophet and the mother of all believers, her political actions remained a source of censure for Sunni and Shii Muslims alike. This common censure evolved into an almost universal Islamic principle, at least in mainstream Islamic lands, forbidding women to participate in politics, much less take up leadership positions.¹⁷ Even Al- Ghazali, who was sensitive to women's spiritual merits, cited manliness, good horsemanship and skills in bearing arms as necessary qualities a ruler should possess.¹⁸ Following the tradition set by al-Mawardi, he was severe towards women, barring them from holding even subordinate positions, such as those of a vizier, minister or judge.¹⁹ Basing his interpretation on a *hadith*, he believed that power required independent reasoning and strength of determination for which women were too frail.²⁰

Feminization of negative attributes also deprived women of the opportunity to be considered for leadership roles.²¹ Discussions on women and government in the third century (A.H.) presented the defects of women as the greatest *fitna* a term, which in this context referred to all females as a source of temptation or chaos.²² Third-century *hadith* implicitly perceived women as flawed and prone to err. They seriously lacked *aql* or reason. Powerful definitions of the feminine as dangerous, sinful and irrational set the stage for projections of the inevitable outcome when women became involved in politics. Since women were inherently flawed, consequences of female leadership or rule

¹⁶ For example, the Hindu idea of divine kingship (*chakravartin*) prevalent in the region was transformed to the Islamic notion of the *Khalifah* (caliph), shadow of God on Earth.

¹⁷ Denise A. Spellberg, *Politics, Gender and the Islamic Past: The legacy of Aisah bint Abi Bakr*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 137.

¹⁸ Ann K.S. Lambton, *State and government in medieval Islam: an introduction to the study of Islamic political theory: the jurists*, (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 121.

¹⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Nasihah al-Muluk Nasihat kepada Raja-raja [Advice for Kings]* translit. by Jelani Harun (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2006), p. 208.

²⁰ *Women in Islam: A Reader*, ed. by Ruth Roded, (Imprint London: I.B. Tauris, 1999) p. 113.#

²¹ Spellberg, *Politics, Gender and the Islamic Past*, p. 142.#

²² Spellberg, *Politics, Gender and the Islamic Past*, p. 138.

would be decidedly dire. Nizam al-Mulk (d.485/1092) in his “Book of Government or Rules for Kings” cited a series of famous females beginning with Eve to confirm the disastrous effects of women who gained access to political power. Nizam al-Mulk’s view was a restatement of third-century perceptions and representative of later medieval Islamic views.

In contrast to the writings and political theories of mainland Islam, the *Taj us-Salatin* concerned itself with theories of female leadership. As mentioned in Chapter 1, by a distinctly local take on Islamic doctrines, the text helped a female succeed a male ruler, albeit with caveats. Following Wolters’ analysis of the process of “Indianization” in Southeast Asia, I would argue that al-Jauhari interpreted, adopted and adapted Islamic classical theories on leadership in order to suit them to the indigenous context.²³ This ‘localisation’ not only eased acceptance of female rulers but also accorded legitimacy to a political situation that might be frowned upon in other more orthodox parts of the Islamic world.

Al-Jauhari, who saw female rule as slightly more tolerable than chaos,²⁴ actually detailed the theoretical basis of female leadership in the Malay world in ways that bridged *adat* and Islam. One condition attached to a female ruler in the *Taj us-Salatin* was that she discuss matters with male ministers and heed their advice. On the other hand, a male *raja* was forbidden to discuss matters concerning the *kerajaan* with women, though kings too were encouraged to discuss state matters with their male ministers.²⁵

Unlike al-Jauhari, who wrote in Aceh in 1603 before the period of female rule, al-Raniri had to grapple with this issue while writing the *Bustan* based on the political reality unfolding in front of his very eyes. Although heavily influenced by al-Gazali’s *Nasihah al-Muluk*,²⁶ like al-Jauhari, al-Raniri did not view female rule as contrary to Islamic tenets, despite following closely the *Nasihah*’s explication on intelligence (*aql*) and women (*wanita*).²⁷ Whilst al-Raniri clearly agreed with al-Gazali on women in general, he deviated on the leadership position of women. Regardless of whether his praise for his queen, Safiatuddin, was due to his dependence on her patronage, his description of her in the *Bustan* as a good ruler attests his acceptance his support.

²³ For a fuller discussion, refer to, O.W. Wolters, *History, Culture and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives*.

²⁴ *Taj us-Salatin*, Khalid, p. 61.

²⁵ *Taj us-Salatin*, Khalid, p. 61.

²⁶ Al-Ghazali *Nasihah al-Muluk*, Jelani, p. xvii-xviii.#

²⁷ Al-Ghazali *Nasihah al-Muluk*, Jelani, p. xxxix.

Another court chronicle, the *Sulalat Us-Salatin*, perhaps set the precedent by depicting some ladies at court of the Melakan Sultanate as very influential, even to the point of choosing the heir to the Sultan and *bendahara*. For example, the wife of Sultan Muhammad Syah, daughter of Raja Rekan chose her son, Raja Ibrahim to be his heir though the Sultan personally preferred Raja Kassim, his other son from another wife. According to Tun Sri Lanang, the court chronicler, Raja Ibrahim was named the heir because Sultan Muhammad Syah was obeying the wishes of the Raja Perempuan, the female king. (*Raja Ibrahim dah dirajakan baginda menurut kehendak Raja Perempuan*).²⁸

From Predatory to Protective Rule

Theoretical justification aside, how did female rule work in the largely patriarchal society of the kingdom of Aceh Dar-al-Salam for fifty-nine years? Were there unique features that might set the female monarchs apart from their male counterparts? Women rarely transgressed the political sphere, seen as a prerogative of men. So how did three queens survive in power till natural death when most male rulers were assassinated or deposed at will? How did these female sovereigns deal with their male elite?

Anthony Reid identified three stages of development in his study of royal power in Aceh from c.1550-1700. Stage one was the period of the great mercantile *orangkaya* up to 1589, followed by the second stage, a period which he identified as “royal absolutism” from 1589-1636 and finally stage three, which witnessed the decline of the crown and the rise of the three **sagi* each ruled by a *panglima*.²⁹ Reid argued that the end of royal absolutism was a gradual process, where royal decline already set in as early as 1629 with the defeat of Iskandar Muda’s forces in Melaka. The reduced skill and authority of rulers after Iskandar Muda and the growing commercial power of the Dutch speeded the decline. Although, there was no immediate change in the system of government, the style was quickly transformed by Iskandar Muda’s successors, Iskandar Thani and his

²⁸ *Sejarah Melayu*, Cheah, pp. 130-131.

²⁹ Reid, ‘Trade and the Problem of Royal Power in Aceh. Three Stages: c.1550-1700’, in *Pre-Colonial State Systems in Southeast Asia*, ed. by Anthony Reid and Lance Castles, (Kuala Lumpur: Council of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1975), 45-55, pp. 47-55.

widow Safiatuddin who were mild. Royal absolutism³⁰ continued, Reid argued, but without the royal jealousy which made life hazardous to the wealthy.³¹ But, in the course of Safiatuddin's long reign, Reid claimed that fundamental changes were taking place in the balance of power which ultimately produced a radically different state structure.

Reid's analysis begs several questions. What was the context in which these shifts in royal power took place? What were the political institutions like in Aceh in the sixteenth and seventeenth century? How was power contested during the reigns of the female rulers and how did this impact the political order of the kingdom, royal power and the fortunes of both the elite and the kingdom? Aceh, like most of the other polities in the region, was ruled by a monarch who derived his/her legitimacy from age-old customs and tradition, lineage and religion.³² Temporal and religious powers, in theory, rested in the ruler's hands. His royal prerogatives included political appointments and ownership of land and resources. Other political institutions were in place to assist the ruler in his task of governing the kingdom. It is not known with certainty when these institutions were created but Aceh did have executive and legislative councils and a judiciary.³³ Customs and religious traditions determined the norms and values of ideal leadership and exemplary subject in addition to laying out their codes of conduct, rights and responsibilities. The Malay ancient oath of allegiance or social contract was based on the ruler's task of manifesting his *daulat* and the subjects' obligation to obey him and never commit *derhaka*. The prescribed style of governance was one where the ruler and elite were engaged in mutual respect and advice. In reality, the ruler was checked by the merchant or landed nobility, whose main objectives were to promote their own interests and protect their descendents. This situation often brought about a clash of interest and a tussle for power and wealth between royalty and nobility, as described by Reid in his first two stages (1550-1636). The tension between monarchical prerogative and nobility power however, need not necessarily be a zero-sum game. The nature of royal-elite relations depended much on the personalities of the rulers and indeed, as will be shown

³⁰ See Anthony Reid, 'Charismatic and Constitutional Queens: Women Rulers in Southern Asia', *History Today*, 53 (2003), 30-35, p. 35.

³¹ Reid, 'Trade and the Problem of Royal Power in Aceh', p. 52.

³² For a more general discussion on features of monarchy see, W. M Spellman, *Monarchies 1000-2000*, (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2001) p. 17.

³³ See Van Langen, *De Inrichting van het Atjehsche Staatsbestuur*, p. iv. See also A. Hasjmy, *Iskandar Muda Meukuta Alam*, (Jakarta: Penerbit Bulan Bintang, 1975), pp. 70-73. These institutions are dealt with in greater detail in the following sections.#

below, royal-elite relations could be a mutually beneficial one characterised by interdependence and patronage.

The nature of power and how it was wielded in Aceh depended much on the personalities and style of leadership of the rulers concerned and the circumstances in which the kingdom found itself. The personal nature of the system made it more fluid and dynamic where powers contracted and expanded and institutional lines blurred. A reduction in royal power need not necessarily signify its decline. Similarly, royal absolutism³⁴ might exist in theory but in reality absolutism was limited by circumstances such as the nobility, the rulers' personalities, and provincial or local conditions. Provincial leaders could still temper a strong ruler such as Iskandar Muda since control of farther outlying territories and men raised for war came under their influence.³⁵ For example, local elites in SWC, unhappy with the trade conditions imposed by Iskandar Muda, requested a change of allegiance from Aceh to the VOC in Batavia even when they were supposedly under the yoke of this mighty king. "Absolutist states" could be fragile since besides force of personality, wealth and coercion, no lasting institutions or rule of law supported them. Iskandar Muda's "absolutism" was in itself a function of his personality and a reaction to the powers wielded by the *orangkaya* earlier. Being insecure as he would be because of the potential ability of the elite to dethrone or even assassinate him, as happened before to his predecessors, Iskandar Muda resorted to the use of force to strike fear and obedience into the hearts of his elite. His insecure yet showy disposition further inclined him to resort to terror and violent executions of those who dared to defy him, which made him more of a despot than an absolute monarch.³⁶

His son-in-law, Iskandar Thani was not as mild as he was commonly depicted. Indeed his style of leadership displayed many similarities to that of his predecessor. His violent executions of those who threatened him were testimony to his cruel streak. Iskandar Thani however was not able to protect himself as effectively as Iskandar Muda; his short-lived reign and his highly suspicious and unexpected death proved this. He was

³⁴ Reid, 'Trade and the Problem of Royal Power in Aceh', pp. 45-55. Also, Kathirithamby-Wells, 'Restraints on the Development of Merchant Capitalism in Southeast Asia before c.1800', in *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era: Trade, Power and Belief*, ed. by Anthony Reid, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 125.

³⁵ According to Beaulieu, even during Iskandar Muda's absolute reign, besides the senior *orangkaya* at the capital, there was a group of *orangkaya* who lived in their *nanggroe* where they had jurisdiction and authority over the inhabitants although they had to pay tribute to the ruler; quoted from Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', p. 62. See also Beaulieu, 'Memoires', p. 107.

³⁶ Spellman, *Monarchies*, p. 20.#

perhaps also seen as being too dangerous and was a potential source of instability to the kingdom. Internally, he supported al-Raniri's more orthodox religious stance and allowed him to undertake a bloody and divisive purge of Hamzah Fansuri and Sheikh Syamsudin's followers. Externally, despite the VOC's more threatening position for Aceh after the conquest of Melaka, he was also making the Dutch unhappy and irritated with his refusal to accept and pay for some very expensive jewels he had ordered. A despot but one as unstable as Iskandar Thani would just bring more harm to the kingdom. Iskandar Muda, though cruel and arbitrary were not putting the kingdom in harm's way. Furthermore, Iskandar Muda was a "son of the soil", where Iskandar Thani was a foreigner. Iskandar Thani was neither supported by his *orangkaya* nor was he feared.

Under Aceh's female rulers, I detect a different leadership style. Both Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Thani exhibited a style that could be described as characterised by wrath and malevolence (*ira et malevolentia*). This does not merely signify subjective mood but a system where a king could consciously and explicitly decide to deal with those who offended him by distraint to ensure obedience.³⁷ Royal anger could effectively though not technically put a man outside the law.³⁸ The personalities of subsequent rulers and the circumstances of Aceh after 1641 brought about a different style of leadership - more benevolent and moral. In contrast to predecessors who tended to be predatory and punitive, the female sovereigns were more peaceful and protective of their subjects (*pax et custodia*).³⁹ Whether rule based on coercion and fear was much more expensive and difficult to execute, or whether it was perhaps naturally offensive to women, Aceh's female rulers preferred to ensure support based on rewards and a sharing of the kingdom's wealth to promote a collective stake in the kingdom's survival. Indeed, under its female sovereigns, Aceh saw its longest period of peace and prosperity. A workable relationship based on co-operation between royalty and the nobility replaced the perpetual conflict that characterised royal-elite relations under earlier male kings.

³⁷ Robert Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings, 1075-1225*, (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2000), p. 48.

³⁸ J.E.A. Jolliffe, *Angevin Kingship*, (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1955), pp. 96-98.

³⁹ *Pax et custodia* is the counterpart of *ira et malevolentia*, see Jolliffe, *Angevin Kingship*, p. 97.

The VOC official, Jacob Compostel once described Safiatuddin as having more royal worth than her predecessors.⁴⁰ His contemporary, the indigenous *ulama* al-Raniri echoed this positive view of the Sultanah. Al-Raniri stated that Sultanah Safiatuddin demonstrated exemplary conduct; she was merciful to her subjects and was a blessing to the indigent. She loved her subjects as a mother would her children. She loved and respected the *ulama* and all the descendents of the Prophet and accorded them rewards and gifts.⁴¹ It is rare praise indeed that both men, so culturally apart, could come to a similar assessment of a female sovereign, when it was not fashionable to discriminate in favour of women. This section illustrates that female rule in Aceh did manifest, to a large extent, the political ideals laid out in indigenous political treatises such as the *Taj us-Salatin* and the *Bustan us-Salatin*.

The idea that rulers needed to share responsibilities with their ministers and to discuss matters of state with them was not merely a customary ideal but also a religious one. This responsibility of the ruler stated in the *Taj us-Salatin* was reinforced in the *Bustan us-Salatin*. Women rulers were especially encouraged to do this. The “Jewel Affair” illustrates the decision-making process at court under the Sultanah during audience days. This signalled a distinct departure from the period under her male predecessors. One main feature was the involvement of the *orangkaya* in through *muafakat*. This custom of *muafakat* had been practised in Aceh and instilled in the minds of its people from the simple villager to the nobility at court.⁴² This age-old decision-making process was revived by Safiatuddin and adopted by her female successors.

In the early years of Safiatuddin’s reign, she allowed the *orangkaya* free access to the inner court, formerly restricted under her male predecessors.⁴³ According to Ito, during the reign of Iskandar Muda, it was not clear that the *orangkaya* had to be present at court regularly. The *orangkaya*’s duty was to keep guard of the *Dalam* (palace quarters) every third day and night. Except for a few senior *orangkaya* who would be summoned

⁴⁰ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1641-1642, p. 123.

⁴¹ This is my translation of the text. See *Bustan*, Siti Hawa, p. 43. See also *Bustan*, Iskandar, p. 59.

⁴² See Snouck Hurgronje, *The Acehnese*, trans. by A.W.S. O’Sullivan, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1906) pp. 64-77.#

⁴³ Ito, ‘The World of the Adat Aceh’, p. 31. Quoted from Beaulieu, ‘Memoires’, pp. 49-50, 102-103. This may sound to be a strange practice under female rulers, but this writer suggests that under male rulers, the harem would be the private quarter whilst under a female ruler; the harem would no longer be in existence.

ad hoc to the royal presence there were no court audiences except on state and religious occasions. There was no need to hold audiences regularly under Iskandar Muda.⁴⁴ Jan de Meere first mentioned a Saturday audience in 1640 when he visited Iskandar Thani at court. This practice was, however, institutionalised by Sultanah Safiatuddin since Dutch envoys mentioned the weekly Saturday audiences under her reign, and continued under her successors.⁴⁵ Two English envoys who visited Aceh in 1684 noted that every Saturday, the *orangkaya* met at the palace where all that had any business would come and appear before the Sultanah.⁴⁶ Here, all matters were heard and determined and the *orangkaya* were silent unless the Queen called upon them.⁴⁷ Saturday audiences were held regularly and would be cancelled only during heavy rain and flooding and when they fell during important religious and state festivities. Sunday audiences then replaced them. The Sultanah and her *orangkaya* were absent only because of illness.⁴⁸ Many important matters were debated, discussed and decisions made through a consensus and affirmed by all in attendance with the word, *daulat*, during these audiences. Indeed, the seating order of the state officials based on rank was first regularised and established under Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah.⁴⁹

This regularised decision-making process did not make the Aceh court free from behind-the-scenes power struggles. As seen in the previous sections, Company officials reported intrigues, rumours, scandals, coups, counter-coups and assassinations. Many affairs were discussed outside the audience hall at court, in the shadows of the corridors and in the houses of the different *orangkaya*, in secret and in the darkness of the night away from the knowing eyes of the enemies and their followers. These power-struggles were played out before they were arbitrated at court. The Company officials also lobbied the different *orangkaya* with numerous gifts and always ensured that they knew who the Company's friends were, before their affairs were brought up in court. These manoeuvrings helped to determine when and how Company matters were brought up

⁴⁴ Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', p. 32.

⁴⁵ Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', pp. 32, 43. This practice was mentioned right up until 1660, the last year when the Dagh-Registers of the Company Commissars are available.

⁴⁶ A. Farrington, 'Negotiations at Aceh in 1684: An unpublished English document', *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 27.77 (1999), 19-32, p. 25.

⁴⁷ Farrington, 'Negotiations at Aceh in 1684', p. 25.

⁴⁸ The Company officials attending court would faithfully report on who was present during these audiences and who was sick, especially when the Company affairs were discussed on the Audience Days.

⁴⁹ Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', p. 44. See also *Adat Aceh*, transliterated by Ramli Harun and Tjut Rahmah, (Jakarta: Departement Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1985), p. 69.

during audience days and by whom. On audience days, arbitration was finally made and the Sultanah still held the final say, which was still the mark of legitimacy.⁵⁰

The Dutch factors who were present at the court observed that jealousies were kept hidden and the Sultanah was successful in maintaining peace and authority as the final arbiter.⁵¹ The coup and counter-coup of the 1650s showed that whilst the *orangkaya* factions were killing each other, the Sultanah intervened at the crucial moments to prevent matters from getting of hand. Her presence was necessary to restore stability and legitimacy. This suggests that the Sultanah was not a mere figurehead, restrained by obligations to the nobility. The queen's presence, on the contrary, was crucial to prevent jealousies and factionalism among the nobility from degenerating into civil wars that could have consigned Aceh to the fate of other polities in the region. In a private confession to a Dutch factor, one of the *orangkaya* admitted that he would not be able to last for even an hour without the Sultanah since he had so many enemies.⁵²

Pieter Sourij remarked in 1642 that the Acehnese at the time were subject to a *zeer debonnaire echter ontsagheijk* government and each of the Councillors of the kingdom were respected as a king without which counsel and advice the queen could not perform.⁵³ Pieter Sourij's observation captured the essence of Sultanah Safiatuddin's reign – benevolent but not weak. This remark also revealed the interdependent and reciprocal nature of the Sultanah and her elite. Not all Dutch officials held such a positive view of the Sultanah's reign. In the same year, Pieter Willemszoon who remained in Aceh after the departure of Pieter Sourij, noted how the *orangkaya* were so factionalised that they shunned each other and their followers were very suspicious of each other. Pieter Willemszoon predicted that this government would not last long in peace under the “soft and gentle” government of the queen. He reasoned that this “bold and strong” nation had to be ruled the hard way. The more fear and awe the elite should know, he commented, the less resistance they would pose.⁵⁴ Willemszoon's prediction

⁵⁰ In 1643, Pieter Sourij advised that the Dutch must be contented with the Queen's verbal orders and that the Dutch should not always demand a written contract. He wrote that the Queen was an absolute queen and her words and verbal orders remain to be law. NA, f.680R. Dagh-Register gehouden bij Pieter Sourij, 1643.

⁵¹ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1641-42, pp. 96, 123.

⁵² NA, VOC 1143, ff.559V-560R. Dagh-Register of Pieter Sourij, 15 Mei-18 August, 1642.

⁵³ NA, f.565V. Dagh-Register gehouden bij Pieter Sourij gedeputeert als Commissaris in legatie aen de Coninginne van Atchin 15 Mei-18 Aug 1642.#

⁵⁴ NA, f.511V. Copie dagh-Register gehouden bij den oppercoopman Pieter Willemsz.

did not come true since Sultanah Safiatuddin went on to rule for another thirty-three years.

By the last decade of the seventeenth century, the kingdom of Aceh had evolved from a monarchy based on fear to one characterised by voluntary association based on rewards and consensus gathering. Jacob de Roy, a Dutch private trader who resided in Aceh at that time, went to the extent of even describing the kingdom as a “republic.” Though the term “republic” might be an exaggeration, Sultanah Kamalat, he wrote, “is a queen that presumes an unlimited power and authority and convenes the Assembly but she is obliged to wait for a favourable resolution from the majority of her courtiers.”⁵⁵ The institution of “queenship” appeared to have been firmly established in the kingdom after a few decades of female rule. In the 1670’s, Thomas Bowrey observed that Aceh had for a considerable amount of time been governed by a Queen that the very title of King proved to be nauseous to them.⁵⁶ In the 1680’s, William Dampier noted that the English residents there were of the opinion that a Queen had ruled Aceh since the beginning, from the antiquity of the present constitution, it was believed that the Queen of Sheba was the queen of this country.⁵⁷ Bowrey explained that the men who served under her office were all very submissive and respectful to the Queen, not daring to do anything until they had thoroughly acquainted her regarding the matter. And if she agreed, she sent her *chap* as a signal of her permission to their request.⁵⁸ There was, however, a conflict of opinion among European observers. William Dampier, who resided in Aceh in 1689, observed that though her subjects respected and revered her, the Queen had little power or authority and was more of a figurehead with power resting in the hands of the *orangkaya*.⁵⁹ Dampier however provided no evidence for his opinion.

Takeshi Ito, in his study of the Sultanate of Aceh in the seventeenth century, observed “the Sultanate under Safiyyat al-Din was undermined by the Dutch who pursued an aggressive commercial policy and promoted the disintegration of political unity and royal power by causing discord and at times power struggles amongst senior

⁵⁵ *Voyage made by Jacob Janssen de Roy to Borneo and Atcheen, 1691*. Completed in 1698 in Batavia at the order of William van Oudtshoorn, Governor-General of Netherlands East Indies. Translated from Dutch into English in 1816. BL, India Office Records: MSS Eur/Mack (1822)/5, p. 366.

⁵⁶ Thomas Bowrey, *A Geographical Account of the Countries around the Bay of Bengal, 1669-1679*. Series edited by R.C. Temple, (London: Hakluyt Society, 1905), pp. 295-6.

⁵⁷ Dampier, *Voyages and Discoveries*, p. 99.

⁵⁸ Bowrey, *A Geographical Account*, pp. 299-300.

⁵⁹ Dampier, *Voyages and Discoveries*, p. 100.

orangkaya".⁶⁰ Ito however conceded that "despite this shrinkage of political power under the four successive female rulers, the Sultanahs, though playing the role more or less of figureheads still maintained their honour and dignity and even exerted, to a certain extent, an influence on Aceh's political life. This was particularly true for the case of Safiyyat al-Din."⁶¹ Many other writers such as Marsden, and more recent ones such as Mulaika Hijjas and Auni Luthfi however, viewed these female monarchs as having very little to do with governance since this was left in the hands of the *orangkaya*.⁶²

Ito argued that factionalism brought political disunity and decline of the kingdom. Thus far, there is no conclusive evidence pointing to either the decline of royal power or the kingdom under these female sovereigns. Based on contemporary sources, Aceh was a peaceful and prosperous kingdom and its harbour was still thriving by the end of the century.⁶³ The Dutch or any other power could easily exploit the differences amongst the *orangkaya* to advance their interests at court. Viewed from another perspective, however, such factions represented the plurality of interests in the kingdom, which contributed to the check and balance on one another with the Sultanah acting as the final arbiter and balancer. Indeed, factionalism within the ranks of the *orangkaya* had been a permanent feature of the kingdom. As the Jewel and Perak Affairs illustrated, the Dutch demands split the elite because they differed as to how they should respond to these pressures. These differences nevertheless, did not bring about a political disintegration since these elites and the Sultanah had to compromise for the sake of the kingdom. Factionalism existed before the female sovereigns came to power and before the period of Dutch aggressive commercial pressures. For example, the *orangkaya* were plagued by the violent religious debates and were hopelessly disunited during the reigns of Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Thani. The success of the ruler lay in how he or she managed these divisions. Under the female sovereigns, royal power might be limited but it did not decline. This balancer and arbiter role played by Sultanah Safiatuddin served to enhance her unique position and her survivability on the throne for thirty-five years.

⁶⁰ Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', pp. 103-104.

⁶¹ Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', p. 120.

⁶² See Marsden, 'History of Sumatra', p. 447. Mulaika Hijjas, 'The Woman Raja', p. 69.#

⁶³ See p.242.

Another political feature introduced during the reign of female rulers was the institution of the three *sagi*. The smallest socio-political unit in Aceh was the **gampung*, followed by the **muqim*, then the **nanggroe/negeri* headed by an *uleebalang*, a commander-in-chief of sorts. The highest level was the *sagi*, headed by a Panglima.⁶⁴ There are a few versions as to the *sagi*'s establishment. One was that it was established long before the time of the female rulers, another- during the time of either the first or the second Sultanah.⁶⁵ The other intriguing question was whether this was instituted by the ruler or by the powerful *uleebalang* of the district. According to Reid, Naqiatuddin Syah's reign brought a shift in the balance of power from the royal capital to the provinces, especially in the upland region of Aceh, which saw the creation of the institution of the three *sagi* consisting of *mukim* 22, 25 and 26. Reid suggested that the illegitimate son of Iskandar Muda who headed the 22 *muqim*, established the *sagi*. This in turn brought about the formation of the other two lowland *sagi*, which changed the economic strength of the kingdom in favour of rural Aceh.⁶⁶ Reid claimed that this *sagi* became a source of political opposition to female rule. They also posed an economic challenge to the port-capital since they based their economic power on rice cultivation, which according to Reid appeared to be on the increase in the latter half of the seventeenth century. Reid argued that these men from the *muqim* 22 succeeded in overthrowing the fourth queen, Kamalat Syah, aided by a letter from Mekah forbidding female rule.⁶⁷ Faced with this disruptive challenge from the interior and coupled with decreased trade because of Dutch pressures, Reid concluded that the promising movement towards institutionalised government broke down.⁶⁸

Contrary to Reid, Veltman argued that the *sagi* came into being in all probability during the reign of Safiatuddin Syah with the aim of forming a counter-federation against the nobility and then assumed its more definite form during the reign of Naqiatuddin Syah when the *sagi* came to be headed by its own Panglima.⁶⁹ Van Langen argued that Sultanah Naqiatuddin had formed the three *sagi* under a Panglima each, as an attempt to

⁶⁴ For a detailed explanation of the workings of the *mukim*, *nanggroe* and *sagi*, see Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', pp. 57-78.

⁶⁵ Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', pp.19, 70. *Adat Aceh*, transliterated by Ramli Harun and Tjut Rahmah, p. 29.#

⁶⁶ Reid, 'Trade and the Problem of Royal Power', pp. 53-54.

⁶⁷ Reid, 'Trade and the Problem of Royal Power', p. 54.

⁶⁸ Reid, 'Trade and the Problem of Royal Power', p. 55.

⁶⁹ Veltman, *Nota over the geschiedenis*, pp. 67-68.

centralize the administration of Eastern, Western and Southern Aceh. Although no information is available as to who these Panglima were and how they were appointed, Van Langen asserted that the Panglima were to execute royal orders and ensure that these were carried out by the numerous *uleebalang* in the *nanggroe*.⁷⁰

Ito pointed out that the institution of three *sagi* was most probably created during the reign of Safiatuddin because in the *dagb-register* of Pieter Sourij of 1643, he mentioned the *drie gemeenten* (three municipalities) of the capital, in relation to the disappearance of a ship's crew member. This was in contrast to the description by Beaulieu in 1621 where the capital was divided into four districts, each under a Penghulu Kawal, for the maintenance of law and order.⁷¹

An old manuscript, *Peta Aceh dan susunan kabinet pemerintahan Aceh* describing the court of Aceh and its institutions during the time of Iskandar Muda mentioned the three *sagi* consisting of *mukims* 22, 25 and 26.⁷² This shows that this institution might have been formed during the reign of Iskandar Muda or pre-dated his rule. There has been no mention, however, thus far that Iskandar Muda ever used this institution. Given his centralizing and despotic style, this is not surprising. If this is indeed the case, in most probability Sultanah Safiatuddin did not initiate the creation of the *sagi* but she was responsible for reviving the *sagi* in her effort to reorganise administration at the provincial level.

In the first few years of her reign, Sultanah Safiatuddin had repossessed the lands granted to some *orangkaya* by her husband and redistributed them according to earlier grants made by her father Iskandar Muda. Based on her policy of rewarding certain *orangkaya*, she would most likely reward the *orangkaya* of her choice with these repossessed lands. A **sarakata*, recorded that in 1613, Iskandar Muda granted a certain *orangkaya* by the name of Orangkaya Teuku Bahra an area consisting of six *mukims* in Samalanga, in the north coast. Sultanah Safiatuddin confirmed this *orangkaya's* right over this territory under the title Seri Paduka Tuan Seberang. She also appointed him as the Panglima Bandar, executive administrator of foreign traders and the port of Aceh during her reign. This was a new position created under Safiatuddin in a move to reduce

⁷⁰ Van Langen, *De Inrichting van het Atjehsche Staatsbestuur*, p.14

⁷¹ Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', pp. 70-71.

⁷² *Peta Aceh dan susunan kabinet pemerintahan Aceh* [Map of Aceh and Aceh Cabinet line-up] MS 4, (Kuala Lumpur; Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Tun Sri Lanang Library).

the responsibilities and powers of the anti-Dutch Laksamana.⁷³ Before this, under Iskandar Muda, the Laksamana was in charge of security of the palace and the city including the port. When Orangkaya Teuku Bahra died in 1658, his son, Teuku Cik di Blang succeeded him.⁷⁴ This showed that the Sultanah was no mere figurehead without right to make appointments, contrary to other writer's, such as Marsden's, claims. Furthermore, royal power was said to decline under female rulers because other writers claimed that the position of some *orangkaya* became hereditary, which meant that the ruler lost the right to appoint. It is not clear in this case whether the Sultanah granted this hereditary right, but it appeared that by keeping this position within the Teuku Bahra's family, the Sultanah was ensuring this *orangkaya* family's loyalty for her.

Another incident which showed that the Sultanah was repossessing and redistributing land to new stakeholders was in October 1642, when a dispute arose between Sri Bijaya, (the Sultanah's eunuch in charge of the queen's book-keeping of the revenue derived from her lands) and a **tandil*. A month later, the Sultanah resolved the issue by reclaiming all the land situated around Pidie ceded by her husband, Iskandar Thani and reconfirmed those grants made by her father, Iskandar Muda as lawful. The Sultanah charged the Panglima of Pidie to carry this into effect.⁷⁵ Yet, another incident was even more telling in illustrating that the Sultanah used land grants to reward her supporters. As mentioned in the previous section, the Sultanah adopted a pro-Dutch policy during the earlier years of her reign. Whilst the Lebai Kita Kali supported her, the Orangkaya Laksamana and the Maharaja Sri Maharajah and their followers were anti-Dutch. In November 1642, the Laksamana accused the Sultanah's eunuchs of dispossessing a certain person of his land granted by Iskandar Thani after what he deemed only as a perfunctory examination. The Sultanah granted this land to one *uleebalang*. The Maharajah Sri Maharajah's, (the most senior *orangkaya*) own attempt at possessing some land for himself at Pidie was thwarted by the Sultanah. He had even built a canal for irrigation through these royal estates without asking the Sultanah's

⁷³ Recall in the previous chapter how the Laksamana was anti-Dutch and opposed the Sultanah's policy of conciliation with the VOC.

⁷⁴ Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', pp. 60-61. According to Ito, the *sarakata* referred to here was first brought to attention by Tichelman. The *sarakata* was probably issued during the reign of Jamal al-Alam Badr al-Munir (1703-1726). Quoted from Ito, 'Tichelman "Een Atjehnese Sarakata (afschrift van een besluit van Iskandar Muda)"', in *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal, Land, en Volkenkunde uitgegeven door het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunst en Wetenschappen*, 73 (1933), pp. 368-373.

⁷⁵ NA, f.520V. Copie dagh-Register gehouden bij den oppercoopman Pieter Willemsz.

permission. The Sultanah was furious and reprimanded him harshly. Unlike her father, however, it was enough that he soothed her wrath by apologising with his hands on his head for two hours.⁷⁶

Even during Iskandar Muda's "absolute" reign, there was a group of senior *orangkaya* at the capital and those in their *nanggroe* who commanded jurisdiction and authority over their inhabitants although they paid tribute to the ruler.⁷⁷ Therefore, Sultanah Safiatuddin's possession and redistribution of lands was an attempt to bring the disparate areas under these commanders around the capital to be reorganised and streamlined. More importantly, by redistributing land and position to the *orangkaya* of her choice, Sultanah Safiatuddin was making sure that she received the necessary support and loyalty from them.

It is not surprising then that her successor, Nakiatuddin Syah continued and institutionalised the three *sagi* formed by Safiatuddin Syah. As Van Langen argued, three Panglima Sagi were appointed to centralize administration in the provinces and to ensure that the *uleebalang* in the various *nanggroe* execute the Sultanah's orders. He further added that these Panglima were not elected from their own people but they were from the royal family. The illegitimate son of Iskandar Muda, called Panglima Polem, became the Panglima Sagi of 22 muqim.⁷⁸

Very little evidence can be gleaned as to the effect of this new feature on the workings of the government. Whether this helped to increase or decrease royal power or whether it helped to centralize or decentralize political power. One thing is however clear, the formation and institutionalization of the three *sagi* survived the four Sultanah.⁷⁹ It appears that these Panglima supported and accepted these female monarchs since there was no attempt on their part to depose these female rulers except for a few token protests from mukim 22. The same could not be said of these Panglima after their deaths. In the eighteenth century, these three Panglima, Muda Setia, Imam Muda and Perbawang Syah, when in agreement could set up and depose kings.⁸⁰ To illustrate, Sultan Jamal al-Alam (r.1703-1723) tried to bring one of the Panglima Sagi, Muda Setia

⁷⁶ NA, f.527R. Copie dagh-Register gehouden bij den oppercoopman Pieter Willemsz.. Under Iskandar Muda, this Maharajah would probably lose his head.

⁷⁷ Quoted from Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', p. 62. Beaulieu, "Memoires", p. 107.

⁷⁸ Van Langen, *De Inrichting van het Atjehsche Staatsbestuur*, p. 15

⁷⁹ The institution of the Panglima Sagi played the most significant roles in the political life of the Sultanate in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', p. 60.

⁸⁰ Marsden, 'History of Sumatra', p. 457.

of the 22 Muqim under his control because this Panglima, according to him, had given him umbrage. The Panglima retaliated and the Sultan had to retreat and was finally deposed. The Three Panglima set up a Panglima Maharaja, with the title Johar al-Alam, as his successor. After seven days in power, this king was afflicted with a convulsive neck disorder and died. The nephew of Jamal al-Alam named Undei Tebang, having bribed the Three Panglima with thirty *catties* of gold was placed on the throne. After allowing him the dignity of enjoying his throne for a few days, the Panglima deposed him.⁸¹

To summarize, female rulers engaged the process of collaboration between royalty and nobility and this became one main feature of the political system. Decision-making was through the process of *musyawarah/muafakat*. Collaboration did not signify the weakness of these queens indeed given the ideal of Malay leadership that even a king should discuss and take the advice of their Ministers, these queens were exemplary. Indeed, it made good political sense too. Most, if not all, local rulers had to rule over or rule by means of their elite or *orangkaya*, who had the wealth to support themselves and their armed followers. These elite also had a high sense of dignity and honour concerning their rights as individuals in the kingdom and their responsibilities towards their ruler and kingdom. It was not surprising that they displayed resentment or even violent opposition towards rulers who violated their rights and honour.⁸² A ruler who respected these would be recognised as worthy to remain as their sovereign till death.

The main task of a ruler was to manage the elite. The queens were successful in this to a large extent by giving patronage to encourage loyalty and service. Nevertheless, when necessary, they were also successful in withholding reward, by showing disfavour as a form of reprimand. Sultanah Safiatuddin did this expertly when the Orangkaya Maharajah took her best lands without her permission.⁸³ She was also able to survive by astutely balancing the factions of her elite and when necessary made a tactical retreat to prevent the formation of a sizeable opposition faction. Her actions during the Perak Affair amply demonstrated this. Sometimes it was even necessary to tolerate greed and

⁸¹ Marsden, 'History of Sumatra', p. 458.

⁸² Bartlett discussed different types of nobility opposition to threats from royal government. Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings*, p. 51.

⁸³ Raja Ijau of Patani also had an interesting way of dealing with her *orangkaya* who opposed her rule. *Hikayat Patani*, Siti Hawa, pp.29-31.#

violence to turn enemies into friends. This does not signify weakness but political astuteness and judgement, on which the ruler's survival depends.⁸⁴

Audience days and administration of the capital were also regularised and reorganised by the first and second Sultanah, which survived not only their rule but their successors as well. This helped to engender the peace and stability that characterized their reigns. The assassinations and frequent toppling of the ruler and the *orangkaya* and the perpetual fear and suspicion between royalty and nobility that characterized the period in the sixteenth century were minimized during the reign of these female rulers. Indeed, the period of female rule saw the most successful co-operative relationship between royalty and nobility. All three female rulers ended their reigns by natural deaths except for the fourth. With the ascendance of male rulers once more from 1699 onwards, the aggressive and violent contest for power in the form of frequent depositions and assassinations of unpopular Sultans became a feature of the political system once again in eighteenth century Aceh.⁸⁵ Collaborative rule during the reigns of female rulers brought about the strengthening of the political system and greater stability and peace to the kingdom.

Women and Wealth

The port of Aceh al-Raniri related in the *Bustan us-Salatin* was never quiet during Sultanah Safiatuddin's reign, being very busy with ships, junks and boats from many other lands that came to trade in Aceh. He elaborated that under her rule, food items were cheap and the kingdom was prosperous.⁸⁶ Al-Raniri mentioned the important find of abundant gold deposits during the rule of the Sultanah and claimed this increased the revenue of her kingdom.⁸⁷

Aceh's main exports were the goods obtained from its dependencies of Sumatra West Coast and the Malay Peninsula especially tin and pepper. Aceh's most valuable

⁸⁴ Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings*, p. 58.

⁸⁵ Badr al-Alam Sharif Hashim who replaced Kamalat Ayah was himself induced to abdicate after a mere two years in power. Of the eight kings who succeeded him, only one died a natural death. Thomas Braddell, 'On the History of Acheen', *Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia*, 5 (1851) pp. 15-25, (p.20). Badr al-Alam's successor, Perkasa Alam was deposed after one year in power. His successor, Jamal al-Alam though managed to rule until 1723 was also deposed. Marsden, 'History of Sumatra', pp. 455, 458.

⁸⁶ *Bustan*, Siti Hawa, p. 43.

⁸⁷ *Bustan*, Siti Hawa, p.63.

mineral source, however, was gold. Gold was discovered in several mountains during the reign of Sultanah Safiatuddin, and were mined with the outmost care that no foreigners were allowed to know or set foot here. De Roy attested that as late as the 1690's, gold was still exported in very large quantities from three excellent goldmines.⁸⁸ Acehnese coins (*mas*) were minted and the Sultanah had the right to coin money without any interference from her ministers. Each of the Sultanahs had their own coins minted and inscribed with their titles on the face of the coins and their names on the reverse side.⁸⁹ The Acehnese themselves were reputed to be richer than most because of these goldmines and the frequent visits by foreigners. In 1696, the largest of ships carrying merchandise to Aceh would be emptied in the course of three months due to the high level of consumption, every article being sold promptly and paid in ready money or gold dust.⁹⁰

In his study of the *Adat Aceh*, Ito concluded that the structure and offices of the port of Aceh Dar al-Salam came to be in place during the reign of Iskandar Muda and that by 1621, "the bureaucratic system of the port administration had reached a level of stability."⁹¹ Before 1621, the main areas of administration came under the secretariat under the charge of a Penghulu Kerkun, taking care of the ruler's interests including taxable goods and the customs house officials. The policing officials in charge of law and order were under the Penghulu Kawal. During Iskandar Muda's reign, both duties, i.e. protecting the ruler's interest and the overall supervision of the port were centralised in the hands of the most senior representative of the ruler, the Laksamana. It was also the Laksamana's duty to provide foreigners trading in Aceh protection and assistance. According to Ito, no significant change was made to the working of the port bureaucracy, except for one noticeable modification during the reign of Sultanah Safiatuddin.⁹² In 1641, the duties of the Laksamana were divided into two and a new position, the Panglima Bandar was created. This Panglima Bandar was tasked with matters related to trade, foreign merchants and the west coast pepper trade. This was the sole responsibility of the Laksamana earlier. Thus, half of the Laksamana's duties

⁸⁸ Dampier, *Voyages and Discoveries*, pp. 84-89. *Voyage made by Jacob Janssen de Roy*, p. 356.

⁸⁹ Ibrahim Alfian, *Mata Uang Emas Kerajaan-Kerajaan di Aceh [Gold coins of the Aceh Kerajaan]*, (Projek Rehabilitasi dan Perluasan Museum Daerah Istimewa Aceh, 1979), p. 45.

⁹⁰ *Voyage made by Jacob Janssen de Roy to Borneo and Atcheen*, 1691, p. 361.

⁹¹ Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', pp. 278-279, 284. For a detailed description of the port officials, refer to Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', pp. 276-324.#

⁹² Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', p. 291.

and therefore power, were taken away from him. The Laksamana, now also known as the Panglima Dalam would be in charge of policing and security. The post of Panglima Bandar went to none other than the earlier mentioned Orangkaya Seri Paduka Seberang and he held this post until his death in 1658. Therefore, Sultanah Safiatuddin ensured that the *orangkaya* in-charge of foreigners would be one who supported her policies towards foreigners, especially the Dutch. As mentioned before, the Laksamana at that time belonged to the anti-Dutch faction. This is contrary to Ito's observation that this change was insignificant, "nothing more than a demarcation of the dual function of the Laksamana".⁹³ In a similar move, the Sultanah appointed her half brother, who was the Kadhi Malik al-Adil, known to the Dutch as Lebei Kita Kali, the Company's good friend, to the position of Orang Kaya Maharaja Sri Maharaja in 1645. This was when anti-Dutch sentiments in Aceh were high due to the Company's blockade of Perak and Aceh harbours. It is not known what happened to the existing Maharajah but it appears that the Lebei's son took over his position as the Kadhi.

The policy of welcoming traders from all nations and guaranteeing their security of life and property was an important feature of female rule in Aceh.⁹⁴ To this end, the Acehnese were concerned to facilitate trade and prevent capital flight. When the city was besieged by men from the hinterlands opposing the accession of the third queen, Dampier wrote, "the *Shabander* sent to the Foreigners, and desired them to keep in their own Houses in the night, and told them, that whatever might happen in the City by their own civil Broyls, yet no harm should come to them."⁹⁵ Sultanah Safiatuddin also granted foreigners a considerable degree of freedom. In 1668, she granted permission to the Franciscans to build a church and establish a mission in Aceh. Kamalat Syah even ensured the protection of private merchants besides the employees of the European Companies. Once, the EIC requested the queen to extradite an English merchant to Madras to be put on trial for some misdeeds he committed. This request was refused. In addition, the Sultanah was reported to have generously provided help to a Dutch ship, which had caught fire by giving them loans and sending them to Melaka.⁹⁶ Under

⁹³ Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', p. 298.

⁹⁴ It appears that Raja Ijau of Patani also took an active part in trade negotiations, protected private property and established opportunities conducive to trade. Francis Bradley, 'Piracy, Smuggling and Trade in the Rise of Patani, 1490-1600,' in *Journal of the Siam Society*, Vol.96 (2008), pp.27-50, p.45.

⁹⁵ Dampier, *Voyages and Discoveries*, p. 145.

⁹⁶ *Voyage made by Jacob Janssen de Roy to Borneo and Atcheen*, 1691, p. 328.

Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Thani, goods and treasures on wrecked ships were confiscated.

While collaborative rule was an important feature of the style of governance instituted by Sultanah Safiatuddin, another characteristic feature was the distribution of the country's wealth amongst the ruling elite and the elites' freedom to acquire economic wealth. According to Beaulieu, the surest ways for the *orangkaya* to court death during Iskandar Muda's reign was to be notable for "the good reputation they have among the people, and secondly their wealth."⁹⁷ Such predatory behaviour was not attested during the reigns of the queens. The *orangkaya* were free to make profits in peace. VOC officials such as Pieter Sourij, Peter Willemszoon and Arnold Vlamingh reported on the numerous orders for gold thread and Japanese paper by the *orangkaya* in exchange for pepper they procured from them. Despite tremendous pressures from the Dutch for a large share in the tin trade of Perak, the Sultanah also made sure that her *orangkaya*'s right to procure tin from Perak for their own trade was protected. Jan Harmanszoon who was left in charge after the departure of Vlamingh reported that eight vessels that sailed to Perak belonged to the Acehnese *orangkaya*. The Sultanah, on her part, traded Gujerati cloth in exchange for tin in Perak.⁹⁸ Jan Harmanszoon noted the numerous trading ships belonging to the Sultanah and her *orangkaya*, which traded at Sumatra West Coast. The Laksamana's ship for instance brought gold, benzoin and camphor from Sumatra West Coast. The Sultanah's ship alone brought 100 bahar pepper from Sumatra West Coast, the Laksamana's 15 bahar and the Acehnese Panglima 20 bahar.⁹⁹ In return, the *orangkaya* presented the customary tribute to her.¹⁰⁰

One source of royal revenue besides the highly lucrative product of pepper, coveted by the European companies, was tin. The "Perak Affair" showed that despite consistent pressures from the VOC officials even resorting to blockades (gun-boat diplomacy) large amounts of tin was exported from Perak to Aceh. By 1680, far from monopolising the trade, the Dutch still faced problems even procuring tin from Perak and competition from English, Portuguese and Indian traders actually increased since

⁹⁷ A. Beaulieu, *Memoirs of Admiral Beaulieu's Voyage to the East Indies (1619-1622) drawn up by himself*, translated from M. Thevenot's large collection of voyages in John Harris, *Voyages and Travels*, 1744, p. 257.

⁹⁸ NA, VOC 1155, ff.437-447, f.460R. Vervolch van Atchin's dagh-register van 26 Feb-12 April 1645.

⁹⁹ NA, f.442V. Vervolch van Atchin's dagh-register.

¹⁰⁰ Truijtmán mentioned that the usual gifts from the Shahbandars were brought ceremoniously to court for her Majesty's satisfaction as part of their duty in serving her. NA, VOC 1171, ff.182-250, f.223V. Truijtmán's Dagh-Register, 13 August 1649-November 1649.

they could get tin from Aceh instead. Sultanah Safiatuddin was successful in resisting the VOC's demands to obtain toll-free privileges in Perak and Sumatra West Coast since she insisted that this was her subjects' customary right and livelihood and this should never be taken away from them.

Even though keen to keep foreigners secure and happy to trade in Aceh, Sultanah Safiatuddin was careful to protect her own royal wealth. The 'Jewel Affair' illustrated how Sultanah Safiatuddin was not willing to see her treasury depleted on "dead assets" - useless adornments.¹⁰¹ Another commodity highly prized by the Sultanah and successfully protected by her since the VOC officials could only cast their jealous eyes on was elephants. These elephants were not only sources of great wealth but symbols of power and prestige. Truijtmán reported that the Sultanah so jealously guarded her prized possession that she disapproved and did not consent for the VOC to buy even one head of the animal. Sultanah Safiatuddin reasoned with Truijtmán that the Dutch should be content with the generous privileges she had granted to them in Sumatra West Coast and Perak. She further added that she was following the customary practices of her predecessors and had no wish to reverse their policy. Truijtmán however reported to the Governor-General in Batavia that he suspected the real reason was that the Sultanah and her *orangkaya* found this trade very profitable indeed since they could benefit from the high customs and excise duties imposed. They also did not want to jeopardize the age-old commercial links they enjoyed with the Indian traders who were the main buyers of these elephants in exchange for their cloth.¹⁰² Not only were the Dutch not able to gain a hold in the elephant trade, Aceh's trade in this commodity actually grew from 1640s to 1660s.¹⁰³

Aceh's female rulers did not waste the kingdom's resources on weaponry. The import of guns on a large scale took place around 1540 with the influx of military assistance from Ottoman Turks in the form of guns and gunners.¹⁰⁴ In the 1560s, during Aceh's holy war against the Portuguese in Melaka, al-Kahar imported more weapons in the form of heavy bronze guns, small guns and ammunitions. Whilst Sultanah

¹⁰¹ Pieter Sourij reported that the Lebai Kita Kali told him that it was in the nature of woman not willing to see her treasury depleted. Dagh-Register gehouden bij Pieter Sourij, f.560V.

¹⁰² NA, VOC 1175, 1651, ff.309R-310R, ff.323V-324R. Origineel Rapport van den Oppercoopman Johan Truijtmán in dato 13 Januarij.

¹⁰³ Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', p. 415.

¹⁰⁴ Anthony Reid, 'Sixteenth century Turkish influence', pp. 402-403; Quoted from Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', p. 47.

Safiatuddin used elephants for trade, her father prized and kept them as war-elephants, nine hundred in number at least, according to Beaulieu. Iskandar Muda demanded the highest kind of training for these war-elephants that two of his nobles were nearly castrated for failing to ready the animals at the set time. Although there was no indication of a standing army except for the slaves and elephants' corps since the *orangkaya* were obliged to raise the army needed for the ruler as part of their tribute to him, Iskandar Muda had to spend money to provide them with guns and ammunition. Iskandar Muda's glorious army was nearly wiped out during the 1629 attack on Melaka. In 1633, after recovering from this ugly setback, Iskandar Muda began to rebuild his forces by constructing thirty galleys and purchasing artillery from the Dutch. By 1635, there was adequate naval force though not as strong as the pre-1629 might. Iskandar Thani continued to accumulate guns like his father-in-law and bought iron from the Dutch. Jan de Meere reported that Iskandar Thani queried him about methods of founding guns and making mortar shells and the destructive power of these weapons.¹⁰⁵ It is not known to what extent these forces were rebuilt but according to Ito, they never seemed to have been restored to the pre-1629 scale owing to difficulties in replacing manpower in a relatively short period and due to the diminishing royal power after the death of Iskandar Muda.¹⁰⁶

This accumulation of weapons of mass destruction was most likely stopped during the reign of female rulers since no European sources mentioned the reconstruction of Acehese forces from 1641 onwards. Sultanah Safiatuddin bought 60 pieces of metal guns (*metale stukies geschut*) from the English,¹⁰⁷ in most probability, for defensive purposes in 1661. This was the time when tensions were high between the VOC and the Sultanate and when the elite of Aceh were expecting a war with the Dutch. This nevertheless was an exception rather than rule since the Sultanah preferred to tackle problems with diplomacy rather than guns. In the 1690's, De Roy commented on the lack of fortifications in Aceh, and concluded that the VOC could capture and subdue Aceh easily and with little expense.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ NA, f.125V. Dagh-register gehouden door Jan de Meere.

¹⁰⁶ Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', p. 55.

¹⁰⁷ Chijs, *Dagh-Rgister*, 1661, p.16. See also Ito, 'The World', p.126.

¹⁰⁸ *Voyage made by Jacob Janssen de Roy to Borneo and Atcheen*, 1691, p. 369.

A Truly Golden Age

Iskandar Muda's rule is generally seen as the "golden age" of Aceh's history because of his successful centralizing policies which boosted royal power, his expansion of the military and coercive powers of the state and his ability to control territories and resources albeit through coercive means. By comparison, the queens' subtler, more collaborative exercise of power and reluctance to resort to war are viewed as weakness and a fall of Aceh from its golden era. However, one could argue that even if one considers Iskandar Muda's centralizing and coercive policies as part of a pattern towards the creation of early modern states, this argument falls short since his policies did not bring about a change from personalism, patronage and caprice to a more rational, routinized and impersonal form of administration.¹⁰⁹ I argue that his centralizing power in royal hands, his use of coercive powers and his capriciousness in administering justice stemmed partly from his personality and his response to the circumstances in Aceh at that time.¹¹⁰ Indeed, even under his "golden rule" the military decline of Aceh had already set in. This was an example of the classic victim of his own expansionist policies. If one were to shift the definition of "golden age" from a more materialistic to a more moral one (as will be shown in the next section), female rule in Aceh could indeed constitute a golden period, certainly far from one of political decline, as commonly perceived. A devolution of power, an emphasis on a rule of law rather than military might, wariness of increasingly powerful external enemies, and an economical use of state resources provide for a different form of government but not necessarily a weaker one. In fact, a more accommodative and consensual approach based on law and the ability to keep foreign diplomats and merchants happy could well be the answer to Aceh's continued peace, prosperity and survival as an independent kingdom. Clearly, Aceh became weak, relatively speaking but that was a function of the regional balance of power, not a consequence of the shift to female rule.

¹⁰⁹ See Valerie Kivelson, "Merciful Father, Impersonal State: Russian Autocracy in Comparative Perspective," in *Beyond Binary Histories- Re-Imagining Eurasia to c.1830*, ed. by Victor Lieberman (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1999) p. 218.#

¹¹⁰ See p.207.

Features of Female rule

Part II: Piety Politics

Aceh's Worldview and Islam

The very name of the kingdom, Aceh Dar al-Salam (Aceh the Abode of Peace) shows, at least in theory that Islam was to play an important, if not integral role in the character and practice of the kingdom since its inception. In the sixteenth century, Aceh was known as the major pepper producing state but it was also well known for its rivalry with Portuguese Melaka in commerce and religion. Both the *Hikayat Atjeh* and the *Bustan us-Salatin* were at pains to show Aceh's seemingly close relations with Turkey. According to Anthony Reid, Aceh's self-image in the 16th century was bound up with two issues - its Islamic struggle against the Portuguese and its pivotal role in the revived Islamic trading system as the main supplier of pepper to the Mediterranean. During this time, Aceh viewed itself as a vassal of the Ottomans and the "verandah of Mekah" for Southeast Asia.¹¹¹

In seventeenth century Aceh, under Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Thani, diplomatic missions and alliances with Turkey were no longer realities but the memory and the idea that Aceh had a privileged position as the representative of a local Islamic *ummah* remained. Interestingly, the justification for this superior position in the seventeenth century did not merely rest on the Islamic notion of the Caliphate but was also supported by older indigenous notions of supernatural power and universal kingship. According to Reid, Iskandar Thani introduced what may reasonably be seen as a more Malay style of kingship. His emphasis on sacral kingship and the weakened link with the Red Sea suggests a shift towards a more Nusantara pattern.¹¹² I suggest that under female sovereigns, the justification for the position of the ruler relied less on notions of sacral and charismatic power based on prowess but instead shifted to Muslim notions of piety and the just ruler.

¹¹¹ Anthony Reid, 'The pre-modern sultanate's view of its place in the world', in *Verandah of Violence: the historical background of the Aceh problem*, Anthony Reid, ed., (Singapore: University Press, 2006), 52-71, p. 55.

¹¹² Anthony Reid, 'The pre-modern sultanate's view', p. 60.

Snouck Hurgronje, Takeshi Ito and Amirul Hadi examined the historical role of Islam in seventeenth century Aceh. Snouck Hurgronje, the first scholar who attempted to study Islam in Aceh wrote that though there was no reason to doubt the good intentions of Acehnese rulers in their edicts relating to the purely religious sphere, they rendered in purely formal manner due homage to the institution ordained by Allah, which were ill-observed in practice.¹¹³ Ito stated that the Sultans of Aceh “were heads of the Islamic community or state and were the central figures in purely Islamic rituals and that these religious rituals were very much syncretic in nature”.¹¹⁴ Amirul Hadi concluded that since Aceh was neither the heir to any ancient higher culture nor an inland state, it showed itself to be more prone to Islamic influence. These in turn played a significant role in shaping the strong Islamic elements in that polity. Hadi believed that Snouck Hurgronje had underestimated the role the Islamic faith had in Acehnese political life.¹¹⁵

The following section examines the role of the female rulers in the practice and execution of Islam in the kingdom and the role of religion, if any, in governance. Did the sex of the ruler change the role and practice of the religion in Aceh, in any way?

Piety versus Pageantry: Comparison between the letters of Sultan Iskandar Thani and Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah

According to Annabel Teh-Gallop, the single most striking feature of the compliments in Iskandar Muda’s letter of 1615 to King James I, was the absence of any specifically Islamic formulae or references.¹¹⁶ Instead, there were recognisable Indic vestiges. His titles appeared to have more in common with those of his contemporaries in Ayuthia and Arakan than those found in later Malay letters. What particularly set

¹¹³ Hurgronje, *The Acehnese*, vol. 1. pp. 6-7.

¹¹⁴ Ito, ‘The World of the Adat Aceh’, p. 248.#

¹¹⁵ Amirul, *Islam and State*, p. 247.

¹¹⁶ Annabel Teh-Gallop, ‘Gold, Silver and Lapis Lazuli: Royal Letters from Aceh in the 17th century’, presented at the First International Conference on Aceh and Indian Ocean Studies, 24-26 Feb. 2007, Banda Aceh: Sumatra, unpublished conference paper.#

these compliments apart from those in other subsequent royal Malay letters was the emphasis on the possession of material goods (even when these might have symbolic or ritual value) and worldly success rather than on moral attributes.

Gallop argued that “the lack of overtly Islamic or otherwise spiritual or moral elements should be seen as a deliberate omission; the focus on material goods and worldly success reflecting both a relationship which was fundamentally materialistic in nature, and the subject matter of the letter, namely a request for trading rights”.¹¹⁷ Nonetheless, she concluded, “the religious allegiance of the sovereign was unmistakable in the heading situated at the very top of the letter, in tiny letters but indubitably there.”¹¹⁸

It is unfortunate that no original Malay letter of Iskandar Muda to other Malay, Muslim powers survives so that a comparison between his letters to Muslim powers and non-Muslim powers could be made. Perhaps the reason why Iskandar Muda used less Islamic references was because the idea of holy war or *jihad* that characterised relations between the Sultans of Aceh in the sixteenth century with the Portuguese had taken on a more commercial turn in the seventeenth century. Unlike the Portuguese, the English and the Dutch sailed to the East in search for commerce not converts. The other reason for the lack of Islamic reference, I suggest, is because of the more mystical and syncretic brand of Islam favoured in Aceh during the reign of Iskandar Muda.

During the reign of Iskandar Thani, there is less documentary evidence in contemporary records for the involvement of Nuruddin in negotiations with foreigners, but the question of whether his hand can be discerned in the letter to Prince Frederik Hendrik is supported, according to Gallop by the internal evidence. Although this too, is a letter to a non-Muslim ruler, Gallop noted that a quite different approach was taken here. “Instead of all but shielding the Islamic element from the uninitiated and meeting materialism with materialism, we find a more didactic - and literary - approach in the introduction of suitable Islamic exemplars, for example Nusyirwan the Just, who despite being a *kafir* was renowned for his goodness and justice, and Hatim Tai.”¹¹⁹ Gallop concluded that Iskandar Thani retained the emphasis on self-description in the compliments initiated by Iskandar Muda but a completely different flavour prevailed,

¹¹⁷ Teh-Gallop, ‘Gold, Silver and Lapis Lazuli’, p. 24.

¹¹⁸ Teh-Gallop, ‘Gold, Silver and Lapis Lazuli’, p. 24.

¹¹⁹ Teh-Gallop, ‘Gold, Silver and Lapis Lazuli’, p. 24.

with the emphasis on virtues appropriate for a king who was the shadow of God on earth.

Teh-Gallop did not suggest why a more Islamic imagery was projected here. I venture that Iskandar Thani used the title Caliph to present himself not only as a Muslim monarch of a Muslim polity but at the same time trying to claim the right to be the representative of the Muslim polities in the region, the *ummah*. Thus, whilst retaining Iskandar Muda's idea of a universal king, *chakravartin*, Iskandar Thani used an Islamic title to legitimise his position and status. This is perhaps a reflection of his embrace of a more orthodox form of Islam, propagated by Nuruddin al-Raniri whom Iskandar Thani himself appointed as the Sheikh al-Islam in Aceh.

Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah adopted Iskandar Thani's epistolary style with no gendered changes made. The indubitably male sovereign epithets *sultan al-muazzam wa-al-khaqan al-mukarram*, 'the great sultan and illustrious king' applied to Taj al-Alam.¹²⁰ Both the *Bustan us-Salatin* and *Adat Aceh* addressed Safiatuddin and her successors with the title "Paduka Sri Sultan". Indeed, the only gendered epithet was the uniquely Acehnese *Berdaulat*, 'the Sovereign one', accorded to all queens of Aceh, while all kings of Aceh from the time of Iskandar Muda onwards bore the title *Johan Berdaulat*, 'the Sovereign Champion'.¹²¹ In her royal seal however, Safiatuddin and her female successors chose to put the title "Sultanah".¹²² It appears that Safiatuddin also used the title "Sultanah" on a new batch of coins minted during her reign, a template copied by her successors.¹²³

In Iskandar Thani's letter, he was heralded as the *sultan al-muazzam wa-al-khaqan al-mukarram* and his name and title proper were followed by Muslim epithets of kingship, *zill Allah fi al-'alam* and *khalifat Allah*. I suggest that it is noteworthy that the Sultanah also took the full Muslim epithets *zill Allah fi al-'alam* and *khalifat Allah*, i.e. she as the *khalifat* or Caliph, to illustrate that her role and duties as the shadow of Allah or representative of Allah on earth were similar to that of her male predecessors,

¹²⁰ Teh-Gallop, 'Gold, Silver and Lapis Lazuli', p. 25.

¹²¹ Annabel Teh-Gallop, 'Malay seal inscriptions: a study in Islamic epigraphy from Southeast Asia', (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies: University of London, 2002), p. 89.

¹²² According to Teh-Gallop, on Tajul Alam's royal seal, however, her title is given as "Sultanah" see Teh-Gallop, 'Malay seal inscription', p. 112.

¹²³ On the newly minted coins, the obverse side states her title "Paduka Sri Sultanah Taj al-Alam" and reverse side simply her name "Safiat al-Din Syah Berdaulat" (Safiat al-Din Syah, the Sovereign). The high sounding title of "Berdaulat Zillullah fil Alam" (*trans.* Who rules as Allah's Shadow on Earth) was not adopted by her. The same format was used by her female successors. See Van Langen, *De Inrichting*, p.66. See also, Nicholas Rhodes, Goh Han Peng and V. Mihailovs, 'The Gold Coinages of Samudra Pasai and Aceh Dar as-Salam', unpublished manuscript, Singapore, 2007, pp. 58-60.

regardless of sex. However, by the very title that she chose, Taj al-Alam Safiatuddin Syah or Safiyyat al-Din Syah¹²⁴, “Taj al-Alam” meaning “Crown of the world” and “al-Din” referring to subjection to Allah’s laws, she set herself apart from her male predecessors.¹²⁵ Whilst basing her rule on her status as crown or sovereign of the world she placed her rule firmly on the foundation that she was chosen by Allah, she was a representative of God to rule according to his laws.¹²⁶ Although Iskandar Thani saw himself as the representative of Allah on earth, no such submission to Allah’s laws was mentioned.

Teh-Gallop pointed out that Iskandar Thani likened his sense of justice to that of Nusyirwan Adil (a non-Muslim) but he compared his liberality to Hatim Tai. These names were omitted from Tajul Alam’s letter. Instead, she likened her sense of justice to that of ‘Sultan’ Ibn Abd al-Aziz, referring to Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz, the fifth Umayyad caliph (r.717-720) and to later generations ‘an exemplar of the Muslim virtues of piety, equity and humility’.¹²⁷

Upon closer examination, the Sultanah’s use of Islamic imagery is only one feature of her letters. The other important feature is the emphasis on her attribution of her roles and duties as a Muslim ruler. There are 26 distinct sets of attributes in Iskandar Thani’s letter. All but five are repeated in Safiatuddin’s letter, which also include several new formulations, giving a total of 32 sets of attributes. The five that are not repeated pertain to descriptions of the king’s material wealth such as how shiny (*cemerlang cahayanya*) his gold (*mas kudrati*) is and how bright (*gilang gemilang*) his copper (*swassa*) is. The other omission is the description of the ruler as being studded and decorated with gems and precious stones. In contrast to her husband’s emphasis on the material, almost all of the new formulations added by the Sultanah are of a religious or moral nature. As

¹²⁴ This is referring to the Arabic spelling or version of Safiatuddin which is Safiyat al-Din.

¹²⁵ <http://quranicteahings.co.uk/deen.htm>. <Accessed 10 August 2007>. The word “al-Din” also refers to the establishment of a way of life which obedience is only to Allah. It could also mean, “...a way of dispensing judgement and rewards following Allah’s laws”.

¹²⁶ Elizabeth I and Empress Wu Zhe Tian used providentialism as the most effective means of legitimating a female monarch. See Anne McLaren, ‘Elizabeth I as Deborah: Biblical typology, prophecy and political power’, in *Gender, Power and Privilege in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Jessica Munns, & Penny Richards (Pearson Education Limited, 2003), pp. 99, 105. Empress Wu Zhe Tian (r.683-708) of China argued that she should be allowed to serve her country against strict patriarchal custom on grounds that she was the reincarnation of a previous female saint whom Buddha himself had promised spiritual rebirth. See P. N. Stearns, *Gender in World History*, (London: Routledge, 2000) p. 36.#

¹²⁷ Teh-Gallop, ‘Gold, Silver and Lapis Lazuli’, pp. 16-17.

mentioned earlier, Sultanah Safiatuddin adopted the full title of her male predecessors including the Islamic title of *Khalifah* for a ruler. The interesting difference is that she emphasised not only the title of *Khalifah* but her role as *Khalifah*, (God's Deputy on Earth). In this letter, she writes that she is one "who manifests Allah's wisdom and blessings, who upholds Allah's laws, who clarifies those that are in doubt, whose shine brings forth Allah's light and goodness, who exhorts people to Allah's path, who treats Allah's creations with mercy, who dispenses Allah's justice with utmost care, who hides that which is ugly and forgives those who have sinned, and whose words are gracious."¹²⁸ In contrast, Iskandar Thani attributes no such roles to himself. The Sultanah's modesty and humility in describing herself as dispensing Allah's laws contrasts with Iskandar Thani's arrogant depiction of his own powers. The other clause found in Iskandar Thani's letter but not in Safiatuddin's is "*lagi raja yang ngurniai kesukaan akan yang dikasihinya dan kedukaan akan yang dimarahinya*", (a king who dispenses good fortune to those he favours and misfortune to those who have incurred his wrath).¹²⁹

It is unfortunate that this is the only surviving original Malay letter belonging to the Sultanah. The rest of her correspondences with the Dutch in Batavia and Melaka and the rest of the polities are Dutch translations of her letters. These translated letters come with the attendant problems of omissions, additions and genuine misinterpretations. Nevertheless, they are very useful and the fact that most of these letters survive, it is possible to gain some insights and offer some generalizations as to the way the Sultanah represented herself and her basis of legitimacy and authority. In her other letters written to the various Dutch Governors in Batavia, she usually described herself as one who was chosen by God to succeed and to sit on the throne of Aceh Dar al-Salam. Indeed, one particular letter stood out in terms of not only the compliments attached to the beginning of the letter but to the main content of the letter. Indeed, this was the main message of the letter, the other being her request to the Governor General to send a capable and powerful envoy to Aceh so that he would be able to carry out the tasks assigned according to the Governor's intention.

In her letter to Joan Maetsuyker, the Governor General in Batavia, in 1659¹³⁰, she wrote,

¹²⁸ Writer's own translation.

¹²⁹ Teh-Gallop's translation in 'Gold, Silver and Lapis Lazuli', p. 16.

¹³⁰ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1659, pp. 103-104.

God says that since antiquity there are no better things as these two things; namely, think always about God above all and always do good to other people. That the Governor General on his part I trust shall do. Over such work, one is more and more blessed and is honoured and praised by all other men in this world. The Acehnese and the Dutch have for many years continued in peace and friendship, but now as it has pleased God, we have come to war, but these differences are small, and with the help from God Almighty and the good resolve of a good outcome from the GG, once again the Acehnese and the Dutch are one. Therefore, the Governor General, herein, would do no other but to settle [the differences]. The wise people in earlier times say to warn [us] that always remember two things, namely always think foremost of God and of death and forget two things, all the virtues that we do to other men and all the bad things that are done to us, so that our conscience will remain pure and calm.

In this letter, Sultanah Safiatuddin was almost giving a sermon to the Governor. She used religion to exhort the Dutch to undertake good deeds. Unlike in the past, where her male predecessors, especially Sultan Al-Kahar who used religion to wage holy war (*jihad*) against the Portuguese, Islam was used not as a means to show the difference between the *kafir* (infidels) and Muslims but as a common denominator, a universal call to do good and bring peace to all mankind. Of course, this letter was carefully composed to persuade the Dutch not to wage war against Aceh and an appeal to peace by diplomacy since tensions between the VOC and Aceh were high given the murders of Dutch officials in Perak and Sumatra West Coast. This sermon, in all probability, would not sway the Governor General. He would consider other practical conditions such as costs of war and stoppage of commerce as more important considerations when deciding whether to go to war with Aceh. This letter, nevertheless, reveals an interesting insight as to how the Sultanah used diplomacy tempered by religion. Her religious tolerance was also manifested in her allowance for Franciscan priests to minister the

Catholic community in Aceh. This freedom to practise their religion was denied with the restoration of male rule in 1699. Furthermore, in 1688 with the death of the third queen, Zaqiatuddin, the *orangkaya* and conservative *ulama* who opposed the appointment of the last female ruler captured Fr Bento de Christo and took away his possessions. It was only after Kamalt Syah was appointed that Fr Bento was released and returned to his duties.¹³¹

To what extent did Sultanah Safiatuddin's religious advisor influence her? In 1642, Pieter Sourij mentioned that the Lebai Kita Kali, the Sultanah's half brother and the high religious judge of the kingdom was responsible in drafting the Sultanah's letters and *firman*.¹³² By 1649, however, the position of the Lebai Kita Kali was held by a young and inexperienced man, most probably his son.¹³³ No mention was made of the Syekh al-Islam, Nuruddin al-Raniri's, role in letter writing. Furthermore, he left Aceh in 1644 and Syaiful Rijal replaced him. The most senior role in the Council at that time was the Orangkaya Maharaja Sri Maharaja. Furthermore, if the *opperste bischop* mentioned by the Dutch who was murdered in 1653, was indeed Syaiful Rijal, then in 1659, Aceh was without any known prominent religious scholar and head. The other known prominent *ulama*, Abdul Rauf al-Singkel, returned to Aceh from Mekah only in 1661. Therefore, it was most likely that the 1659 "letter of sermon" sent to Governor Maetsuyker was a reflection of the Sultanah's own personal leanings.

Another interesting feature of her letter that differs from her male predecessors and perhaps reflects a more feminine orientation is the mention of *lagi yang mengitarkan segala bau-bauwan kemurahannya pada segala tepi langit takhta kerajaan*, (one who spreads her fragrance of generosity to all areas under her rule).¹³⁴ Sultanah Safiatuddin used the same imagery in her letter to the Viceroy of the Estado da India.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Account by Jeronymo dos Reis, 24 October 1688 in Achilles Meersman OFM, *The Franciscans in the Indonesian Archipelago, 1300-1775*, (Nauwelaerts: Lovain 1967), pp. 129-130, 133-134. Quoted from Anthony Reid, ed., *Witnesses to Sumatra, A Travellers' Anthology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 52.

¹³² Dagh-Register gehouden bij Pieter Sourij, f.586R.

¹³³ "The first Rijxraadt, the Lebe Kitta Calij, should be passed over for now, depending on his state of mind and health. In politics he is of little power since he is young and inexperienced and so we understand not highly esteemed". Truijtmans Dagh-Register 13 August 1649- November 1649. NA, VOC1171, ff.182-250, f.207V-208R. Sultanah Safiatuddin appointed the father, the Kali as the Maharajah Sri Maharajah.

¹³⁴ Letter from Sultanah Tajul Alam to Charles II in 1661. Quoted from Teh-Gallop, 'Gold, Silver and Lapis Lazuli', p. 17.

¹³⁵ Letter from Sultanah Safiatuddin Tajul Alam to the Viceroy of the Estado da India, 1668. Portuguese copy, Arquivos Nacionais, Ministerio dos Negocios Estrangeiros, 558, n.119.#

Very little is known about how Islam was practiced at court and in the kingdom and the role of religious officials and scholars in the sixteenth century. The *Bustan* mentioned a few famous foreign scholars who came to Aceh from Mekah such as Syeikh Abu al-Khair and Syeikh Muhammad Yamani and Syeikh Muhammad Jailani from Gujrat. The *Bustan* suggested that these *ulama* had a tremendous influence on the Sultans of Aceh such as Sultan Alauddin (1579-86) who was described to be very pious and exhorted his subjects to pray and fast, even to sport beards.¹³⁶

According to Ito, by the end of the sixteenth century, Islamic law had become an integral part of the law of the Sultanate.¹³⁷ The ruler, represented by a group of religious judges headed by the Kadi Malik al-Adil as the head, administered law and order of the realm. A more detailed picture of the system of law and courts in Aceh emerged from the reign of Iskandar Muda based on European observations such as those from Beaulieu and Peter Mundy.¹³⁸

Ito concluded that the system of administration of justice established by Iskandar Muda "was maintained by and large, even under the diminishing royal power of his successors."¹³⁹ Ito pointed out that the *Adat Aceh* mentioned the existence of a number of religious scholars from Pidie during the reign of Safiatuddin. The Kadi Malik al-Adil, referred to by the Dutch as Lebai Kita Kali (Kali being the Acehnese variant of the Arabic Qadhi) was given first place in the order during Saturday audiences. Ito further added that with the return of Abdul Rauf al-Singkel, a local *ulama*, from Mekah to Aceh around 1661, the Sultanah's subsequent royal patronage further stimulated and encouraged the orientation to Islamic law in the judicial administration of the Sultanate. The duumvirate of this Kadi was possibly comparable to that of Syeikh Shamsuddin in the reign of Iskandar Muda.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ *Bustan*, Iskandar, p. 33.

¹³⁷ Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', p. 155.

¹³⁸ Please refer to Ito's thesis on the description of Aceh's law and court administration. Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', pp. 156-161.

¹³⁹ Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', p. 165.

¹⁴⁰ Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', p. 164.

Whilst Sultanah Safiatuddin and her successors might have worked closely with Abdul Rauf al-Singkel till his death in 1693 to implement Islamic law in the administration of justice and other religious rituals and festivals, it appeared that Sultanah Safiatuddin kept herself above the politico-religious debates and struggles that gripped the kingdom at that time. Iskandar Muda had embraced a monistic brand of Sufism under his protégé Syeikh Shamsuddin whilst Iskandar Thani had taken on a more orthodox approach by appointing al-Raniri as the Syeikh al-Islam in Aceh in 1637.¹⁴¹ This direct involvement of the rulers had resulted in a bloody struggle for power between these two groupings. With Iskandar Thani's blessings al-Raniri carried out a bloody purge of Syeikh Shamsuddin's followers. Many were executed, their books burnt and some fled the kingdom. This bitter struggle between these two groups reared its ugly head again in 1643. The return of Syaiful Rijal to Aceh from Mekah, a native from Minangkabau, who was a student of Jamal al-Din, a former follower of Syeikh Shamsuddin, brought about renewed opposition to al-Raniri. Pieter Sourij described the chaotic condition at court where the Sultanah was called upon to settle this dispute. Instead of taking sides, the Sultanah declared that she knew little about these religious debates and asked her elites to solve this conflict themselves.¹⁴² The Sultanah waited until this struggle had been played out. Only after a clear winner had emerged in the person of Syaiful Rijal that the Sultanah decided to call him to court to honour him and appoint him as the Syeikh al-Islam.¹⁴³ It is especially important to note that despite this bitter struggle repeating itself, and al-Raniri's faction was defeated, this time there was no vengeful mass executions and bloodshed. Al-Raniri was allowed to return to Gujerat in 1644 where he died in 1658. It is difficult though to infer from this episode what the ideological and theosophical leanings, if any, of Sultanah Safiatuddin were.

The above episode shows, however, that Sultanah Safiatuddin refrained from actively supporting or giving political patronage to any particular *ulama* and their followers. Nor was there any evidence of her embracing a particular Islamic order, be it orthodox or mystical. One thing was clear though, she was a patron of religion. The proliferation of Islamic learning and literature, representing a golden age of Islamic and

¹⁴¹ See Peter Riddell, *Islam and the Malay Indonesia World*, (Singapore: Horizons Books, 2001) pp. 110-121.#

¹⁴² NA, ff. 671V-672R. Dagh-Register gehouden bij Pieter Sourij.

¹⁴³ Pieter Sourij reported that one week after the bitter debate at court, the Sultanah summoned Syaiful Rijal to court where he was given the highest honour. NA, ff.671V-673R. Dagh-Register gehouden bij Pieter Sourij.

Malay cultural renaissance, unrivalled till today, was testament to the effective collaboration between the Sultanahs and the *ulama*. Al-Raniri wrote at least seven well-known books pertaining to not only religious knowledge but also history, literature and law during the time of Sultanah Safiatuddin. Some examples are *Shiratul Mustaqim* (The Straight Path), *Syaiful-Qutub* (Medicine for the Heart) and *Bustanul Salathin fi Dzikiril-awwalin wal-Akhirin* (The Garden of Sultans concerning Biographies of People in the Past and Future). The same Sultanah also commissioned Abdul Rauf al-Singkel to write a book on *fiqh* (laws pertaining to ritual obligations) the result of which is the *Mir'at al Tullab*, the first book on Canon Law written in Malay.¹⁴⁴ Sultanah Inayat Zakiatuddin also commissioned Abdul Rauf to write his Commentary on Forty *Hadiths*.¹⁴⁵ Although there was no mention of mosques being built on the instruction or sponsorship of these female sovereigns, Dampier noted in 1689 that the kingdom had a great number of mosques.¹⁴⁶

The Ruler's Tasks

The main tasks of an exemplary ruler, the defender of the faith, were laid out in the *Kanun Syarak Kerajaan Aceh*, *Taj us-Salatin*, *Bustan us-Salatin* and the *Adat Aceh*. The main responsibilities were to uphold Allah's laws, pursue prosperity for subjects and to ensure public welfare. The most important pre-requisite the ruler must possess to carry out these tasks was his/her moral attributes. The ruler must be just, merciful, generous, thrifty, knowledgeable, pleasant/good looking, and possess good conduct.¹⁴⁷ Neither religious knowledge nor sex, were amongst the pre-requisites in the selection of a king, nor the yardsticks used to judge the quality of the ruler.

This was what the highest-ranking *ulama*, with the title Syeikh al-Islam writes in the *Bustan us-Salatin* about Sultanah Safiatuddin's religiosity, moral attributes and religious duties:

¹⁴⁴ Rusdi, 'Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah', in *Wanita Utama* ed. by Ismail Sofyan and Others pp. 47-49.

¹⁴⁵ Amirul, *Islam and State*, p. 74.

¹⁴⁶ Dampier, *Voyages and Discoveries*, p. 90.

¹⁴⁷ *Taj us-Salatin*, Khalid, p. 59.

Her royal highness, our lord Seri Sultan Tajul Alam Safiyyat al-Din Shah Berdaulat, the shadow of Allah on earth, possessed many praiseworthy and virtuous traits, as well as being fearful of Allah and always praying five times a day and reading the Quran aloud, repeating the name of Allah and always reading the book of Allah, and commanding people to perform good deeds and forbidding them to commit bad deeds, as was sent down by Allah to our Prophet Muhammad, and was extremely just in the matter of examining and sentencing all the servants of Allah. On account of the blessing of the royal power and good fortune of *Yang Maha Mulia*, there were many of the servants of Allah who were faithful believers and prayed five times a day and pursued knowledge.¹⁴⁸

Al-Raniri depicted Sultanah Safiatuddin as a great and generous queen. Al-Raniri added that the Sultanah never failed to reward her nobles, captains and soldiers generously. She also accorded missions from abroad with the same generosity. Al-Raniri cited the example of Sultanah Safiatuddin presenting one mission from Gujerat with twenty-eight elephants unparalleled in their size and courage, one of which has four tusks instead of the usual two.¹⁴⁹ Al-Raniri remarked that no ruler could give a more generous reward than that given by the queen.

Sultanah Safiatuddin's generosity was evident from the many observations of the various Company delegates who resided in Aceh. Pieter Willemszoon reported in 1642 Sultanah Safiatuddin granted an English surgeon by the name of Mr. Thomas, the title of "Orangkaya" and gave him four slaves as a gift.¹⁵⁰ Besides the customary gifts of clothes and daggers to the Dutch envoys attending her court and her generous gifts of large amounts of pepper and tin to the Governors in Melaka and Batavia, Company officials in Aceh mentioned the thoughtful and frequent gifts of baked foods and fruits, which the Sultanah ordered to be brought to the Company's lodge. The third Sultanah, Inayat Zakiatuddin Syah was another example of a generous queen. In 1683, she welcomed the delegation from the Syariff of Mekah, headed by the representative of Syariff Barakat

¹⁴⁸ *Bustan*, Siti Hawa, p. 62.

¹⁴⁹ *Bustan*, Siti Hawa, pp. 43-44.

¹⁵⁰ NA, f.508R. Copie dagh-Register gehouden bij den oppercoopman Pieter Willemsz., 26 Sept 1642-27 Nov 1642.

named El Hajj Yusuf E. Qodri with great ceremony. When the envoys returned to Mekah, they were laden with gifts of gold, five golden lamps for the Ka'bah, sandal wood, camphor and money to be donated to the poor people in Mekah.¹⁵¹

Sultanah Safiatuddin dispensed generous rewards to her own *orangkaya*, for example, when Maharaja Adonna Lilla returned from an elephant hunt with eleven huge elephants for the queen, she ordained that the elephants be presented to her *orangkaya* instead. Namely, the biggest one, plus two more for Maharaja Adonna Lilla himself, one for the Orangkaya Laksamana, one for the son of Maharaja Lilla, one for Orangkaya Maharaja di Raja, one for Raja Lila Wangsa and the remaining four to be given to the children at court.¹⁵² On another occasion, the Sultanah was presented with thirty young Acehnese who were taken as slaves. She instead ordered these slaves to be distributed as gifts amongst her *orangkaya*. Another example was when the Orangkaya Paduka Mamentri offered her twenty young slaves to be at her disposal. She answered that those slaves under him should be kept by him.¹⁵³

Sultanah Safiatuddin was also known for her piety. A Muslim traveller Al-Mutawakkil, who arrived in Aceh during her reign gave this interesting description of the Sultanah. He wrote,

a very gracious, perfect Muslim woman, generous with money, rules them. She can read and knows science, beneficence and agreement on the Quran. She is called Safiyati 'l-Din Shah Bardawla [*Berdaulat*, meaning sovereign]. Her name is written on the coins, on one side Safiyati 'l-Din and on the other side Shah Berdawla.¹⁵⁴

The VOC officials who were present in Aceh mentioned that the Sultanah observed fasting in Ramadhan, the third pillar of Islam. Truijtmán, described one audience day as such:

¹⁵¹ Snouck Hurgronje, 'Een Mekkaansch Gezantschap naar Atjeh in 1683', *Bijdragen Taal-land-en-Volkenkunde*, 1, 37, (1888), 545-554, pp. 553-54. See fn. 246.

¹⁵² NA, f.523R. Copie dagh-Register gehouden bij den oppercoopman Pieter Willemsz.

¹⁵³ NA, f.523V. Copie dagh-Register gehouden bij den oppercoopman Pieter Willemsz.

¹⁵⁴ *The Hollanders in the Sirrah of Al-Mutawakkil*, from papers of R.B. Serjeant found in Edinburgh University Library, p. 124.#

we were very welcomed and honourably treated with elephant fights, stage plays etc. It was fasting month, thus could not eat or drink. The Sultanah asked to be excused for this and hope that we would not blame her for not treating us with food.¹⁵⁵ Later in the evening, we were treated with more singing performances at court where the whole court was alight with lighted candles. We were treated with food served in gold plates and honoured with betel-box.¹⁵⁶

Vlamingh noted that during Ramadhan, foreigners and guests at court were not served any food and drinks. However, in the evenings, after sunset, when Muslims broke their fast, the palace halls were filled with banquets once again. Also, if audience days fell during the time when the Acehnese celebrated the two Muslim canonical festivals, these audience days were cancelled. Of course, no mention was made about the Sultanah's observances of daily prayers and reciting the Quran since these were private rituals performed in the inner sanctum of the palace.

Administration of law and justice under the Sultanahs

As mentioned earlier, according to Ito, the justice system in Aceh was well established by the time of Iskandar Muda. More information is also available from travellers such as Beaulieu and Mundy. Based on these observations and information from the *Adat Aceh*, the kingdom had four courts of law, one pertaining to ritual, family and inheritance, second dealing with criminal cases, third concerning commercial law and the last pertaining to the purely religious requirements and observances such as praying, fasting etc. Since Muslim jurists did not recognise any distinction between civil, criminal and other branches of law, the first three courts were also based on Islamic law. However, it appeared that cases were generally judged according to *adat* and in accordance with the law of the land. Ito inferred that the former referred to indigenous legal practice whilst the latter referred to Islamic law.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ NA, VOC 1171, ff.182-250, f.205R. Truijtmán's Dagh-Register 13 August 1649-November 1649.

¹⁵⁶ NA, f.205V. Truijtmán's Dagh-Register 13 August 1649-November 1649.

¹⁵⁷ Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', p. 174.

Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Thani, often modified *syariah* law of the Sultanate. In many cases, the penalties inflicted were harsher than the provisions of the *syariah*. Penalties were meted out based on traditional judicial practices, which Ito described as trial by ordeal and discretion (more often whim) of the sovereign.¹⁵⁸ Examples of trials by ordeal include plunging one's hand into boiling oil and licking heated iron. These were cruel enough by normal standards but the punishments meted out by these two male rulers went far beyond this. European observers reported on the harsh punishments especially during the reign of Iskandar Muda. Punishments were meted out based on caprice, jealousy or just plain bad temper. Verhoeff, Broecke, Best and Beaulieu mentioned that delay in attending to his needs, defeating him in cockfights and wearing too costly ornaments would lead to a loss of limbs and life. Wealth and popularity of an *orangkaya* could cost him his life or his property.¹⁵⁹ For more real crimes or the perception thereof, such as military indiscipline, breach of court etiquette and treason, his cruelty had no limits. An *orangkaya* who requested Iskandar Muda for deferment in preparation for war had him and his whole family killed. As if death was not punishment enough, they all had their noses, lips, ears, genitals and bellies cut off. Iskandar Thani meted out the same torture and death penalties as Iskandar Muda on those suspected of attempts at assassinating them.¹⁶⁰ Iskandar Muda forced his son to eat his own faeces and his mother's fingers for failing to make his obeisance. The mother's punishment was for neglecting her responsibility to teach her son. In 1636, Iskandar Thani punished four of his concubines by amputating their hands, feet and noses. Then their bellies were opened and the flesh excised from the bones. After which their bodies were burnt.¹⁶¹ Francisco de Souza de Castro, the Portuguese envoy, was imprisoned by Iskandar Thani for failing to mount the elephant sent to convey him to the palace. Other *orangkaya* were either castrated, amputated or flogged owing to delay in offering their services.

This form of *ira et malevolentia* was not reported during the reigns of the female rulers. Ironically, their *pax et custodia* checked by moral and religious values were deemed as soft or weak. In contrast to her father and husband, as related earlier, Sultanah

¹⁵⁸ Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', p. 178.

¹⁵⁹ Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', p. 180.

¹⁶⁰ Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', p. 181.

¹⁶¹ Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', p. 172.

Safiatuddin merely admonished the Maharaja Sri Maharajah accused of taking her royal lands at court. Pieter Sourij who attended an audience day during the reign of Sultanah Safiatuddin related that on that day, 12 July, 1642, many criminal and civil cases were discussed and debated. Amongst others, a delinquent was brought to the Sultanah but by a request from someone, her Majesty was moved to be merciful. Pieter Sourij believed this was due to her nature as a woman, and the delinquent was pardoned.¹⁶² In another case, a congregational member at a mosque had opposed the Penghulu Kawal, an official at court in charge of policing. He was supposed to receive a death sentence but thanks to appeals from many Indian Muslim traders requesting his pardon, the perpetrator was saved from the death sentence. Because he had committed a grave crime of beating the Penghulu Kawal in a mosque, his left hand was amputated.¹⁶³

Another characteristic feature in the administration of justice under Sultanah Safiatuddin was to call upon the relevant courts to administer cases rather than to mete out punishment based on personal whim and caprice of the ruler. For example, a Muslim captain from Bengal by the name of Mirs Mamoet was accused of having sexual intercourse with the daughter of a certain Sayyid Sierip. Whilst the case was still being investigated, the Sayyid killed Mirs Mamoet because Mamoet had refused to marry his daughter. A fellow Bengali merchant, in retaliation to this murder, requested the Sultanah to put the Sayyid and his daughter to death. The Sultanah instead referred this to the relevant courts and adjudicators. The Laksamana and the Lebai Kita Kali eventually settled this case since the case involved a murder (to be tried at the criminal court) and a sexual liason (under the jurisdiction of the religious court). The verdict was death for both father and daughter. The Sultanah, however, had the right to hear the final appeal. It turned out that the Sultanah saved the father from the death sentence but the daughter was sentenced according to the law of the land, which was strangling for fornication.¹⁶⁴

Under the Sultanah, the punishment for adultery was consistent - either flogging or strangling which was in accordance with the law of the land. In one case, Sultanah Safiatuddin ordered the Lebai Kita Kali to investigate and try the case of a man who wanted her to punish his wife for committing adultery whilst he was working on a fort.

¹⁶² NA, f.565V. Dagh-Register gehouden bij Pieter Sourij, 1642.

¹⁶³ NA, ff.567V-568R. Dagh-Register gehouden bij Pieter Sourij, 1642.

¹⁶⁴ NA, f.503R-503V. Copie dagh-Register gehouden bij den oppercoopman Pieter Willemsz.

The punishment meted out in this case was similar to another case where both the adulterer and adulteress were punished by flogging. Thomas Best reported that during Iskandar Muda's reign, a man who committed adultery was put to death (not mentioned how) but his corpse was left lying near the gate of the palace to be eaten by dogs.¹⁶⁵ This was unnecessarily cruel, even to the dead and ran counter to both custom and Islam. It would be good to know how the Sultanah punished sexual transgressions generally, especially those punishable under Muslim codes – but the sources are rather silent on this point.

Not much detailed information is available for the succeeding Sultanahs' approach and execution of justice since the VOC officials were no longer residing in Aceh to write detailed reports after the VOC closed their factory in Aceh in 1663. Observations from European travellers residing in Aceh such as Thomas Bowrey and William Dampier from 1669-1689 did not reveal or describe any unnecessary harsh punishments meted out based on caprice of the sovereign except for the customary amputation of hands and feet for thefts and banishment to a nearby island called Pulo Wei for incorrigibles. Dampier wrote that he never heard of anyone who suffered death for theft.¹⁶⁶ Bowrey, however observed that for theft of what was considered of considerable value such as cow or buffalo then a death sentence was meted as an example to others.¹⁶⁷ The attitude to this kind of crime, according to Ito, "was typically Islamic and the letter of the law book was rigorously applied".¹⁶⁸

Religious Rituals and Festivities

Among the indices for assessing commitment to Islam in seventeenth-century Aceh, were the celebration of Friday prayer¹⁶⁹ and the two canonical festivals of the Muslim year - Id al-Fitr celebrated after a month of fasting in Ramadhan and Id al-Adha,

¹⁶⁵ Thomas Best, *The Voyage of Best to the East Indies, 1612-1614* ed. by Sir William Foster (London: Hakluyt Society, 1938), 75, p. 164.

¹⁶⁶ Dampier, *Voyages and Discoveries*, pp. 96-97.

¹⁶⁷ Bowrey, *A Geographical Account*, p. 315.

¹⁶⁸ Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', p. 173.

¹⁶⁹ Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', p. 206.

the festival of sacrifice celebrated on the 10th of the month of Dzulhijja.¹⁷⁰ The third part of the *Adat Aceh* provided a detailed description, including the sovereign's role.¹⁷¹

The main responsibilities of the ruler were as follows – a. Sultan led the procession on an elephant from the palace to the main mosque, Bait al-Rahman, accompanied by state officials, courtiers and servants. b. Sultan entered mosque and proceeded to a private alcove¹⁷² in the mosque where curtains were then drawn. c. Sultan performed the obligatory prayers in this alcove with the *imam* leading the prayers. d. After prayers, all the officials and nobility pledged allegiance to the Sultan. e. The procession reformed and made its way back to the palace with the Sultan riding an elephant. f. Sultan welcomed by old womenfolk at the palace with sprinkles of yellow toasted rice mixed with gold foils. An additional ritual took place during the celebration of Id al-Adha, the feast of sacrifice. Here after the prayers at the mosque, the Sultan, led by religious officials would begin the sacrifice by putting his knife to the jugular vein of the animal specially prepared for this occasion. After the first cut and as soon as blood began to flow, the Syeikh al-Islam took over this ceremony, which he finished accordingly.

No Islamic doctrine based on the Quran and Hadith forbids a woman from appearing in public processions. Nor is there one that forbids a woman from going to the mosque to pray although this is not encouraged. Yet no evidence has been found in either indigenous records nor in European accounts or observations regarding the participation of female rulers in the above religious rituals and festivals. Does this silence mean that these rituals did not take place under female rulers? It is difficult to suggest that these rituals did not take place. These rituals are mandatory for all Muslim adult males. Thus, the question here is, how or at what scale were these ceremonies and processions undertaken? Since no evidence mentions the participation of the various Sultanahs in these processions going to the mosques nor their participation in congregational prayers and the ritual of the sacrifice, it is difficult to conclude otherwise. The responsibility of congregational prayer, Friday prayers in particular, in mosques falls only on adult Muslim males. The *imam* must also be necessarily male. The prayer hall in

¹⁷⁰ Id al-Adha marks the sacrifice of Prophet Ibrahim and his son Prophet Ismail respectively.

¹⁷¹ For a detailed description of how these rituals were performed and festivals celebrated, see Ito's study on the *Adat Aceh*, in Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', pp. 209-248.

¹⁷² According to the *Adat Aceh*, this curtained alcove is called *mesjid kelambu*. Ito, 'The World of the Adat Aceh', p. 216.#

the mosque is regarded strictly as a male domain. The *Taj us-Salatin* differentiated a male ruler from a female one by stating that a male ruler, as mandatory to all adult male Muslims, ought (*harus*) to go to the mosque for Friday and Id prayers. The *Taj* continued that the male ruler ought to go to the mosque adorned and accompanied by his ministers and soldiers. A female ruler could not do this (*raja perempuan itu tiada dapat berbuat demikian*).¹⁷³ A female ruler could only pray in a place that was quiet so as not to be seen by other males (*sembayang pada suatu tempat yang sunyi supaya jangan dilihat orang laki-laki adanya*). Given these injunctions that are followed rather strictly in almost all Muslim communities in the world and the silence in the sources, unless new evidence is found, it appears that the Sultanahs did not lead the processions to the mosques during these religious rituals. Nor would they perform any prayers in the curtained alcove, which was situated in the main prayer hall of the mosque. Id al-Fitr and Id al Adha, however, were celebrated with much pomp and fanfare. Truijtmán recounted one such celebration during the reign of Safiatuddin at the end of the fasting month. He mentioned that as customary, 400 buffaloes were slaughtered and the meat eaten to mark the ceremony.¹⁷⁴

The above seems to suggest that the female ruler's capacity to manifest Allah's laws was limited. Furthermore, as in a "theatre state",¹⁷⁵ the construction of these ceremonies and public rituals was an important means to enhance the sovereign's charisma and status, in this instance his religious authority.¹⁷⁶ However, upon closer examination, it is important to note that the above religious rituals were mandatory to all adult male believers but not to rulers. The ruler's roles in these processions were merely ceremonial based on culture and politics of power but not religion. The authority of the ruler was religiously sanctioned, but the ruler himself was not a religious leader. The need for rulers to take part in these ceremonies was a created one designed to balance the authority of religious leaders or to show that the ruler held supreme or ultimate authority. These ceremonies and processions were designed to enhance the power of the ruler and his religiously sanctioned authority but were in no way obligated by the doctrines of the religion. Indeed, the palace, instead of the mosque was used as the

¹⁷³ *Taj us-Salatin*, Khalid, p. 61.

¹⁷⁴ NA, VOC 1171, ff.182-250, f.224R. Truijtmán's Dagh-Register 13 August 1649-November 1649.

¹⁷⁵ See Geertz's, elucidation of this concept in Clifford Geertz, *Negara: the Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, (Princeton: Princeton University, 1980), p. 103.

¹⁷⁶ According to Anthony Milner, many unIslamic practices pertaining to kingship and pageantry survived even after the adoption of Islam. For more detailed assessment of Malay political culture, see, A. C. Milner, *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule*, (Arizona: Arizona University Press, 1982).#

starting point and the end of these ceremonies. The palace, the abode of the ruler, where royal insignia and regalia were kept, then carried to the mosque during these processions and returned created a new pivot of authority and power that balanced the mosque complex. The main task of a ruler in a Muslim community was to uphold religious laws and to ensure that the subjects could practice the religion freely and in peace. The ruler was never expected to be an *imam* to lead congregational prayers nor to initiate the sacrifice during the feast of Id al-Adha. These were court traditions given a veneration of religion.

The female ruler's absence from rituals returned religious duty to its proper sphere. This was in line with other features of female rule: duties and responsibilities were distinctly delineated to authorised persons, but with the monarch as the ultimate arbiter. This might have created a more limited monarchy but not necessarily a weak one, much less declining, as most writers claimed.¹⁷⁷ The female rulers might not have taken part in processions which were really a showcase of power rather than faith, and might in consequence have appeared to be less charismatic. They might have erased the veneration of religious grandiosity and pageantry but they upheld the piety, the substance of the faith.

Absence from processions to the mosque, but this does not mean that these female rulers did not take part in other public processions. Numerous observations by European travellers, residents and VOC officials in Aceh illustrate that the Sultanahs ventured out in public on elephants to perform other rituals such as funeral ceremonies, visiting graves of deceased, and taking part in the bathing ceremony during the month of Safar. The queens also participated in numerous outdoor entertainments and recreation and presided over the elephant and tiger fights organised by the Acehnese court to entertain foreign envoys and their own subjects.

Al-Raniri described the placing of the headstone at the tomb of Iskandar Thani in detail and noted how the Sultanah, just after a few months after taking power, led the

¹⁷⁷ In her study of the Byzantine Book of Ceremonies, Averil Cameron observes that the more centralized the government became, the more the rituals themselves would need to and tend to include all officials who mattered. Thus, the ceremonial was both self-generating and self-reinforcing. Ambition engendered ceremony and ceremony made ambition respectable. Averil Cameron, 'The Construction of court Ritual: The Byzantine Book of Ceremonies', in *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies*, ed. by David Cannadine and Simon Price, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 106-136, p. 131.

procession mounted on an elephant.¹⁷⁸ Pieter Sourij described an excursion to a *speelhoff* (a place for amusement) headed by Sultanah Safiatuddin in 1642. He reported that all the elites and foreign delegates took part in enjoying the singing, dancing and bathing activities not to mention the sumptuous seven course meals.¹⁷⁹ On another occasion, Pieter Sourij related another outing where this time, the Sultanah, the elites and foreign guests went to a beautiful field with a lake where there was bathing and fishing. Pieter Willemszoon mentioned another expedition where the Sultanah heading another trip, started out early one November morning to a place called Indrapur(i)? about three hours away from the palace. Pieter Willemszoon described the procession as an elaborate one involving all the horses, elephants and royal ornaments. After arriving at a great river near a village, they settled at a very entertaining *speelhuis* where the wives of the *orangkaya* and the eunuchs went fishing. Pieter Willemszoon also mentioned gold and silver trumpets being played on this occasion.¹⁸⁰ Sourij mentioned yet another fishing trip in 1643 whilst he was in Aceh appointed for the second time as the VOC envoy. Arnold Vlamingh, recounted the magnificent spectacle of elephant and tiger fights staged by the Acehnese court during Sultanah Safiatuddin's reign to welcome the VOC officials. He also described how the Sultanah appeared from the palace accompanied by her female maidens to sit on a stone building at the palace square to watch the fight.

One festival described by Bowrey illustrates the elaborate procession undertaken during the reign of the third queen, Sultanah Inayat Zaqiatuddin Syah. He witnessed a royal procession down the river, "the like I believe was never paralleled in the universe," which took place shortly after Zaqiatuddin became queen.¹⁸¹ Interestingly, no accounts, to the best of this writer's knowledge, describe the physical appearance of any of the queens, except for an estimate of their age.¹⁸² Bowrey estimated Sultanah Zakiatuddin to be at least sixty years old. Dampier described the same Sultanah as an "old Maid".¹⁸³ Referring to the same queen, two English delegates, Ralph Ord and William Cawley noted that "the queen appears not to be forty years of age, is of a large size and the strongest voice that we have heard," which made them suspicious enough to think that

¹⁷⁸ *Bustan*, Siti Hawa, p. 57.

¹⁷⁹ NA, 1642, ff.566V-567R. Dagh-Register gehouden bij Pieter Sourij.

¹⁸⁰ NA, ff.523V-524R. Copie dagh-Register gehouden bij den oppercoopman Pieter Willemsz.

¹⁸¹ For a fuller description of this procession, see Bowrey, *A Geographical Account*, pp. 325-326.

¹⁸² For that matter, there are also no descriptions available of kings, even one who is as famous as Iskandar Muda. Of course imaginary depictions in paintings abound!

¹⁸³ Dampier, *Voyages and Discoveries*, p.99. Dampier was in Aceh in 1688-1689.

they she might be a eunuch dressed in woman's apparel.¹⁸⁴ These vague and uncertain descriptions of the Sultanah give the impression that they were not clearly in sight, that they were shadowy figures, almost invisible even.

Glimpse of the Invisible

In theory, the *Taj us-Salatin* differentiated the rule of male and female rulers according to their degree of visibility. The *Taj* stated that a male *raja* was seen and not hidden but a female *raja* was hidden and should not be seen.¹⁸⁵ The *Taj* continued, the male *raja* sat in front of those who have an audience with him without any intervening curtain (*tirai*) and must be clearly in sight. The female *raja*, on the other hand, ought not be seen and must face her audience from behind a curtain.¹⁸⁶ Only wives of Ministers, other females and males who have not reached puberty were allowed to face the queen in the audience hall.¹⁸⁷ This restriction was extended to her voice even. The *Taj* stated that a female *raja's* voice could not be heard except from behind the curtain.

Unlike this clear delineation of visibility and space in the *Taj's* gender-based construct on leadership, a reading of the *Bustan us-Salatin* and the *Sejarah Melayu* provided a more ambiguous picture. On the one hand, al-Raniri described the Sultanah as hidden from public view. According to the description given in the *Bustan us-Salatin*, the queen received her ministers and subjects in the audience hall (*Peratna Sembah*) behind an intervening curtain of gold brocade. The ladies of the court, seated outside the curtain, became her voice and acted as the intermediary between her and her audience.¹⁸⁸ Yet, on special occasions like the placing of the headstone on Iskandar Thani's tomb, al-Raniri mentioned that the Queen ventured out to appear in public.¹⁸⁹ Al-Raniri gave the impression that Sultanah Safiatuddin rode on an elephant and gave instructions on the placing of the headstone. Unfortunately, al-Raniri was vague here and did not clearly describe whether the queen was visible to the public or whether she remained hidden in

¹⁸⁴ Farrington, 'Negotiations at Aceh in 1684', p. 25. This was four years before Dampier's description of the Sultanah in 1688.

¹⁸⁵ *Taj us-Salatin*, Khalid, p. 60.

¹⁸⁶ *Taj us-Salatin*, Khalid, p. 60.

¹⁸⁷ *Taj us-Salatin*, Khalid, p. 61

¹⁸⁸ *Bustan*, Siti Hawa, p. 46.

¹⁸⁹ *Bustan*, Siti Hawa, p. 57.

a curtained pavilion on the elephant.¹⁹⁰ The *Sejarah Melayu* described the mother of Sultan Mahmud I, who watched or eavesdropped, the discussion on the choosing of a new Bendahara from behind a door. When Sultan Mahmud asked which amongst you should become Bendahara, the chiefs answered that all nine chiefs were eligible. Whoever His Highness preferred should be made Bendahara. At this juncture, the Sultan's mother was said to have shouted out, "Let it be Tun Mutahir." The Sultan immediately agreed with his mother's choice and announced that Tun Mutahir should be Bendahara and the chiefs all agreed. The writer of the *Sejarah Melayu* even recognised her choice as an excellent one since Tun Mutahir (her younger brother) turned out to be one of the best Bendahara Melaka ever had. The ambiguities are starkly presented in this episode, the very idea that she made one of the best political choices in the kingdom, and yet she remained behind the door. This not only presents a complex picture of women's status and roles but blurs the distinction between private and public. Physical barriers or spaces do not clearly mark the distinction between inside and outside, private and public.

To what extent do these indigenous writings reflect the political reality of the time? Could European records corroborate the above instances? According to Balthasar Bort, the VOC envoy to Aceh in 1660, Sultanah Safiatuddin handled business as customary; the only difference was that she was not visible to the audience. She had to make sure, however, that her voice was recognizable to all, thus during the entire audience, Bort reported that the Sultanah spoke in such a loud voice that her words could be fully heard and understood by all.¹⁹¹ Thomas Bowrey reported that on the occasion that he accompanied the English Commander to the palace to have an audience with Sultanah Zakiatuddin, they were seated on fine carpets and "sit with our faces directly towards the queen's lodgings...making a **sembah* to the queen's windows, she all the while look upon us although we cannot see her."¹⁹² William Dampier related that after ascending the throne, Sultanah Zakiatuddin was largely confined to the palace and she seldom "go abroad". Neither was she seen by people of inferior quality or rank except for some of her "Domesticks". The exception was that once a year dressed in

¹⁹⁰ *Bustan*, Siti Hawa p. 57.

¹⁹¹ NA, VOC 1237, 1661, f.354V, f.356R. Balthasar Bort Dagh-Register. Quoted from Andaya, 'A very good-natured but awe-inspiring government', p. 71. Leonard Andaya mentioned that during audience days, the Sultanah was always seated behind a screen or door. Unfortunately, he gave no specific reference to this claim.

¹⁹² Bowrey, *A Geographical Account*, p. 307.

white, she would ride an elephant to the river to wash herself.¹⁹³ Dampier was not able to affirm whether the common folk could see her in the parade. Dampier observed that it was the custom of Eastern princes to screen themselves from the sight of their subjects. If they did venture out, the people would be ordered to turn their backs or to hold their hands before their eyes.¹⁹⁴ Ralph Ord and William Cawley described their audience with Sultanah Zakiatuddin as such- adjoining to the audience hall, was an upper and open room where the Queen sat on a throne of ivory and tortoise and around her, a row of ladies. Below the throne, two more rows of ladies were seated. Before this room, hung a thin gauze which did not hinder the audience but prevented any perfect view of the queen. They commented that the Sultanah had a strong voice but not manly.¹⁹⁵ Earlier on, in 1642, Pieter Sourij related that Sultanah Safiatuddin, upon the Company's delegates' arrival, and despite the rainy weather, appeared outside, in the presence of well 3-4000 men.¹⁹⁶ He also reported that when the business at hand was urgent, the Sultanah commanded them to sit right in front of the throne (*recht over des Conincklijken troon*).¹⁹⁷ Vlamingh and Truijtmán also have noted that in some cases when the queen was displeased (with one of the Dutch incessant demands), she would raise her voice and speak in anger but they did not mention that the Sultanah only spoke to her female attendants and this in turn was then related to the male audience or listeners. They, too did not mention any intervening curtain. A Muslim traveller, al-Mutawakkil, who was in Aceh during the reign of Sultanah Safiatuddin made another interesting and rare observation. He described her as a good Muslim ruler and noted that "she puts between her and the ministers an overflowing curtain when she gives orders. When she is riding on the hunt or strolling about she is completely veiled."¹⁹⁸

The evidences gathered from European records and travellers' accounts do not paint a clear picture either. Whilst Sultanah Safiatuddin was reported to go on frequent outings- fishing, hunting and amusement trips, Sultanah Zakiatuddin did not venture out much. At times, the queens were said to have been behind a thin gauze, other occasions behind a screen or door, even window. Furthermore, more references were made to an

¹⁹³ Bowrey, *A Geographical Account*, pp. 325-326.

¹⁹⁴ Dampier, *Voyages and Discoveries*, p. 99.

¹⁹⁵ Farrington, 'Negotiations at Aceh in 1684', p. 25.

¹⁹⁶ NA, f.554R. Pieter Sourij's Dagh-Register, May-Aug, 1642.

¹⁹⁷ NA, f.558V. Pieter Sourij's Dagh-Register, May-Aug, 1642.

¹⁹⁸ *The Hollanders in the Sirrah of Al-Mutawakkil*, from papers of R.B. Serjeant found in Edinburgh University Library, p. 124.

intervening barrier between the queen and her audience towards the latter part of their reigns, from 1660's onwards rather than earlier. Did the Acehnese court become more conservative towards the latter part of the seventeenth century? Opposition to female rule did increase from the 1680's onwards when a group of Arab delegates arrived in Aceh and it was from this group that the *fatwa* forbidding female rule was procured from Mekah. Or did the age of the individual queens affect the kind of activities they indulged in? Sultanah Zakiatuddin was certainly old when she ascended the throne whilst Sultanah Safiatuddin was only twenty-nine years old. As mentioned earlier, the evidences are inconclusive.

Were the Acehnese female sovereigns good Muslims and as such they chose to remain behind the curtain when they were discoursing in public, especially with men? These female monarchs appeared to have adhered to the treatise on female leadership of the *Taj* rather closely. As mentioned earlier, there was no evidence that they participated in the procession to the mosque since women were not encouraged to go to the mosque or pray in public. Could it be concluded then that with the coming of Islam, local females, at least those in the upper class became more secluded? Barbara Andaya asserted that Sultanah Safiatuddin spoke to men from behind a screen because of the strongly Islamic court of Aceh.¹⁹⁹ She also claimed that Quranic teaching differentiated respectable women from their social inferiors by their degree of visibility. Respectable women were distinguished by their retreating into the confines of domestic space.²⁰⁰ Contrary to B. Andaya's assertion, the Quran does not make any distinction between upper class and lower class women, nor does the Quran advocate seclusion of women; the Quran urges women to dress modestly, to cover their bosoms and jewellery and asks the wives of Prophet Muhammad to cloak their bodies so that they will not be bothered in public. The Quran does not mention veiling and seclusion of women from public space.²⁰¹ So this idea of seclusion and veiling did not originate from Islam. It was part of the complexities of Islam that this veiling habit had spread so widely that it became synonymous with the practice in Islam and assumed to be sanctioned in the Quran.

¹⁹⁹ B. Andaya, *Flaming Womb*, p. 85.

²⁰⁰ B. Andaya, *Flaming Womb*, p. 86.

²⁰¹ A woman's face is not part of *aurat* (forbidden to be seen by a male that is not kin or *muhrim*). Indeed even in prayers, women are not allowed to cover their faces. Women during Prophet's Muhammad's time joined their men in battles, fighting along with men, nursing the wounded and burying the dead. They too were given a share of the war booty.

If this practice did not originate from Islam then did this come from *adat*? *Adat* practise in the region also did not seclude women. Indeed, on the contrary, one of the identifying features of this region was the relative freedom of women to appear in public, though Islam did help to cover a larger part of their bodies. The “Islamic” dress of *hijab* and veiling never took on in the region, certainly not amongst the common people. This idea of seclusion and exclusivity though did take root among the upper ruling class of society and royalty as a sign of elite status. As observed by Dampier, eastern monarchs could not be looked upon by lowly subjects. This was part of the aura of mystery and semi-divinity that these rulers wished to project to their subjects to inspire awe.²⁰² This idea of veiling and seclusion originated from the Eastern Roman Empire and Persia and spread to pre-Islamic Middle East.²⁰³ Veiling signified the sexual unavailability of respectable women. Arab Muslims adopted the practice of veiling from the people they conquered and this became part of the practice in royal households.²⁰⁴ Al-Jauhari, the author of the *Taj us-Salatin* concurred and adopted the Persian and Sassanid tradition found in the Umayyad and Abbasid courts where women from the upper classes were veiled, where they were invisible to the non-**muhrim* male gaze. As mentioned earlier, al-Jauhari might not want to veer too much away from what was believed to be the established orthodox view of Muslims in the heartland, thus, his conditional acceptance of female rule in the region. But in copying the practice of the seclusion of women in the Umayyad and Abbasid courts, he was adopting not Islamic practices but a syncretic version of Islam. There were some Arab women at court who were very influential politically in Islamic dynasties such as the Umayyad's, and the Abbasid's but they held power from *behind* the throne. In contrast, the ladies that held power in Malay, Muslim polities in this region actually held power *on* the throne and were reigning monarchs in their own right.

Based on earlier evidences that the Sultanahs of Aceh did rule in their own right and were certainly not mere figure-heads or shadow queens one can conclude that even if these female monarchs did rule from behind some sort of barrier that prevented a

²⁰² Milner, *Kerajaan*, p. 26. See also, John M. Gullick, *Malay Society in the Late 19th Century*, (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 282.

²⁰³ See Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Perseus Books, 1991) pp. 94-95.#

²⁰⁴ Stearns, *Gender in World History*, (London: Routledge, 2000) p. 40.

clear sight of them, these queens were not invisible.²⁰⁵ The Sultanahs of Acch, ruling from behind a curtain might have been secluded but certainly not isolated or powerless. The idea that women, belonged to the *dalam* (inside/private) domain and men, to the outside or public domain, was blurred here. The physical barrier did not in any way confine these rulers nor impede their very public roles as reigning monarchs. Like Sultan Mahmud mother's voice, their voices and authority emanated from this curtain and these were obeyed through out the kingdom. This curtain also did not prevent them from being plugged to the news, rumours and happenings outside their private domain since the network of eunuchs and women was well utilized by these queens.²⁰⁶ Neither did this curtain make the queens more inaccessible since under these queens; any man and woman could come to appear before them if they had a business every Saturday on audience day. Indeed, under female monarchs the palace became more accessible since the harem, the private chambers of the Sultan's numerous wives and concubines need no longer be protected or out of bounds to others.²⁰⁷ Neither were the other court ladies secluded from the male gaze. Thus, one may conclude that this seclusion of female monarchs was not so much a function of their sex, religion or due to the need to protect female modesty.²⁰⁸ It was more a function of style of governance which emphasized the exclusivity of the ruler that was influenced by a mixture of a syncretic tradition of Islam that originated from the Middle East and the region's own Indic past. This practice was not unique to the female sex but also to male monarchs in line with the tradition of creating a mystique and aura of inaccessibility of a ruler that may prove advantageous.²⁰⁹ It is indeed powerful to see and yet not be seen. How else does one reconcile this idea of a female ruler's seclusion due to their sex to their very public participation in the numerous processions, amusement trips and outings?

²⁰⁵ How else could Ord and Cawley knew that the queen sat on the throne of ivory and tortoise, unless it was just their imagination?

²⁰⁶ See section on "Jewel Affair" to show how successfully this was achieved by Sultanah Safiatuddin.

²⁰⁷ Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Thani were always described to be surrounded by hundreds of women guards and eunuchs. Beaulieu mentioned that Iskandar Muda had three thousand women in his palace. Van Goens noted that Sultan Agung of Mataram had ten thousand. Quoted from Reid, *Age of Commerce*, Vol. 1, p. 167. Peter Mundy described an elephant fight in Aceh in 1637 where Iskandar Thani was seated on an elevated stone platform, under a pavilion and surrounded by his guards of women. Mundy, *The Travels of Peter Mundy*, pp. 126-130.

²⁰⁸ In a letter from Iskandar Muda to King James I of England, he described himself as "he who is not seen by the seers, who is not heard by the hearers." Annabel Teh-Gallop and B. Arps, *Golden Letters: Writing Traditions of Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Yayasan Lontar, 1991), p. 128. Quoted from Mulaika, 'The Woman Raja', p. 78.

²⁰⁹ Reid, *Age of Commerce*, Vol. 1, pp. 179-181.#

Sultanah Safiatuddin's methods were something of a template for her female successors. Royal proceedings and grand court ceremonies as in the Ottoman and Mughal courts seem to have been quite consistent from the time of Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah to that of Sultanah Kamalat Syah. Although continuing the tradition of her husband and father in practices such as the reception of letters from foreign powers, the presentation of gifts and the sending down the royal seal to newly arrived vessels, Safiatuddin's reign was noted for her impeccable hospitality since these were all consistently reported throughout the second half of the seventeenth century. The VOC envoys like Pieter Sourij and Vlamingh reported how Sultanah Safiatuddin treated them royally. In the *balai*, they were treated with seven to nine course meals served on silver and gold dishes. At the palace courtyard in front of the Sultanah's lodgings, the foreign missions and the local guests would be seated on fine carpets, entertained and served with a big golden box of betel leaves, fruits and areca nuts. The whole ceremony continued with more merry-making, dancing and feasting. To sweeten the palate, sweetmeats, delicacies and all sorts of excellent fruits were served. Entertainment for the guests was just as varied as the foods and drinks served. The foreign missions were treated to elephant and tiger fights in the palace yard.²¹⁰ The queen's eunuchs carried the presents brought by the foreign ambassadors, which were placed on golden vessels or trays. These eunuchs were flanked and protected by gilded pavilions carried over them. If there was an official letter from any of the foreign representatives, it would receive an even more dignified reception. The letter would be carried separately with great stately ceremony and royally attended by the Sultanah's favourites. The letter was placed on a silver plate covered with yellow silk cloth and carried on an elephant. The foreign mission bringing the letter would accept gifts and the envoy was given a suit of silk clothes and a turban. On taking their leave, at the palace yard, awaiting the envoy, was a stately elephant richly decorated to transport him back to his dwelling or factory. The *orangkaya* and other important men of the court would accompany him. This procession was a grand one with music from pipes, drums and flags carried by footmen. The

²¹⁰ NA, ff.598R-598V. Dagh-Register of Arnold Vlamingh.

procession was accorded much respect and importance that according to Thomas Bowrey if any native was in their way and did not move after being told to do so by the footmen, they would be lanced. As the grand procession passed by the city, many other merchants would sprinkle rosewater on them as a mark of honour and respect. When the parade finally ended at the house or the factory of the foreign diplomat, they alighted from the elephants and exchanged ceremonial compliments and good wishes before the *orangkaya* took their leave.

Besides court protocols, many festivities and amusements peppered the queens' reigns. Sultanah Safiatuddin, who ascended the throne as a young widow of only twenty-nine, was fond of entertaining and organising outings and hunting. These amusements could be as elaborate as the court ceremonies themselves. During these outings and festivities, not only the *orangkaya* of Aceh were invited but also all the foreign envoys and important merchants. Sourij who joined one of her fishing trips described the merry ceremony with lots of dancing and feasting where her Majesty's ladies-in-waiting served him fish they caught themselves.²¹¹ Vlamingh reported that on another of the Queen's fishing trips, he was served with fish caught by Her Majesty herself!²¹² On another occasion, the Sultanah invited the Dutch envoys to a celebration organized by one of the Sultanah's officials to honour her. Vlamingh described the festive atmosphere vividly when he related that special small paper houses filled with various types of delicacies were laid out but alas the festivities had to stop abruptly because of the pouring rain. Once the Dutch envoy described how the whole palace was set alight with candles everywhere. One could just imagine the whole spectacle. The Sultanah was also fond of singing and dancing and invited the Dutch to join the Acehnese to enjoy these pleasures. Typical of the Dutch perhaps, they were not too happy that they had to add dancers and entertainers to their lists of gifts. Nevertheless, these relaxed occasions, numerous under female rule, provided excellent opportunities for the Acehnese elite to forge friendships and alliances with these foreign representatives and merchants.

Whilst the Sultanahs were impeccable hosts to foreigners and guests, they were exemplary rulers to their subjects since they did not forget their subjects during times of festivities. Throwing huge parties for their subjects was part of sharing the kingdom's bounties with its subjects. It reflected the generosity of the monarch and increased the

²¹¹ NA, ff.568V-569R. Dagh-Register of Pieter Sourij.

²¹² NA, ff.604V-605R. Dagh-Register of Arnold Vlamingh.

subjects' loyalty and allegiance to their provider. In his study of Malay court rituals, A. C. Milner suggested that ceremonial functions, public processions and state festivities were not meant for the rulers to enjoy themselves but these were part and parcel of a *raja's* work.²¹³ Thus, to attend these monarch-sponsored festivities and to enjoy themselves (*bersuka-suka*) were part of a subject's duty.²¹⁴ Sultanah Safiatuddin's preparations and organization of her husband's funeral was one of the first tasks she undertook when she became queen.²¹⁵ Al-Raniri in the *Bustan* described in detail how this procession, organized by the Sultanah, successfully completed the extremely important task of ensuring the proper burial rites of the previous king. The *Bustan* also described in similar details the seemingly unimportant aspects of the procession where the multitude of spectator subjects took such delight and joy in absorbing the almost carnival atmosphere of the funeral procession where specially made floats and giant puppets of mythical animals and monsters were paraded. Many came from great distances to witness these grand spectacles. Alms in the form of gold and silver foils and jewels were strewn on the streets in such a huge amount that subjects who received these could actually become rich. According to A.Reid, the popular enjoyment of royal festivals was another indication of the power and cosmic beneficence of a great ruler. Or simply, subjects having a great time when a generous ruler was on the throne. The multitude of subjects who attended these state-sponsored festivities not only demonstrated the populousness of the realm, but more importantly, it testified to the skill and greatness of the ruler.²¹⁶

Network of Women and Eunuchs

According to Hamka, an indigenous manuscript entitled "*Qanun al-Asji Darussalam*" laid out several institutions whose duties were to assist the ruler in governing the kingdom. The ruler's closest advisors were the Wazir, Perdana Menteri and the Kadhi Malikul Adil. The executive branch consisted of the Balai Laksamana, a kind of

²¹³ Milner, *Kerajaan*, p. 45.

²¹⁴ Milner, *Kerajaan*, pp. 23-24.

²¹⁵ See Chapter 2 for details of the funeral procession.

²¹⁶ Reid, *Age of Commerce, Vol. 1*, p. 182.

military arm led by an admiral and the Menteri Dirham and Balai Furdah, the commercial arm in charge of taxes and issuing money.²¹⁷ The legislative branch, called the Balai Musyawarah, whose task was to swear on the consensus undertaken (*angkat muafakah*) consisted of three branches, the Balairungsari, Balai Gadeng and Balai Majelis Mahkamah Rakyat. The Balairungsari consisted of the four senior *orangkaya*, the Balai Gadeng consisted of twenty-two prominent religious scholars in Aceh and the Balai Majelis Mahkamah Rakyat made up of seventy-three members, each representing a *muqim* in Aceh.²¹⁸ During Safiatuddin's reign, many women members served in this Balai Mahkamah Rakyat, a House of Representative of sorts.²¹⁹ It is unclear whether the Sultanah appointed these women or the people from their own *muqim* elected them.²²⁰ One thing is clear though – no matter how they were chosen, this reflects the representative nature of the Sultanah's rule.

The only mention of women Council members in contemporary European sources was in the *Dagh-Register* of Pieter Willemszoon. He remained in Aceh as the Resident and senior trader of the VOC after the departure of Pieter Sourij in August 1642. After two months in Aceh, in early November, Willemszoon got into financial trouble and tried to borrow 2,000 taels from the *orangkaya*. At that time, the situation between the Company officials and the Acehnese elite was rather tense because of the jewel affair. The anti-Dutch Maharaja Sri Maharaja refused to lend Pieter Willemszoon any money and asked him to request this from the Sultanah instead.²²¹

²¹⁷ Hamka, 'Dewan Perwakilan Rakjat Atjeh diabad ketujuhbelas' [Aceh's House of Representative in the 17th C] in *Gema Islam*, no.36/37 (15 Djuli, 1963), p. 11-12. According to Hamka, this *Qanun al-Asji Darussalam* was written during Iskandar Muda's reign and was copied from generation to generation by the family of Tengku di Abai, Ibnu Ahmad from Habib Abubakar bin Usman bin Hasan bin Wundi Molek Sjarif Abdullah bin Sultan Djamalul'l Alam Badrul Munir Djamalullail Ba'alawi, the Sultan of Aceh of Arab descent. The last copy was rewritten 1310H/1893AD.#

²¹⁸ Hamka, 'Dewan Perwakilan', p. 11.

²¹⁹ The *Qanun al-Asji Darussalam* lists the names of these women as such, Si Njak Bunga, Si Halifah, Si Sanah, Hidajat, Munabinah, Siti Tjahaya, Mahkijah, Si Bukih, Si Nyak Ukat, Si Manjak Puan, Nadisah, Si Djibah, Uli Puan Siti Awan, Si Njak Angka, Si Njak Tampli, Si Mawar, and Si Manis. Hamka, 'Dewan Perwakilan' p.11.

²²⁰ The *Adat Meukuta Alam*, states that a Panglima Sagi or Uleebalang representing a particular *muqim* must be elected by the village head (*keuchik*), the religious head (*imam*), and the elders (*orang tuha-tuha*), through consensus. See *Adat Meukuta Alam*, ed. by Tuanku Abdul Jalil, (Pusat Dokumentasi dan Informasi Aceh, Banda Aceh, 1991), pp. 1-2. According to Hamka, Sultanah Safiatuddin made a royal decree in 1059H/1649AD renewing the members of the Balai Majelis Mahkamah Rakyat and added women members. Hamka, "Dewan Perwakilan" p. 11.#

²²¹ NA, f.516V. Copie dagh-Register gehouden bij den oppercoopman Pieter Willemsz.

After one month of unsuccessfully lobbying the *orangkaya*,²²² Pieter Willemszoon was desperate and decided to go to court to request for the 2000 taels. He reported that despite making obeisance to the *orangkaya* four times at the court, he received no hearing. For good measure, the *orangkaya* told him that her Majesty did not have any money now since she had paid 4,000 for the jewels and that Her Majesty still owed the Dutch 6,000.²²³ The Company's friend, the Sultanah's favourite eunuch, Radia Adonna Lilla, however, provided him a ray of hope. Adonna Lilla told him that one of the principal woman member of the council, (*een der principaale Raadt Vrouwen*), had spoken that her Majesty would grant Pieter Willemszoon's request, on condition that he gave her and her followers gifts as customary. She and two other women would see to it that the Dutch obtain the 2,000 tael in Acehnese mas.²²⁴ A few days later, Pieter Willemszoon sent the translator, Andries to Adonna Lilla to enquire about the money. Andries was told that Adonna Lilla had spoken to these ladies and they ordered that in the coming Saturday, Pieter Willemszoon should go to court and make obeisance to the Sultanah and without doubt, the Dutch would succeed in getting their request granted. The Dutch were reminded that they should be mindful of them.²²⁵ It was unfortunate that Pieter Willemszoon did not report on the outcome of this affair. He did write however, at the end of his *dagh-register* how desolate he was waiting at the Company lodge with rain pattering down. He died in Aceh in early 1643.

A powerful woman at court, related to the royal family and a close confidant of Sultanah Safiatuddin, was Putra Dewa. She was exiled to the Maldives in 1653 because she was accused of arranging a sexual dalliance between the Sultanah and her Muslim tutor.²²⁶ It is difficult to ascertain whether the main reason for her forced exile was due to her involvement in this alleged scandal or the *orangkaya's* fear of her increasing power at court. Nevertheless, she was forced into exile because of the strong pressures from the *orangkaya*. Since the court was inflicted with a bitter factional struggle amongst the *orangkaya* in 1653,²²⁷ the Sultanah might have relented and allowed her close confidant to

²²² Pieter Willemsz. listed down all the gifts given to the different *orangkaya* which totalled fl. 25, 9. 0, which he found to be a great waste since the Dutch could not get their requests granted. NA, ff.526V-527R. Copie dagh-Register gehouden bij den oppercoopman Pieter Willemsz.

²²³ NA, f.526V. Copie dagh-Register gehouden bij den oppercoopman Pieter Willemsz.

²²⁴ NA, f.527R. Copie dagh-Register gehouden bij den oppercoopman Pieter Willemsz.,

²²⁵ NA, f.528R. Copie dagh-Register gehouden bij den oppercoopman Pieter Willemsz.,

²²⁶ Andaya, 'A very good-natured but awe-inspiring government', p. 72.#

²²⁷ See Chapter 3.

be taken away from her side. By 1660, Sultanah Safiatuddin was secure once more on the throne and decided that enough time had lapsed for her to grant a pardon. Putra Dewa was brought back from the Maldives in December 1660. She returned in a ship from Surat named the “Moessady” belonging to a Mamer Talcki, a resident in Aceh. It appeared that during her exile she had gone on the *hajj* pilgrimage since the Dutch mentioned that she had visited the grave of Mahomet (Muhammad). The Dutch reported that the Sultanah was very happy that she (Petra Deenava), an old woman, had returned to Aceh but the *orangkaya* wished she had not returned.²²⁸

It appears that these powerful women who held the purse strings were influential in court as late as the 1690’s. De Roy noted that in the Council of Ministers during the reign of Sultanah Kamalat Syah, those who surpassed in wealth certainly had more authoritative power. More of those in the Council were supported by the wealthy and these wealthy *orangkaya* were supported, according to de Roy, by the influence of their own kin, their wives, or sons and daughter in-laws.²²⁹

Capados or eunuchs may not be unique to female rule but they appeared to have extensive functions since Sultanah Safiatuddin established a women’s network of sorts together with her eunuchs, to assist her in her execution of her policies and to act as a counter-weight against the male elite. Pieter Willemszoon’s case above is one example. Besides serving guests at court, bearing messages and participating in royal processions; a few rose to positions of political prominence. As a key intermediary between the Sultanah and the Dutch envoys in the Jewel Affair, Raja Adona Lilla, was critical to executing an outcome favourable to the Sultanah at the expense of the hardliners headed by the Laksamana. Enjoying free access from the inner recesses of the court to the *orangkaya*’s houses and foreign factories and lodges, these *capados* were uniquely positioned to report on the latest rumours and intrigues and to convey the Sultanah’s instructions directly outside the formality of the audience hall. Though there is less information on the roles of the eunuchs in court during the reign of her successors, they continued to serve in varying capacities. Thomas Bowrey describing the situation in Aceh during the reigns of Sultanah Naqiatuddin and Sultanah Zaqiatuddin, related that about five hundred women and eunuchs attended to them. Bowrey mentioned that Sultanah Zaqiatuddin had several eunuchs “of very acute wit about her that advise with

²²⁸ Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1661, p. 17.

²²⁹ *Voyage made by Jacob Janssen de Roy to Borneo and Atcheen*, 1691, p. 367.

her to condescend to what is requisite.”²³⁰ Though these eunuchs were mentioned in both European and indigenous sources,²³¹ unfortunately, none shed light as to their origins.

Women's interests - Mrs Harmanszoon. and European Fashion

Typical of a court ruled by a woman but certainly not of her male predecessors was the personal interest the Sultanah took in the envoys that were appointed by the Company to the court of Aceh. Some of Sultanah Safiatuddin's favourites which she mentioned in person and requested them to come and stay in Aceh together with their families were Willem Harmanszoon and Balthasar Bort. So fond was she of Bort that there was a rumour that she wished to marry him but was prevented by the Company.²³² True to her word, when she heard that Harmanszoon had brought his wife and eight-year-old son to Aceh with him on board the ship, the Sultanah invited them to her palace, even before they landed. Indeed, they were fetched to the palace for an informal audience with her even before Arnold Vlamingh, the Commissar who led the Dutch delegation, was fetched to court for a formal audience.

Just four days after the Company delegation landed, on 29 July 1644, early Friday morning, (which was not an official audience day), a number of female slaves belonging to Sri Bidia Indra, the main Acehnese envoy to Batavia and a good friend of the Company's, came to the Company's lodge to fetch Mrs. Harmanszoon to his house. Sri Bidia Indra's wife and daughter accompanied Mrs. Harmanszoon in a stately procession of female slaves to court. Mrs. Harmanszoon, placed in a palanquin, rode an elephant, which was expensively dressed in the Acehnese way. She remained at the palace for four hours until noon. Vlamingh wrote that Mrs. Harmanszoon related that she was treated with many dishes and she had a nice discussion with the Sultanah and her noble women (*grote Vrouwen*) and was treated in a very friendly manner indeed and given gifts. Jan Harmansz also reported that when he sent his wife to court there were very powerful women who were with the Sultanah day and night and gifts had to be prepared for them

²³⁰ Bowrey, *Voyages and Discoveries*, p. 299.

²³¹ In classical Malay literature, the term *sida-sida* sometimes refers to eunuchs. See Leonard Andaya, "The Seventeenth-Century Acehnese model of Malay Society," in Husken & Van der Meij (eds), *Reading Asia: New Research in Asian Studies*, (Curzon Press: Richmond Surrey, 2001), p.94.

²³² Marsden, *History of Sumatra*, p. 448.

too.²³³ Sultanah Safiatuddin invited Mrs. Harmanszoon to go to the palace again on Sunday and requested that she wear what Dutch women would wear when they go to church. Mrs. Harmanszoon was then sent back home to the Company's lodge.²³⁴

Mrs. Harmanszoon went to the palace for the second time following the Sultanah's express desire. She was asked to bring her son along but when he saw the formidable escorts of women bearing gold and silver weapons, he was too frightened to go with them. The Sultanah, upon hearing this, sent the boy a special gift of Acehnese clothing. On this occasion, one is reminded of the *Bustan's* characterisation of her reign, "she loves her subjects as a mother would her children."²³⁵ Mrs. Harmanszoon was fetched to court and there she remained the whole day till evening. Vlamingh tried to exploit this women's network or affinity by trying to get Mrs. Harmanszoon to get the ear of the Sultanah. Discussions were made regarding the suitable gifts that should be given to the Sultanah by Mrs. Harmanszoon so that the Company need no longer waste money on gifts for the *orangkaya* and eunuchs to get their business advanced to the Sultanah. The Dutch finally decided to present the Sultanah with a beautiful Spanish wine glass and gold and silver cloth since the Dutch were told that the Sultanah already had an over abundance of gold, silver, gems and cloth. Nothing seemed to have come to fruition from this feminine liaison. Nevertheless, the visits continued, since according to Vlamingh, this happened two to three more times. Vlamingh, jealous of Mrs. Harmanszoon's privileged position, complained about how men were shut out in this prudish Muslim court.²³⁶

In 1684, two English representatives from the Madras Council, Ralph Ord and William Cawley, went to Aceh to negotiate for an English fortified settlement in Aceh. During their second audience with Sultanah Zakiatuddin, she asked the two Englishmen to sit nearer to her. The main reason for this seemingly strange request was because the Sultanah wanted to have a closer look, not at the two Englishmen, but at the wigs they were wearing.²³⁷ The Sultanah was so fascinated by the wigs worn by Ord and Cawley and she queried them about their uses, which they tried to answer as best as they could.

²³³ NA, VOC 1155, ff.437-447, f.446R. Vervolch van Atchin's dagh-register van 26 Feb-12 April 1645.

²³⁴ NA, VOC 1157, ff.576V-577V. Vlamingh's dagh-register. It is unfortunate that there is no account of this event, or the Acehnese court written by Mrs. Harmansz. herself.

²³⁵ *Bustan*, Siti Hawa, pp. 43-44.

²³⁶ NA, VOC 1157, f.578V. Vlamingh's dagh-register.

²³⁷ "...the Queen was pleased to order us to come nearer, where Her Majesty was very inquisitive into the use of our wearing perrywigs." See Farrington, 'Negotiations at Aceh in 1684', p. 27.

Then the Sultanah requested Ord that if it was of no inconvenience to him, would he mind taking off the wig so that she could see how he looked without it – in which the English gentleman kindly obliged.

End of Female Rule

Contemporary indigenous and European records are silent on the issue of Kamalat Syah stepping down from the kingdom's throne in 1699. Did she abdicate willingly or was she forced, or was she deposed? The only passing mention of deposition is found in the *Adat Aceh* where it stated that "she is deposed by all the Ministers and all the people because of a letter from Mekah from the Qadhi Malik al-Adil stating that a female raja is not within the laws."²³⁸ In view of the long acceptance of female rulers, and the broad convergence of customs and traditions in favour of their legitimacy, this contention requires examination.

According to Veth, there had been opposition to female rule by a group influenced by Arabs in Aceh who believed that female rule was against the tenets of Islam. He called them the *priesterpartij/Arabische partij*. Against this group was the *orangkaya* faction who according to Veth acted as protectors of ancestral institutions whom he referred to as the *nationale partij*.²³⁹ In 1688, with the death of Inayat Syah, the *nationale partij* immediately chose a young female from the royal family as her successor. The *priesterpartij*, though in the minority, was joined by some *orangkaya* to protest against another female successor and called for a return to male rule. An armed struggle ensued between these two parties with the *nationale partij* gaining the upper hand. Kamalat Syah was installed and ruled for eleven years. The *priesterpartij* did not give up and sought other means to achieve their goal. The weapon that they sought was the *schrijven* from the Kadhi Malik al-Adil from Mekah stating that female rule was illegal. Armed with this writing they went to the people of Aceh to inform them that female rule was against

²³⁸ *Baginda itupun dimakzulkan oleh segala wazir dan segala rakyat kerana sebab datang surat dari Mekah dikirim oleh Kadi Malikul Adil tiada sampai hukum sebab raja perempuan. See Adat Aceh, Ramli Harun and Tjut Rahmah, p. 29.*

²³⁹ Veth, 'Vrouwenregeering', p. 368.

Islamic law. The *nationale partij* could not withstand this opposition any longer and Kamalat Syah was deposed.²⁴⁰

Although Veth did not mention who the *orangkaya* who joined the Arab group were, it is probable that they were the *uleebalang* from the hinterland. Jacob de Roy related that now and then the highlanders would come from their mountains to Aceh with about 3-4000 men to demand a king.²⁴¹ Thomas Bowrey mentioned that the inhabitants up in the country were not happy with a female ruler and would rather have a king rule over them. They believed that the true heir was still alive and they would obey him. Bowrey however, did not see him as a serious rival to the queen, "it is and will be past his reach or skill ever to obtain the government of Achin."²⁴² More serious opposition happened during the choosing of the fourth queen, Kamalat Syah, which Dampier described as a "civil war" in Aceh. Dampier related that four *orangkaya* who lived in a more remote part of the court took up arms to oppose the new queen and the rest of the *orangkaya*. They managed to amass 5-6,000 men against the capital. They stayed near the landing place by the river near the city. The queen's party, under the Shahbandar, set up tent, kept a small guard of soldiers and placed 2 or 3 brass guns on the opposite bank. Dampier's "civil war" turned out to be a mere skirmish since he related that these soldiers were calling out to each other and were discussing why they were fighting rather than engaging in actual fighting. They did this the whole night and the next morning everyone went about their usual business. The next night, the whole process was repeated.²⁴³ The hinterland group returned without success.

Besides desiring male rule, there was another reason for this group of agricultural-based hinterland *uleebalang* to oppose the trading-based, port city-dwelling *orangkaya*. Marsden mentioned that in the 1680's, agriculture had suffered considerably, owing to the general licence given to all inhabitants to search for gold in the rivers and mountains, whereas prior to this, only authorized persons could seek for gold whereas the rest were obliged to cultivate the ground.²⁴⁴ Whether this group of disaffected inlanders co-operated with the Arabs cannot be ascertained, but it is unlikely that the

²⁴⁰ Veth, '*Vrouwenregeering*', p. 369.

²⁴¹ *Voyage made by Jacob Janssen de Roy*, p. 367.

²⁴² Bowrey, *A Geographical Account*, p. 313. This "true heir to the Crown" might be the descendent of the illegitimate son of Iskandar Muda, from the Panglima Polem family.

²⁴³ Dampier, *Voyages and Discoveries*, pp. 100-101.

²⁴⁴ Marsden, *History of Sumatra*, p. 450.

small and remote threat posed by the inlanders alone could unseat Sultanah Kamalat Syah, who still had the support of the mercantile city *orangkaya* at court.

Veth too did not mention who this *Arabische partij* were, but since an Arab succeeded Kamalat Syah, it is probable that he was part of an Arab group who opposed female rule. Whether they were native-born or foreign Arabs, however, remains a mystery. Arabs had migrated to Aceh as merchants and religious scholars and sayyids, in particular, enjoyed a high degree of prestige and were very welcomed by the Acehnese into their society.²⁴⁵ Given that the *ulama* and the *orangkaya* accepted the first three female rulers, it is somewhat curious that the appointment of the fourth would cause opposition and deposition after eleven years. An explanation that could be ventured is that those who opposed Kamalat Syah's rule were foreign-born Arabs. In 1683, a Mekkan delegation sent by Syariff Barakat arrived in Aceh.²⁴⁶ Since opposition to female rule became louder in the 1680's, it may be possible that the *priesterpartij* mentioned by Veth refers to the delegates of this Mekan visitors. According to one source which this author cannot verify, when the delegation returned in September 1683, two delegates remained in Aceh, where they were quickly accepted into court circles.²⁴⁷ In the 1680's, the opposition to female rule was not strong enough but the situation changed in the 1690s. The death of the moderate local *ulama*, Abdul Rauf al-Singkel in 1693 might have allowed the Arabs to gain more influence. In the 1690s, the arrival of a letter from Mekah stating that female rule was against Islam strengthened the Arabs' hand and Kamalat Syah had to step down.

It is beyond my purpose to determine who exactly the Arab successors of the last Sultanah were but it is possible to venture that the members of this Arab group had risen to positions of prominence in court and may have established ties with the royal family

²⁴⁵ According to Snouck, the sayyids occupy as high a position in Aceh as in any other country in the Archipelago, they command deeply-rooted respect and fear. Snouck Hurgronge, *The Acehnese*, p.155.

²⁴⁶ Snouck wrote that he based his account on Ahmad Dahlan's *Khulasat al-Kalam*, p.146-7, no other reference details provided. Unfortunately, Snouck too did not shed any more light on this delegation nor their activities in Aceh. Snouck Hurgronje, 'Een Mekkaansch Gezantschap naar Atjeh in 1683', p, 553. Azyumardi Azra mentioned this same delegation, besides citing Snouck's article he quoted Ahmad Dahlan, *Khulasat al-Kalam fi Bayan Umara al-Balad al-Haram*, Cairo:n.p., 1305/1888, 104-5. See Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism*, p.181. This author, not reading Arabic is unable to verify this Arab source.

²⁴⁷ One of them, Sayyid Ibrahim Syarif Hasyimsyah al-Jamalullail was appointed as the Kadhi Malik al-Adil. See Teuku Syahbuddin Razi, *Salasilah Raja-Raja Islam di Aceh dan hubungannya dengan Raja-Raja Islam Nusantara*, Komite Nasional Pemuda Indonesia, Perlak, Aceh Timur. Quoted from Suzana Hj Othman & Muzaffar Hj Mohamad, *Ahlul-Bait*, (Kuala Lumpur: Crescent News Sdn. Bhd., 2006), p. 158.

itself. The potent mix of prestige, kinship ties to the royal family, plus the mentioned letter from Mekah finally clinched the throne for Sultan Badrul Alam Syariff Hashim Jamal-al-Din in 1699.²⁴⁸ This ended the fifty-nine year long rule of female sovereigns in Aceh.

Conclusion

To our earlier question about how female rule is possible in a largely patriarchal system, such as that of Aceh, the answer is that the potential for patriarchal emphases differs in different societies.²⁴⁹ Patriarchy is shaped by the socio-political philosophy of the society concerned. Since Aceh already had a tradition, *adat*, of strong and powerful women who held reins of power it is not difficult to imagine that the male elite, in special circumstances, as found in Aceh in 1641, accepted a female ruler. If *adat* did not directly contradict religious doctrine, then Islam would most likely to be adapted, modified or syncretised, giving it a distinctly local version.

How and to what extent religion was adapted depended on the main power holders at the time. Islam, like other major religions, had complex and sometimes ambiguous ideas regarding women.²⁵⁰ Furthermore, Islam, born in the Middle East, had picked up some older practices concerning gender - an instance of syncretism within the Middle East - such as the isolation and veiling of women that were not integral to Islam, but came to seem so.²⁵¹ Complexities such as these affected Islam's impact on gender construction and practices in the more peripheral areas of Islam.²⁵² "Cultural shopping"²⁵³ would inevitably take place depending on the context and circumstances of the time. Which way the gender balance was tilted became then, a matter of emphasis,

²⁴⁸ Even their family names were uncertain, the Adat Aceh gave the name as Paduka Seri Sultan Badrul Alam Syarif Hasyim Jamalullail, *Adat Aceh*, p.24. Djajadiningrat used both Sultan Badr al-alam Sjarif Hasjim Djamal ad-din and Djamal al-leil, Djajadiningrat, *Kesultanan Aceh*, p.60. Veth mentioned that he was Badroel-alam Scherief Haschim Djamaloed-din, p.83.

²⁴⁹ Peter Stearns gave the example of two civilizations-Mesopotamia and Egypt. Where Mesopotamia stressed on women's inferiority and subjection to male control, Egypt, though largely patriarchal, gave women more credit, at least those in the upper class and experienced the rule of several powerful queens such as Nefertiti and Cleopatra. See Stearns, P., *Gender in World History*, p. 13.

²⁵⁰ Stearns, *Gender in World History*, p. 40.#

²⁵¹ Stearns, *Gender in World History*, p. 38.

²⁵² Stearns, *Gender in World History*, p. 39.#

²⁵³ Stearns, *Gender in World History*, p. 44.

which would also change through time. Hence the seemingly paradoxical situation: Islam was used to legitimize the accession of the first Sultanah and re-used fifty-nine years later to end the reign of the last female ruler.

The very character and emphasis of Islamic teaching in Aceh depended largely on the sovereign's will. The position of Islam (and how this was negotiated and reconciled with existing customary laws) must be understood in the context of the political situation and the ruler's own attitude and approach. Unlike their male predecessors, the Sultanahs intervened less in religious matters and largely allowed the religious scholars to settle matters pertaining to religion. In this sense, they took the politics out of religion. Yet, in the practice of court traditions and governance, they were more Islamic. Politics under the female sovereigns were tempered by moral and religious values. Thus, whilst these female rulers put religion into politics they took politics out of religion. Pageantry, theatre-politics and emphasis on material wealth and prowess were less important to these female rulers, piety and thriftiness were. Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Thani were acutely aware of their image and wanted to be perceived as king of kings by other kings. A slight to their ego or personal honour would invite their wrath and a violent response was in order regardless of whether this could cause injury to the kingdom.²⁵⁴ On the contrary, Sultanah, Safiatuddin Syah emphasized her role as an upholder of God's laws and wished to be seen as a just, merciful and generous ruler. Execution of law and justice were more humane and Islamic under these female monarchs. Although the Sultanahs' own Islamic leanings, whether orthodox or sufistic/mystical, were unknown, these female rulers were dedicated patrons of religion. The court became the most important centre of Islamic studies and learning in the region. It appeared that Islam under female rulers was more publicised but less politicized.

According to Barbara Andaya, despite some toleration of female rulers in Southeast Asia, two factors ensured that political consolidation privileged male authority and patrilineal descent even when bilateral or matrilineal systems operated in society. The standing of individual queens did not undermine the general categorization of females as mentally and emotionally weaker than males and more vulnerable to

²⁵⁴ See chapter 3 on Iskandar Thani's response to the perceived VOC slight upon his honour when they allied themselves with Johor first, a mere vassal, according to Iskandar Thani, before sealing an alliance of friendship with Aceh.

exploitation or manipulation by spouses, lovers or relatives.²⁵⁵ A second disadvantage of femaleness was rooted in the notion that a successful ruler was by definition a great conqueror who vanquished lesser kings and claimed their possessions.²⁵⁶ Andaya asserted that indigenous view on female rulers was ambiguous. A text from central Java denied that authority could be given to a woman yet accepted that a highborn and capable woman was deserving of male respect. Le Quy Don (1726-84) in his biographies of early Le Dynasty stated that women should confine their activities to the inner realm. Yet, despite his disapproval of women in politics, Le acknowledged that Nguyen Thi Anh, the dowager queen who ruled Vietnam during her son's minority held her own in a male environment and had followed established custom in fostering peace and harmony.²⁵⁷

In the above case study of Aceh, female rule was acceptable as seen in the *Taj's* exposition of female leadership. Indeed female rule was highly praised in the other indigenous text, the *Bustan*. Overall, European records corroborated the positive representation of Acehnese female sovereigns in indigenous records. Sex was not a criterion for choosing a ruler and the ideal or exemplary ruler was not so much defined and judged by his/her sex but determined by his/her moral and religious attributes. This study does not examine the status of ordinary women in Aceh at that point in time but one can certainly conclude that men accepted and respected high born, powerful women regardless of their sex.

Contrary to popular definition that a successful ruler was one who displayed prowess and vanquished others, the generally good natured, moderate and peaceful female monarchs, generous in the sharing of power and wealth provided an alternative definition. They were just what Aceh needed to maintain her independence and position in the latter half of the seventeenth century.

²⁵⁵ B. Andaya, *The Flaming Womb*, p. 169.

²⁵⁶ B. Andaya, *The Flaming Womb*, p. 170.

²⁵⁷ B. Andaya, *The Flaming Womb*, pp. 171-2.

CONCLUSIONS

Reasons for Adopting Female Rule: Succession of the First Female Sovereign

Why and how the tradition of male rulers in Aceh was broken in the seventeenth century is the focus of this study. The phenomenon of female rule in Aceh occurred over six decades, a long time indeed, but only once in the kingdom's history. Was it an accident of history? Half a century was rather long for an accident to happen without returning to normalcy. Was it an experiment? Perhaps; it was never tried before. If so, it was an experiment that lasted. In any case, it generally takes an unusual confluence of conditions to produce a turn or a twist that sets events on a new path. I suggest that the beginning of female rule in Aceh was a function of a unique situation in the Acehnese kingdom.

In Chapter One on the succession of Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah, I argued that that there were no fixed laws of succession in Aceh. But one condition necessary to ensure the accession and acceptance of a ruler was the consensus of the *orangkaya*. So why did the elite agree to accept a woman on the throne in 1641? I favour an explanation rooted in political realities of the time. Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah's lineage was impeccable, as she was the widow of Iskandar Thani and a daughter of Iskandar Muda by a royal wife. The dearth of royal males in 1641 was another factor. Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Thani contributed to this problem by killing those they deemed as royal rivals. Iskandar Muda ensured that no *orangkaya* or faction of the *orangkaya* would be strong enough to challenge his rule and that the *orangkaya* remained deeply factionalised and weak. His successor's, Iskandar Thani's, succession was an aberration. Uniquely – for Aceh - the existing ruler designated him. This procedure, however, was common in other Malay kingdoms and was one of the preconditions recognized in the *Sejarah Melayu* for legitimate succession. Iskandar Muda's absolute style, which was also an exception rather than the rule in Acehnese history, allowed him to choose his own successor without opposition from his *orangkaya*. But because the elite did not choose Iskandar Thani, they did not support him. At the time of Iskandar Thani's death, no *orangkaya* or a faction of the elite had regained enough power to impose a candidate of their choice. Furthermore, owing to the lack of a strong, credible, royal, male candidate,

no aspirant could stand without the backing of a strong faction of the *orangkaya*, nor be accepted by the majority. In these circumstances, a candidate with a chance of election had to be neutral, uninvolved with any *orangkaya* faction, and of course of royal blood, which conferred legitimacy.

In Aceh's genealogy of kings up to 1641, three Sultans were of foreign origin, Sultan Ala al-Din known as Mansur Syah (1577-1586), of Perak origin, Sultan Mahkota Buyung (1586-88) from Inderapura and Iskandar Thani (1636-1641) from Pahang. The former two were killed and Iskandar Thani was believed to be poisoned. This reveals or at least reflects the anti-foreign sentiment of the Acehnese elite. Iskandar Thani was remembered without love because he was a foreigner. Anti-foreign sentiment was intense enough to spur the Acehnese elite to make a pact among them never to allow any more foreign kings to rule over them. Therefore, the next successor must be locally born and chosen from Aceh's own dynasty.

By process of elimination, Safiatuddin was the most suitable candidate. She was closest, by consanguinity or marriage, to both male predecessors. She was an adult, whereas the nearest male might be a minor; she was healthy, not handicapped; and she was native. But she was female. There were surely discussions on the issue of her sex since this was a new element in the history of Aceh's dynastic succession. Nevertheless, her contemporaries overlooked her sex to preserve the larger principles of legitimacy. Acehnese *adat* and historical antecedent allowed women to be in powerful positions and Islamic doctrines as interpreted by the *ulama* of the time did not ban a woman from leadership. Externally, the strengthening of Dutch power after the conquest of Melaka had swung the balance of power against the Acehnese. Owing to the circumstances and the willingness of the majority of the elite to take a chance on a female ruler, she was elected, but not *because* she was female.¹

Still, femininity had its advantages. It made the Sultanah a neutral, placed her apart, a stranger even, to the rest of the male elite.² The combination of neutrality and legitimacy enabled her to be elected and accepted by the majority of the *orangkaya*. The

¹ For a discussion on female succession in Europe, see Armin Wolf, 'Reigning Queens in Medieval Europe: When, Where and Why' in *Medieval Queenship* ed. by John Carmi Parsons (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993, 1998) pp.169-178. No such study has been undertaken on female succession in the Southeast Asian context.

² See Fernández-Armesto, 'The stranger-effect in early modern Asia', pp. 181-202.#

orangkaya must have seen the advantages of having a young and inexperienced female ruler, who would need their instruction and guidance, though marriage might introduce a source of unwelcome influence. So the elite jealously guarded her widowhood and chastity.³ This was revealed during the episode where the head *ulama* was killed for an alleged sexual liaison with Sultanah Safiatuddin. The truth of this allegation could not be ascertained but it was certain that no one could or would be allowed to capture her heart and therefore open the way to capture the throne.

I suggest that the second, third and fourth female sovereigns were chosen *because* they were female. Sex became a more important consideration in choosing the successors of the first female ruler. New criteria were introduced, such as age and marital status. Marsden pointed out that the initial opposition to the election of the last female ruler, Kamalat Syah was because she did not meet criteria which were “esteemed essential” in a female ruler: that besides being royal, “she should be a maiden advanced in years”. Bowrey mentioned, “the Queen should never marry or know the use of man”.⁴ Although the ages and marital status of the second to the fourth queens are unknown, the second and third queens were probably rather old. Sultanah Naqiatuddin died after a two-year reign in 1678 – which would be consistent with advanced age at her accession. Bowrey, Dampier, Ord and Cawley described Sultanah Zaqiatuddin as an old maid. It is most likely that reasons why Kamalat Syah did not last as queen till her death included her youth and the strong probability that she got married.

The practice of electing a female after the death of Sultanah Safiatuddin in 1675 was due to a deliberate effort on the part of the *orangkaya*, following the success of the experiment with the first female ruler. The “Jewel Affair” illustrates that the first Sultanah was not absolute but neither was she a weakling. Not as deferential as the *orangkaya* would have hoped, she ruled in her own right, making some fancy political manoeuvres of her own that at times derailed some of the *orangkaya*'s plans. Most significantly, she had instituted a successful and beneficial co-operative relationship with her elite where diversity was not eliminated but balanced. It was a workable system, one that even the *orangkaya* wished to perpetuate. Thomas Bowrey wrote that “Achin now and hath for a considerable time been governed by a Queen...in soe much that the very

³ Veth, ‘Vrouwenregeeringen’, pp. 367-368.#

⁴ Bowrey, *A Geographical Account*, p. 298.

name of a Kinge is longe since become nauitious unto them, first caused through the tyrannicall Government of their last Kinge".⁵ Female rule provided some solutions to the perennial conflict between royalty and nobility. Marsden wrote that "the people being now accustomed and reconciled to female rule which they found more lenient than that of their kings, acquiesced in general in the established mode of government".⁶

Women in Power: Why Female Rule lasted for six decades

Contrary to popular belief that the elite was homogeneous and preferred female rulers since they were mere figureheads, there was sporadic opposition to female rule during the accession of the third and fourth female monarchs. Overall, though, female rule was generally accepted and supported since it was only under female sovereigns that Aceh witnessed prolonged peace. As illustrated in Chapter Five of this thesis, women's rule, viewed through the lenses of *adat* and Islam, was exemplary. The fact that all female rulers adopted a similar style suggests that this might have something to do with their being female.

According to traditional Malay ideas of political leadership as found in indigenous chronicles and **hikayat*, the ruler, or *raja* had a central role since the state or the government was constructed around his person. Similarly, a country and people without its *raja* would be one that was in a state of disorder and loss. So central was his role that customs, ceremonies and laws of the land were said to be in his hands.⁷ Despite this central role, the *raja* was not directly involved in the ruling of the kingdom. Like the ruler portrayed in the *Hikayat Pahang*, he was valued more for his manners than his practical skills.⁸ The mark of a true king lay in his behaviour. An exemplary *raja* should exhibit excellent manners (*baik budi bahasanya*) and speak in a graceful/sweet (*manis*), gentle (*lemah lembut*) and polite way. One of the most important duties of a *raja* was to bestow titles, gifts and honours to his subjects according to their rank.⁹ A *raja*

⁵ Bowrey, *A Geographical Account*, pp. 295-296.

⁶ Marsden, *History of Sumatra*, p. 449.

⁷ Milner, *The Malay Raja*, p. 196.

⁸ Milner, *The Malay Raja*, p. 198.

⁹ Milner, *The Malay Raja*, p. 196.

should behave with propriety (*patut*) and if he did not, he would be considered unjust (*tiada adil*). If a *raja* was unjust, the subject could leave him and settle elsewhere but the subject was not allowed to rebel or overthrow a *raja* because this was regarded as *derhaka*. Milner asserted that the *raja's* authority as presented in the *Hikayat Deli* was not even specifically political in nature since the ruler could offer his subjects little more than titles and audiences. However, Milner went on to argue that titles and ceremonies were not subsidiary aspects of government but they were precisely what the subjects sought from their *raja*. Titles were not empty rewards and the festive events organised for subjects were part of a *raja's* work. These plus good manners and the ability to treat his subjects in the appropriately formal way were the *raja's* most valuable attributes.

From the perspective of the *adat*, sex does not factor at all in the Malay conception of leadership. A female could be as well suited to be an exemplary *raja* as a male. Indeed judging from most contemporary observers' description of female rule in Aceh as gentle, generous and graceful, the female sovereigns were the epitome of good leadership. The generosity of Sultanah Safiatuddin and Sultanah Zaqiatuddin to both subjects and foreign envoys and the justice meted out through a more humane penal system illustrate a leadership style that is favoured by *adat*. The *adat* sanctioned the practice of decision-making through *musyawarah*. *Muafakat*, which female rulers promoted, created an environment where power and wealth sharing was possible, turning the relationship between nobility and royalty from one of conflict to co-operation. The queens, perhaps by virtue of their female sex, remained separate and neutral from the masculine jealousies, egos and rivalries which characterised relations between the male king and his elite.

The *ulama* in Aceh, such as Nuruddin al-Raniri and Abdul Rauf al-Singkel in 1641, did not view female rule as a contravention of Islamic law. The ruler's moral attributes rather than sex determined good leadership. Nevertheless, how leadership and female roles and status were contested, conceived, defined and practised in a Muslim society depended on how the power-holders of the time interpreted Islamic tenets. There was no eternally or universally established model of Islamic political, social and

cultural forms since such forms were historically constituted.¹⁰ Thus, while Aceh tolerated female rule, Muslim communities elsewhere such as in Mughal India and Ottoman Turkey saw even women influence at court as disastrous.¹¹ Even in Aceh it became illegal from 1699. It would be interesting to see how debate on female rule might develop in modern Aceh, if an opportunity were to arise, given the current popular calls for the implementation of *syariah* law. How will the present elite negotiate between *adat* and religion?

Generally, despite the peculiar scope for gynaecocracy in the Malay world, and in Aceh in particular, Islamic tradition viewed political and public realms as male by default. A female had no place or very little space in them. On the rare occasions when a female became sovereign, she was deemed to be placed on the throne and tolerated by the male elite, to whom she would have to defer since, being a woman; she would have very little knowledge in the art of governance, war, trade and religion. In Muslim kingdoms, elite women were generally secluded and their mobility severely limited. Unlike a male king, a female monarch would not have the opportunity to forge alliances by marrying princesses and daughters from noble families or by taking them as concubines. Worse, a female ruler would be more susceptible to sexual scandals and liaisons, which could easily threaten her position and the stability of the kingdom. Marriage itself could compromise her position.

Given these limitations, how did the female sovereigns of Aceh contest and negotiate their powers and rights *vis-à-vis* the male elite? Chapter 2 on the “Jewel Affair” illustrated how through a deliberate deference to her elite and with a dash of feminine softness to sooth ruffled tempers when needed, Sultanah Safiatuddin was able to get her own way and successfully steered her kingdom away from troubled waters through peaceful diplomacy. Her rule was indeed collaborative - designed to keep the rival factions of her *orangkaya* in balance. Compromises balanced the interests of throne, elite and kingdom. The authority of the *orangkaya* was respected and their rights honoured.

¹⁰ As in the Islamic world, in the Christian world and other world traditions as well, differing views exist on the roles of women in politics. See Brenda Meehan-Waters, ‘Catherine the Great and the Problem of Female Rule’, *Russian Review*, 34.3 (1975), 293-307, p. 306.#

¹¹ See Ruby Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World*, (Cambridge: UK, Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 220-225. See also, Hambly, *Women in the Medieval*, p. 9. Sunullah Effendi and Ahmad Refik saw the “sultanate of women” in Turkey as harmful. Imperial women in Mughal India were profoundly invisible in chronicles.#

Final authority, however, as demonstrated in the Jewel Affair, lay in the Sultanah's hands. Unlike her male predecessors' reigns characterised by conspicuous consumption and extravagant spending on jewels to gain charisma, prowess, and status, her reign saw a more pragmatic spending and conservation of the kingdom's resources. Instead of prowess, she emphasized piety and her moral attributes to inspire devotion from her subjects. To other kings and Governors she exhorted peace and goodwill in diplomatic relations, without high rhetoric and virile antics.

Chapter 3 showed how the Sultanah survived two coups, which threatened not only her position but possibly her life. She also managed to survive a sex scandal and still maintained her position on the throne. She survived all these by balancing the factions of the *orangkaya*, giving favours to her supporters and withholding rewards to weaken factions that oppose her. When the need arose, for example, at the height of tensions during the Perak Affair, she astutely manoeuvred to please the Laksamana, who was against her policy of accommodating the Dutch. Meanwhile, she continued to strengthen the faction under the Maharajah, who supported her policy. In the end, her policy of accommodating the Dutch prevailed.

Chapter 5 illustrated how seclusion did not entail isolation. It was a function of royalty rather than sex, an important element to enhance the exclusivity and mystique of royal power. Nevertheless, as a female ruler in a largely patriarchal court, the Sultanah had to devise means to stay abreast of court happenings, be they rumours or real. In this context, the Sultanah's numerous and trustworthy eunuchs, especially Maradia Adonna Lilla and other powerful court ladies assumed important roles when they acted as intermediaries between the Sultanah and her *orangkaya*. Maradia Adonna Lilla was the perfect conduit used by the Sultanah to engage the male sex and to serve as her eyes and ears in a largely male dominated court. Indeed, gendered perceptions such as the queen being inaccessible and inconsistent because she was a woman were cleverly turned to an advantage. The "inaccessibility problem," during negotiations proved valuable since her actions, seen as unfathomable to others, gave her room for manoeuvre. Her "inconsistencies" bought time for the Acehnese during periods of difficult negotiations.

Benevolent and pious, female rule met both the criteria of *adat* and Islam and helps explain why they were able to maintain power for six decades. Perhaps their

greatest achievement was to soften their male predecessors' harsh and tyrannical rule without entirely emasculating it.¹²

End of Female Rule

It is difficult to ascertain why Kamalat Syah was deposed in 1699. It is safe to venture though that the political and religious contexts in Aceh in the 1690's did not favour female rule. By the 1680s, religious sentiment was on the increase in both Aceh and the surrounding territories of Sumatra West-Coast. Ibn Muhammad Ibrahim's comment on female rule as a Persian diplomat in Aceh in 1685, reflected a more orthodox view representative of heartland Muslim notions of female status. The women's appeal was sexual. Real power stayed in men's hands. And only the weakness and effeminacy of the orangkaya could explain the unorthodox situation. He wrote:

Thus the councillors kept the reins of power in their own hands and governed the island without any problem. Their hypocrisy did not balk at this unmanly solution. They simply hid their heads under a female kerchief of shamelessness and disloyalty. These women-hearted men of state seated the maiden of their virgin thought on the throne of deception and from that time on this kingdom...has been given to Houri-like beauties, women as charming as angels.¹³

In Aceh, the arrival of the Mekkan delegates stimulated and reflected such sentiments. By the 1690s, the group that was hostile to female rule became powerful thanks to their prestige and political ties to royalty. A more patriarchic interpretation of Islam sealed Sultanah Kamalat Syah's deposition. While the letter from Mekah stated

¹² Nicholas Karamzin described the greatest achievement of Catherine the Great of Russia "was to soften autocracy without emasculating it" in *Karamzin's Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia: A Translation and Analysis* by Richard Pipes (Cambridge: Mass., Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 130.

¹³ *The Ship of Sulaiman*, translated by John O'Kane, Persian Heritage Series no.11, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), pp.174-178 quoted in *Witnesses to Sumatra: A Travellers' Anthology*, ed. by Anthony Reid, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 92.

that female rule was forbidden in Islam, the real reason for Kamalat Syah's deposition had more to do with politics of power.

Did Aceh decline under Female Rule?

One of the most popular assertions regarding female rule was that royal power declined under the women sovereigns, precipitating Aceh's decline. This view has gone unchallenged. A more detailed study of Aceh during this period, using contemporary Dutch, English and indigenous sources does not support it. Accounts by private merchants such as Bowrey, Dampier and Jacob de Roy who resided in Aceh towards the end of the seventeenth century reveal a politically stable and peaceful kingdom. They described a thriving and cosmopolitan entreport port attractive to private merchants. Aceh remained a centre of Islamic learning and a training centre for would-be *ulamas*.

The description of Aceh as a busy and thriving port with numerous ships from Europe, India and the region through out the latter half of the seventeenth century appeared frequently in VOC records and other travellers' accounts. The Company officials' frequent complaints in the 1640s and 1650s regarding the tough competition between them and the English and the other "Moorish traders" testified to this.¹⁴ In the 1670s, Bowrey described numerous traders and craftsmen such as the English, Dutch, Danes, Portuguese, Chinese, Malabarese, Bengalese, Gujeratis, Javanese, Malays, Makassarese etc. frequenting the port of Aceh.¹⁵ In the two years Dampier was in Aceh (1688-89), he found Aceh to be the largest, richest and most populous of all the Isle of Sumatra.¹⁶ Aceh's harbour was seldom without at least 10-15 ships from all nations. Food was abundant and cheap and he mentioned that rice, which was usually imported, was recently cultivated. Aceh was rich in natural resources, especially gold and the goldmines attracted many foreigners. Aceh was a cosmopolitan city with many foreigners such as the English, Danes, Portuguese, Gujeratis, Chinese and many more. Dampier made a special note of the Chinese traders whom he described as

¹⁴ Around 1640, Surat had four times the trade of Goa. Michael Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, (London: Routledge, 2003), p.135.

¹⁵ Bowrey, *Geographical account*, p. 286.

¹⁶ Dampier noted about 7-8000 houses in the city alone. Dampier, *Voyages and Discoveries*, pp. 84-89.

“remarkable”. Some Chinese lived in Aceh all year long whilst others made annual voyages. The Chinese came in June in about 10-15 ships and settled at the end of town, called the China Camp. There they lived and traded and amongst them were carpenters, painters, musicians. For two months, they transformed the whole camp into a fair selling all sorts of goods including Chinese toys.¹⁷

John Pitt who was in Aceh in 1685 mentioned “a great fleet of ships that lay in the road with bales of cloth and laden with rice.” In the 1690’s, de Roy wrote about the thriving port city of Aceh where some one hundred European vessels came each year as well as a great number of native vessels. De Roy rated Aceh as the best place in the East Indies to make one’s fortune.¹⁸ From these testimonies, while Aceh might have retreated from long distance commerce by the end of the seventeenth century, it continued to be a busy and lucrative port for regional traders. The description of Aceh in the last decades of the century by the likes of Bowrey, Dampier and de Roy is invaluable. It does not paint a picture of a declining kingdom, one that succumbed to the pressures from European incursions, but one that was remarkably resilient.

Contemporary indigenous and Dutch assessments of the female sovereigns were positive. Jacob Compostel noted that Sultanah Safiatuddin had more royal worth than her male predecessors. Pieter Sourij commented that the Sultanah’s rule was gentle but awe-inspiring. Al-Raniri related that because of the excellent attributes of the Sultanah, Aceh remained to be peaceful and prosperous. The twists and turns of the Jewel and Perak Affairs revealed a queen who was well able to manage both her local male elite and foreign ones. By facilitating a more inclusive and collaborative style of government and administering justice based on the laws of the land, the Sultanah had certainly dismantled her father’s despotic, personal and arbitrary style. Collaborative rule meant a reduction or a limitation of royal power but it did not bring about a deterioration or decline of royal power. On the contrary, it strengthened the institution of royalty since Iskandar Muda’s personalism was fragile and arbitrary. Royal monopoly of power in the hands of the ruler was now broken and distributed amongst her *orangkaya* especially those who shared her policies. Her promotion of her half-brother from the position of Kali to the highest-ranking position of Maharajah Sri Maharajah was one such example. This

¹⁷ Dampier, *Voyages and Discoveries*, p. 95.

¹⁸ *Voyage made by Jacob Janssen de Roy to Borneo and Atcheen*, 1691, pp. 356, 363.

showed also that royalty and nobility were never totally distinct and the royalty-nobility balance of power was never a zero-sum game but a negotiated one. I argue that this limitation of monarchical power and return to state institutions ushered in by the first Sultanah brought about a more stable institutionalisation of power sharing which was key to the kingdom's continued stability and prosperity until the last decade of the seventeenth century. Her immediate successors continued this style of government until the end of the century. Since there are no first-hand accounts, of the audiences at court during their reigns it is rather difficult to ascertain the degree of power sharing and how the balance of power between royalty and nobility was played out. It is possible to speculate though that by the fourth female ruler, the *orangkaya*, especially the Arab group, gradually wielded more power, at least enough to depose the last female ruler, Kamalat Syah. It is unfortunate that the style and substance of limited monarchy instituted under these female rulers did not survive their reigns. It could have paved the way for a gradual transformation from a limited monarchy to a constitutional one. Kamalat Syah's successor, Badr al-Alam Syariff Hasyim Jamal al-Din, changed the rules of the game once more and resorted to the style of the Sultanah's male predecessors by accumulating more royal wealth at the expense of the *orangkaya* and foreign merchants. A period of political crisis in Aceh in the eighteenth century paved the way for the decline of the monarchy, which the queens arrested, to resume.

This thesis has presented a different picture of Aceh under female sovereigns from the commonly accepted one of decline and decay. The assertion that Aceh declined after its "golden age" during the reign of Iskandar Muda ought to be revisited. What are the criteria of a "golden age"? Expansions of trade, territories, manpower, and codification of laws are some indicators of progress. These did take place under Iskandar Muda and he displayed his wealth and power ostentatiously to inspire awe and fear amongst his allies and enemies alike. Nevertheless, this "progress" was achieved at high cost. The "golden age" of Iskandar Muda relied on coercion backed by the threat of force. The tyranny and cruelty of the ruler shadowed the gleam of the "golden age". Thousands of lives were lost as a result of conquests and resettlements; the sultan's profligate nature drained the kingdom's resources. The dismantling of this arbitrary power and the institutionalization of law to protect the rights of subjects and foreigners alike were the key features of female rule. In this regard, the adverse course Iskandar

Muda began was actually reversed by his female successors. It is time to recognise their work and its positive effects.

Aceh in Relation to Other Powers

Contrary to Reid's thesis that critical military encounters with Europeans brought about an eclipse of local ethnic shipping, trade and revenue decline and the failure of the last stand of Islamic commerce by 1680, the case of Aceh shows a resilient regional network of Muslim and non-Muslim traders.¹⁹ European private merchants flocked to Aceh and profited by participating in the regional network of trade. Aceh remained to be the port of call for Muslim traders from India and the region and though Muslim trade might be affected by disruptions from the VOC blockades and pass system, this ancient trade survived. Although the pepper trade fluctuated in the last two decades of the seventeenth century, Aceh still profited from its gold and elephant trade.

The "Perak Affair" showed how the VOC failed to engross the tin trade and execute its monopolistic policies in the northern part of the Straits of Melaka. Aceh retained commercial autonomy and, unlike other local polities, was not subjected to unequal trading relations with European Companies. The accommodating and conciliatory stance adopted by the female sovereigns in response to VOC blockades and pressures ensured that Aceh did not become embroiled in wasteful and dangerous wars. Sultanah Safiatuddin concluded many treaties and contracts with the VOC and EIC fully embracing these new instruments of peace in international diplomacy. The Sultanah signed away some trade privileges and revenues but she ensured that customs duties and tolls were protected. The Sultanah granted only limited toll-free privileges for definite periods. In Perak, she allowed equal sharing of tin between the VOC and Aceh. Safiatuddin excluded Dutch Company officials from Aceh's lucrative elephant trade with the Indian merchants.

Another widely accepted assertion needs re-examination: that female rule was responsible for the loss of Aceh's power over its vassal states of Perak and West Coast

¹⁹ Ottoman decline in the eighteenth century is no longer universally accepted, so was India's since Mughal successor states were still commercially viable. Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, p. 118.

Sumatra. Close examination of evidence regarding relations between Aceh, its vassals, the VOC and EIC revealed a more complex picture than the rather simplistic generalisation that with European ascendancy the indigenous polities declined. The VOC's increased influence and intervention in the SWC polities were the result of the initiatives and negotiations of both the Dutch and the local elites to advance their mutual interests.

The Perak Affair revealed the resilience of the traditional vassal-overlord system working to the advantage of local polities. Kinship and loyalty ties between Aceh and Perak courts were very much evident and as a result, the Company officials failed to bring the Perak murderers to justice and in the end, the Company had to cancel reparation debts. The VOC's increased involvement in Sumatra West Coast was not so much the result of its ascent as a powerful power in the Straits of Melaka nor was it because of Aceh's decline. Rather, it was because of the initiative of local leaders who saw that the Company presented new opportunities for them to change allegiance and to rework their political and commercial networks to their benefit.²⁰ The Acehnese-appointed *panglima(s)* were chased out of Sumatra West Coast and the revenue Aceh was entitled to was lost. The system of tributary control erected by Iskandar Muda along the west coast was dismantled because new patrons were available. Aceh however, did not lose its traditional commercial and political links with the coastal polities. Aceh continued to receive pepper and gold brought directly by the Minangkabau inhabitants from both the east and west coasts of Sumatra. Unhappy with the Company's one-sided commercial policy of price-fixing and attempts at monopolising trade, these traders continued to frequent Aceh instead of the VOC commercial base in Padang. Deli and Asahan on the east coast, which supplied a substantial amount of rice to Aceh, had defected to the Company in the 1660's. But commercial links were maintained since rice continued to be exported to Aceh despite the VOC.²¹

The VOC officials became embroiled in local political factions and from the 1660's right up to the mid-eighteenth century; the Dutch never enjoyed more than half a year's peace. The numerous wars frustrated the enforcement of contracts. The Dutch

²⁰ Recall that the local Sumatra West Coast elite had sought to seek allegiance from the VOC even when they were under the control of the mighty Iskandar Muda.

²¹ NA, VOC 1200, 1653, ff.227R-227V, 228V. Quoted from Andaya, 'A very good natured but awe-inspiring government', pp. 74-75.

were not able to control the pepper and gold trade of the island since small planters and traders carried their harvests across jungles and rivers to places all over the coast. It was impossible to close off more than 4,500 kilometres of Sumatran coastline to rivals.²² In 1670, the VOC decided to take up production of gold itself and imported experts and equipments to mine the gold from the Barisan Mountains. But European mining methods did not suit local conditions and European miners could not survive the tropical working conditions. In the 1680's, with the beginnings of religious revivalism of sorts, partly as a response to increased incursions from the Christian west, spiritual ties were rekindled between Aceh and these west coast polities. Polities such as Oelakkan and Barus looked towards Aceh for spiritual leadership. Indeed, in an amorphous and fluid political culture as in the Malay world in the pre-modern era where territorial and physical control was never the norm, these cultural, religious and commercial ties were truly the ones that bound patron-client loyalty.

A different picture emerged in the south. Nearer to the VOC headquarters in Batavia, and farther away from Aceh, the kingdom's rebellious subordinate states of Johor and Pahang were able to establish independence. This presented yet another configuration with a different set of results, difficult to categorize under the heading of "European ascendancy and local decline". With the mediation of the Company, Aceh and Johor signed a peace treaty with each other and vowed never to interfere in each other's affairs henceforth. The Company in this regard, did not play its usual aggressor role but brokered peace that aided strong local polities to survive. Sultanah Safiatuddin agreed to cede Pahang to Johor; given the new constellation and balance of power in the southern part of the Straits in 1641. Johor, seizing the chance to be protected by a new patron, signed a Treaty of Friendship and Alliance with the VOC. This enabled Johor to enjoy peace and concentrate on commercial advancement.

The Perak Affair resonated with the new noise of East-West encounters. They demanded adjustments, sometimes creative at others clumsy, in what John Wills calls interactive emergence. As the Perak affair illustrated, interaction happened at many levels and junctures, from basic hate and fear to commerce, politics, language and legal structures. The VOC had limited success in the use of legal instruments of diplomacy

²² Els M. Jacobs, *Merchant in Asia: The Trade of the Dutch East Indies Company during the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: CNWS Publications, 2006), p. 60.

such as contracts and treaties. According to Grotius, Europeans and Asians were bound by the same legal agreements since both societies were equal. But when did this international system, laid by Europeans and initially confined to Europe become universal? In many cases Europeans did not treat other non-Europeans and non-Christians equally and vice-versa. China saw Dutch merchant-ambassadors as tribute bearers and the Chinese viewed the limited trade allowed for the Dutch as a grant or privilege.²³ The legalistic, letter-of-the-law approach adopted by the VOC to the signing of contracts and treaties contrasted with the personal, spirit of the law approach preferred by Asian monarchs. While VOC officials viewed contracts as inviolable and permanent, the locals saw them as transient and changeable based on changing circumstances. Similarly, in Aceh, the instructions granting Dutch trade privileges in the form of *firman*, *estemie* or *kurnia* could be viewed as unilateral grants, given at will and taken at will as a royal prerogative. Indeed the word *kurnia* literally means grant. By no stretch of the imagination was this seen as mutually obligatory nor was it meant to be a permanent contract.

The contrasting approaches led to many misunderstandings and misperceptions. The Acehnese saw the VOC officials as being too demanding, rude to the extent of forcing the hand of the ruler to accede to their ways, rather than be satisfied and thankful for the grants given based on the ruler's benevolence. The officials, in contrast, saw that they were demanding only what was their right. This in turn led to

Company officials stereotyping Acehnese as treacherous and untrustworthy and the Acehnese viewing the Company officials as essentially merchants robed in ambassadorial clothings. They constantly questioned the Company's sincerity in its friendship with them. The exchanges between Arnold de Vlamingh and the Laksamana during the "Jewel Affair" episode vividly illustrate this type of relationship. Furthermore, with these contrasting perceptions, ambassadorial language usually got lost in translation. In Europe, during the Middle Ages and Renaissance period, diplomatic exchanges between east and west required eloquence in both Greek and Latin, preferred languages of international diplomacy. As these became complex, the drafting of legal and political documents, mastery of public speaking and ambassadorial business became prized

²³ Goor, 'Merchants as diplomats', pp. 10-11.#

skills.²⁴ In Southeast Asia, in the seventeenth century, no such languages of international diplomacy nor ambassadorial skill or protocol existed yet. This is why the likes of Truijtmán and Vlamingh and Sri Bidia Indra faced so many problems. Even the Europeans themselves, the English and the Dutch disagreed as to what constituted legal commercial practices in relation to their rivalry with each other in this part of the world and their relations with indigenous local powers.²⁵

Not all these encounters leave a bad taste, however, as one reads with delight how Truijtmán or Vlamingh enjoyed their pleasurable moments savouring the exotic delights of local food, fruits and cultural entertainments. One is reminded that Europe was not that different after all when one compares how Sultanah Safiatuddin welcomed her Christian ambassadors with how Queen Elizabeth welcomed her Moorish ambassadors from Turkey and Morocco.²⁶ In terms of hospitality and accommodating inter-cultural exchanges, both queens were impeccable.²⁷

Safiatuddin had her share of favourites amongst the Dutch envoys. She had a soft spot for Justus Schouten and Balthazar Bort and did not hesitate to tell the Governor-General in Batavia in her letters requesting the return of these men. Besides European men, commerce and diplomacy Sultanah Safiatuddin learnt about European fashion from Mrs. Harmanszoon and Sultanah Zaqiatuddin about men's wigs from Messrs Ord and Cawley. In the course of this long process of interaction between the European officials and locals, friendships too were also struck. Sri Bidia Indra's (the long term Acehese envoy to Batavia) friendship with the VOC's envoy to Aceh such as Johan Truijtmán is one such example.

The diversity of responses to European intrusions and the different degrees of impact on indigenous polities by the end of the seventeenth century showed that although East and West might no longer interact as equals, European ascendancy remained patchy. Aceh, by the end of the century was no longer an expanding empire, as it was at the beginning, and, relative to the gradual strengthening of the VOC's territorial and commercial empire, Aceh was just a port-polity. Unlike the rest of the Muslim polities in the region, however, Aceh was not a backwater nor was it a subjected

²⁴ Brotton, *The Renaissance Bazaar*, p. 86.

²⁵ See, E. B. Sainsbury, *A Calendar of the Court Minutes, etc., of the East India Company, 1669*, p. 225.#

²⁶ Matar, *Turks, Moors and Englishmen*, p. 34.

²⁷ Matar, *Turks, Moors and Englishmen*, pp. 66, 70.#

state. Partly thanks to the good governance of women rulers and their creative and accommodative diplomacy, Aceh remained to be an independent kingdom, an important regional port of call with its own autonomous commercial networks and continued its role as the veranda of Mekah for the region. The VOC was not successful in dominating the northern part of the Straits of Melaka even by the end of the eighteenth century. For another two hundred years Aceh remained independent, even after the demise of the Dutch East Indies Company in 1802. Aceh remained to be a thorn in the Dutch flesh when the rest of the East Indies had long been subjected colonies. The Dutch colonial government had to fight a thirty- year war (1873-1903) to bring this last frontier within its colonial borders.

Contributions of this thesis: Uses and Limitations

This thesis has not answered all the questions raised. It is not yet possible to ascertain the identities and origins of the second, third and fourth female rulers. Sources at times suggest more questions than answers. The sources, however, have provided enough evidence to challenge popular claims about Aceh under the rule of the female Sultanahs. Contrary to claims that they were responsible for Aceh's decline, one has to accord due recognition to their contributions in keeping the kingdom peaceful and independent. The experiment carried out in 1641 worked and this prevented Aceh from meeting the same fate as the other Malay polities who had to succumb to Dutch power. Female rulers, especially Sultanah Safiatuddin, showed that a female ruler could be as capable and successful as a male one. In this regard, present Acehnese women could draw some inspiration and confidence that they too could play important roles and contribute to the makings of a new and more successful Aceh in the future.

A balanced assessment of the Sultanahs' reigns is possible. Rather than universalising stereotypes of "female rule" or "female rulers" or making cosmic generalisations about them, this thesis presents a particular case study of a succession of women rulers in a certain place at a specific time in history – the representations and their lived realities. To take the scope of the conclusions further, more research would be needed on other female sovereigns in the contexts of female rulership in Southeast

Asia, Islam, and the world. Nevertheless, the achievements, and the interest, of the queenly phase of Aceh's history would surely withstand any comparison.

Appendix 1

Explanatory Notes

CHAPTER 1

Fn.2 p. 30

There are many different versions of the founding of the kingdom, differing accounts of the identity of the first Sultan and the dates of succession of the following Sultans. The indigenous accounts of the founding of the Sultanate and the genealogy of its Sultans are found in the *Adat Aceh*, *Hikayat Aceh* and the *Bustan us-Salatin*. The first two chronicles, believed to be written in the early half of the seventeenth century, authors unknown, are indigenous court chronicles that intersperse myths with history. The *Bustan* written by the *ulama* Nuruddin al-Raniri in 1638, is also a court chronicle but is less mythical and more historical in character. *Bustan us-Salatin* meaning Garden of Kings, was written in Aceh in 1638 by the leading Gujerati *ulama*, Nuruddin ar-Raniri. The *Bustan* was commissioned to be written by Sultan Iskandar Thani. It is not known exactly when Al-Raniri completed the *Bustan* for he left Aceh in 1643 during the reign of Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah. It is believed that this work was completed in Gujerat. The *Bustan us-Salatin* is the most significant piece of Al-Raniri's writings and touted to be one of the most well written Malay works of the period. The *Bustan us-Salatin* combines all the different aspects of history, literature and religion in its seven chapters. In chapter II, part 13, the writer refers to historical characters, in this case, the royal members of the court of Aceh where he worked in. The original manuscripts have been studied and published in these three publications- 1. Iskandar, T. ed., *Bustan us-Salatin*. (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1966) 2. Siti Hawa Salleh ed., *Bustan us-Salatin*, (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1992). 3. Jelani Harun, ed., *Bustan al-Salatin*, (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 2004).

These indigenous chronicles do not reveal in detail the circumstances surrounding succession. In order to get a clearer picture of the historical account of the genealogy of the Sultanate, the accounts from these indigenous chronicles should be corroborated with European sources, namely Portuguese, English, French and Dutch descriptions of the Sultanate. These descriptions are those from travellers such as Joao de Barros, Diogo do Couto, Fernao Mendes Pinto, Godinho de Eredia, John Davis, James Lancaster, Augustin de Beaulieu amongst others. Earlier studies on the genealogy of the Sultans of Aceh were carried out by Marsden and Veth. Marsden, W., (1811), *History of Sumatra* and Veth, (1873), "Atchin en zijn betrekkingen tot Nederland: topographisch-historische beschrijving." The latter and more comprehensive studies of the genealogy combining both Malay and European sources were undertaken by H. Djajadiningrat and D. Lombard. Djajadiningrat, Hoesein, (1911), "Critisch overzicht van de in Malaische werken vervatte over the geschiedenis van het Soeltanaat van Atjeh," *BKI*, 65, pp135-215. Raden Hoesein Djajadiningrat, translated by Teuku Hamid, *Kesultanan Aceh (Suatu Pembahasan Tentang Sejarah Kesultanan Aceh Berdasarkan Bahan-bahan Yang Terdapat Dalam Karya Melayu)*, Departmen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan: Proyek Pengembangan Permuseuman, Daerah Istimewa Aceh, 1982-1983). See Denys Lombard, (1967), *Le Sultanate d'Atjeh au temps d'Iskandar Muda 1607-1636*. Paris: Ecole Francaise d' Extreme-Orient translated by Winarsih Arifin *Kerajaan Aceh : Jaman Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-1636)* (Jakarta : Balai Pustaka 1986), pp.247-249. It is

beyond the purview of this research to illustrate the inconsistencies in the genealogy, suffice to say that these inconsistencies relate more to the history of the Sultanate in the sixteenth century. By the mid-sixteenth to early seventeenth century, the genealogy of the Sultans of Aceh is much clearer.

Fn.5 p.30

Another version is based on the account that Aceh, a vassal of Pedir, was freed by its ruler who then expanded his territory by conquering Daya, Pasai and Pedir itself. It is not clear who this person was, to the Portuguese he was a Raja Ibrahim.

Fn.16 p.32

H.M. Zainuddin gave a differing account of Sultan Zayn al-Abidin who was the son of Al-Qahar's first born son, Raja Abdullah, ruler of Aru. According to Zainuddin, he was a bad-tempered man and he was deposed. Afraid that he would be killed, he exiled himself to Mount Seulawaih and became a farmer. After turning a new life, he returned and claimed the throne again in 1585 and ruled the kingdom well up to 1604. He was the one who came to be known as al-Mukammil. See Zainuddin, *Tarich Atjeh*, p. 399.

Fn.20 p.33

After Aceh's conquest of Perak in 1575, the widow of the former Perak ruler and her family were taken to Aceh. Sultan Ala al-Din who succeeded to the Aceh throne was her eldest son. He married the widow of the Sultan of Aceh.

Fn.21 p.33

They were not happy with this Perak Sultan because he married his daughter to the Sultan of Johor. As a result of this union, they had a son, Raja Hasjim, and the Sultan had the intention to name this grandson as his successor. The elites of Aceh opposed this and he was eventually killed by a *ulebalang*.

Fn.24 p. 33

Djajadiningrat, however, discussed other accounts by John Davis, F.M. de Vitre and Beaulieu, which mention that this person was a mere fisherman who was chosen by the *orangkaya*. Apart from these European accounts, the *Hikayat Aceh* reveals that this person was the descendent of Inayat Syah from the Dar al-Kamal Dynasty, *Hikayat Aceh*, p.99. The *Bustan* states that he is the son of Firman Syah, *Bustan*, p. 34. See also Lombard, p.248. Considering the cases of earlier Sultans who were of royal lineage, including the foreign-born ones, it is difficult to imagine that the *orangkaya* would choose someone from such a lowly background that would be acceptable to all. Amirul Hadi did not discuss this person's contested identity, merely stating that he is from Dar al-Kamal Dynasty without quoting any evidence. Amirul Hadi, p.69. Perhaps the most interesting and plausible explanation was one given by Zainuddin. He stated, as mentioned above, that this Sultan was the same person who exiled himself at Mount Seulawaih and then returned to claim the throne. This would solve the problem of contradictory accounts between European and indigenous sources. Zainuddin, *Tarich Atjeh*, p.401.

Fn.27 p. 33

If Zainuddin's account was accepted, this explains why this king was already very old. The *orangkaya* whom he was alleged to have killed would be those either from Inderapura or those supporting the former Sultan from Inderapura.

Fn.33 p. 34

Not much information could be found regarding this son, Sultan Muda. When Beaulieu was in Aceh, he observed that this son was disliked and unpopular and believed to be involved in an alleged conspiracy. Hasjimy claimed that he was killed because he committed adultery with a Captain's wife.

Fn.76 p. 44

The issue of whether females could be an *imam* or *wali* was essentially religious in nature with little bearing on the issue of political succession. Furthermore, the *Adat Aceh*, an indigenous text covering rules and regulations for kings in the seventeenth century, states that these religious duties of an *imam* and a *wali* were not actually carried out even by a male monarch, but by the religious head or *kadhi*, thus these so-called objections are not relevant.

Fn.79 p. 47

He was born in Ranir (present day Rander). It has been suggested that his mother is Malay. Before coming to Aceh in 1637, it is believed that he spent some time in the Malay Peninsula, namely Pahang. He had extensive knowledge of other Malay works such as the *Sejarah Melayu*. He died in India in 1658.

Fn.84 p. 48

Al-Singkel viewed equality between men and women as a component of humanity, opportunity and rights that extended into the political domain. To him, a female could be regarded as a leader of an Islamic community and be accepted as God's *khalifah* (deputy) in implementing God's laws and the community should offer its loyalty in return. He himself served as an example of a loyal subject to his queen. In the *Mirat al-Tullab*, which Sultanah Safiatuddin commissioned, he wrote that his acceptance of this commission was in honour of Her Majesty and professed his loyalty to her. Amirul concluded, "it is safe to suggest that even though the enthronement of the ruler occurred in the context of *darurah* (crisis), female rule was to al-Singkel, a normal phenomenon.

Fn.89 p. 50

The concept of *imam* is open to various interpretations amongst the Islamic jurists depending on their cultural and political affiliations. A general definition of *imam*, however, is someone who is a religious leader and leads congregational prayers in mosques. One interpretation is that a woman may lead her own kind in prayers but is forbidden to lead men, thus, debarring her from taking this position.

Fn.91 p. 50

Following the tradition set by al-Mawardi, he was severe towards women, for, according to him, they should be barred from holding even subordinate positions, such as those of a vizier, minister or judge.

Fn.101 p.52

Out of the thirteen female Muslim sovereigns who ascended the thrones of Muslim states between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries holding the official insignia of sovereignty, i.e having their names mentioned in the Friday *khutbah* and on coins, two were Turks; six were Mongolians, two Yemenis and three from the Maldives.

Fn.116 p. 55

To meet the contentions of her rivals that she could not rule as a woman, Njinga acted like a man. She married many dependent husbands who became her concubines. She required them to dress in women's clothes and sleep among her maids in waiting. She engaged in virile pursuits by heading her troops to battle personally.

Fn.118 p. 56

Four of the *orangkaya* who lived in a more remote part from the court took up arms to oppose the new queen and the rest of the *orangkaya*. This opposition group met the pro-queen party on the opposite banks of the Aceh River. Dampier commented that the soldiers were calling out to each other discussing why they were fighting rather than engaging in actual fighting. Nothing came out of this and the anti-queen party left for home. No civil war broke out and the third queen ruled peacefully until her death.

CHAPTER 2

Fn.6 p. 60

Aside from Mundy, no one else has mentioned that Safiatuddin had other sisters and that Iskandar Muda had other daughters. It is probable that this instigator was one of Iskandar Muda other "wives" not of royal origin rather than his daughter. It might refer to his non-royal wife from Lam Si who had a son, Imeum Hitam, also known to be Panglima Polem, thus, a half-brother of Safiatuddin. See Zainuddin, *Tarich Atjeh*, p.426. Alternatively, this might refer to Iskandar Muda daughters from non-royal wives who might wish to claim the throne for their sons.

Fn.12 p.63

The *Bustan* detailed this ceremony:

Once the headstone was ready, it was carried in a grand procession to the burial site. Warriors took the first row in full combat gear riding on elephants, taking the stance as if they were charging for battle. Eighty elephants ridden by warriors took the second row carrying small canons and firing them making such a tremendous noise. Eighty war-horses followed carrying warriors with gold-plated swords. Next came hundreds of elephants and horses all dressed with golden or *suassa* saddles. Then, came a huge man made figurine with huge eyes and fangs carrying a spear. An artificially made dragon with a lion-like head and body of a crocodile followed; then, an enormous man made bird pecking a huge snake. Another dragon followed fronted by two figurines which when moved, was followed suit by the dragon. At times, these figurines 'ran' into the crowd pursued by the dragon much to the amusement of the massive crowd that gathered to catch this spectacular procession. Animals, wild and tame including lions and tigers, rhinoceros, cows and deer followed this floats section. Each of the animals, dressed with cloth of all kinds of colours thoroughly delighted the children. Huge lanterns and kites followed. Behind that, a huge artificial

dragon snaked on with a body like a horse with tusks like elephants carrying a huge tray of delicacies on its back. A huge bird with a face like an elephant's with a puppeteer inside and controlling it came next. When the puppeteer danced, the bird followed suit. Next came a retinue of silver 'cars', each bearing a puppeteer from the neighbouring lands such as Java, Pahang and Johor. Two huge elephants carrying golden weapons followed by a band of musicians marked the highlight of this procession. After this band, came a magnificent elephant carrying a court official dressed in armour equipped with a weapon. The weapon was made of gold encrusted with gems, his sword was made of gold, its sheath made of gems, and the handle was made of gold, encrusted with multi-coloured gems. Behind this elephant, came a seven-story golden pyramid-like structure that glittered in the sun. The first level held four noblemen, each with a whip in hand directing the warriors guarding this golden 'car'. A few good-looking noblemen lined the middle level. A level higher was a bevy of courtly ladies dressed in their finery. Four dancing Acehnese puppets, two dressed in glittering man's clothes, and the other two in women's were right at the top. The king's headstone crowned this splendid structure. A group of well-dressed princesses, each carrying the kingdom's sword, dagger, and fan flanked this tombstone. Right at the top of this structure, together with the headstone was a golden tree, its leaves made of copper, flowers made of gold, fruits made of nine precious stones that so glittered that they resembled stars in the sky. Noblewomen, court ladies, women escorts, and female slaves surrounded this seven-story pyramid. More elephants carrying weapons and expensively decorated palanquins accompanied this awesome structure. The kingdom's subjects came from far and wide to witness this amazing spectacle. Those who were fishing would stop fishing; those who were peddling would stop peddling. Young, unmarried ladies beautifying themselves would even bun their hair, wear their jewellery mid-way whilst hurrying to join the crowd. Wives quarrelled with their husbands as to who would stay behind to look after the house. Pregnant women came from so far away that they had to give birth along the way.

Fn.36 p.69

"The auspicious Sultan, the honoured and revered Paduka Seri Sultan Alauddin Mughayat Syah, Champion Sovereign, shadow of God on earth, the vicegerent of Allah, King of the whole world, who like God, is glittering like the sun at midday, whose attributes are like the full moon, is the king chosen by Allah whose characteristics are like the Pleiades, who is king of kings, descendents of Alexander the Great."

Fn.105 p. 90

In the *Hikayat Aceh*, Sultan Sri Alam was depicted as extravagant since he had depleted the kingdom's Treasury by giving expensive gifts to certain soldiers and elites from Fansur (Baros). The *Hikayat Aceh* relates that the *orangkaya* and *ulama* in Aceh had then gathered together and decided that this state of affairs was injurious to the kingdom and that this Sultan must be deposed.

CHAPTER 3

Fn.4 p. 93

Derived from the Arabic word *khalifa*, the title of caliph encompasses many meanings. The first Caliph, Abu Bakar (r.632-634) was the successor of Muhammad and acted as a leader of

the Muslim community in a temporal sense. In the Quran, the word *khalifa* signifies the vicegerency of God on earth. According to Hodgson, the concept of *khalifa* as representing shadow of God on earth is a later importation from Persian/Sassanid tradition where the pre-Islamic king was seen as mystical and semi-divine who acted as an intermediary between God and man to demonstrate God's will. The rulers in Southeast Asia arrogated this title to themselves although this designation had lost its force in the Muslim world following the sack of Baghdad in 1258 by the Mongols.

Fn.16 p. 98

After the Dutch conquest of Melaka, the Company was unable to decide between two conflicting aims. One was to continue and expand existing lines of traffic in trade. To preserve and develop the emporium character of Melaka as a port of call for traders and normalise trade disrupted by the long siege of Melaka. Passes were freely issued to traders, especially Indian traders to Melaka and orders were placed to stock Melaka with goods desired by these merchants. The other was to monopolize trade, which meant to restrict existing trade and to control main articles of import and export with a view to dictate prices.

Fn. 17 p. 98

Sultan Muzaffar Shah of Perak allowed the Dutch to trade in Perak but in competition with other merchants in 1639. It was probable that this was only allowed after obtaining permission from Iskandar Thani since an earlier private arrangement between the Perak Sultan and the Dutch was disallowed. The Sultan, though eager to acquire a new ally in the VOC, had to defer to Iskandar Thani and future relations between the Perak and the VOC depended on Aceh's attitude as the overlord.

Fn.18 p. 99

According to Irwin, as heir to the Melakan Sultans, the Portuguese Crown reserved for itself the whole of Perak's tin. The Portuguese Captains were able to monopolize this tin and gained much profits but this happened only when the Portuguese power was at its height in the mid-sixteenth century. The rise of Aceh and the advent of the Dutch made it increasingly difficult for the Portuguese to control trade outside Melaka. After Aceh conquered Perak, the profits from tin trade went to Aceh and the Asian merchants who traded in Aceh and Perak.

Fn.30 p. 102

The legal frame where European nations traded with local powers consisted of court orders (*farmans*) where special rights were granted. Difference between Mughal and Persian *farmans* was in Mughal empire the *farmans* were irrevocable where as in Persia *farmans* were brought under renewed scrutiny when a new shah-in shah came to power. Privileges had to be reconfirmed after a new emissary was sent. The exceptions were the British-Persian Treaty of 1622 and the Persian-Portuguese Treaty of 1626, which were permanent.

Fn.117 p. 128

Truijtmann wrote, this "reformed" or altered court was a result of the revolt that took place at the end of 1651 where the Company's "affectionate friend", of many years, the Maharaja had faced distress and jealousies from the other *orangkaya*. He was demoted (*ondergebracht*) and on the contrary, the most important person from those who disfavored us (who was of the lowest of the low/sediment) were now driven to the top [the Laxamana and his followers],

whose evil influence was partly funded not only perhaps by their envy and hatred for our good friend but also especially by their grudge against the Company's prerogatives in Perak's trade which we obtained last year which they had sought to annul.

Fn.127 p. 130

Truijtman's mission to Kedah was also ill-fated. Truijtman was at first warmly welcomed by the Sultan but when he started discussing Company's business, the Sultan became angry. He also started objecting to the number of armed soldiers escorting Truijtman and demanded them to surrender their weapons. One soldier resisted and a scuffle ensued where one Dutchman was killed and another wounded. The rest of the delegation including Truijtman were sent to jail. They were held captive from May to October 1652. To add insult to injury, the Company lost 12,809 reals.

Fn.152 p. 136

Although B.Andaya argued that Aceh's influence in Perak had declined drastically under the Sultanah, she pointed out that one reason why the Temenggong not only escaped punishment but was even promoted to Bendahara's position was because of his uncle's influence as a leading member of the Aceh Council. Safiatuddin Syah refused to take any action against the new Bendahara arguing that he could not be deposed since the new ruler was too young and the Regent too old.

Chapter 4

Fn.1 p. 142

The main aim of this section is not to provide an exhaustive account of the political nor socio-economic situation of the area in the latter half of the seventeenth century, but to examine the nature of changing relations between Aceh and its subordinate states and the beginning of VOC interference in their affairs. No such analysis has been undertaken though E. Francis (1856) has provided a descriptive account of the establishment of the Dutch in SWC and J.C.M. Radermacher (1824) descriptions of the island of Sumatra. De Leeuw's (1926) study on these relations ended with the signing of the Painan Treaty in 1663 and further developments up to 1665. This section owes much to studies that have been undertaken by scholars on the individual polities. For example, F. De Haan (1897) on Middle Sumatra, Kathirithamby-Wells' (1976) study on the Inderapura Sultanate, Jane Drakard's (1990) on Minangkabau kingdom and Barus and Timothy Barnard (2003) on Siak.

Fn.5 p. 142

In 1661, the delegation led by Raja Panjang who represented the Minangkabau rajas of Silida, Painan, Batang, Kapas, Kambang and Lakitan went to Batavia to place themselves under Dutch protection. This was followed by the rajas of Dua-belas kota, Padang, Inderpoua and Ticou. In April 1668, another treaty was signed between the VOC and the Minangkabau ruler who recognized the independence of the Minangkabau territories. The area from Barus to Manjuta acknowledged Minangkabau authority under the protection of the Company.

Fn.54 p. 155

The Minangkabau world could be divided into two areas – the heartland known as *darat* and the coasts known as *rantau*. Within the Minangkabau heartland were numerous autonomous settlements, with the most complex form known as *negeri*. Most *negeri* consisted of four to ten *suku* or extended families or matrilineal clans. The leading male of the *suku* was known as the *penghulu*. These *penghulus* would get together in a council that acted as authority for the *negeri*. One *negeri* could form defensive alliances with other *negeri* to form federations known as *laras*. These federations could be either cooperative or conflicting in matters of trade, access to resources and routes and status. The other division of power was between the upstream (*hulu*) and downstream (*hilir*) centres. Tensions sometimes occurred between the production areas upstream and the distribution centres downstream though at most times trade between these two rested on mutual recognition of rights and obligations.

Fn.65 p.157

In 1665, the Sultanah sent 28 small vessels with 500 soldiers to SWC to assist, followed by another 9 bantengs (big ships). The 28 vessels successfully passed the Company's blockade in Baros by night. They then landed in Tiku which caused great dismay amongst the Company's allies. This expedition however did little to try to wrest the vassals away from the VOC. Groenewegen reported that out of the 28, 9 fell into a trap, 1 was conquered at sea, 4 hit against rampart, the rest returned. The 500 soldiers it appeared, did not arrive. See Chijs, *Dagh-Register*, 1665, p.239.

CHAPTER 5

Fn.3 p. 168

Thus far, studies of Malay women in the region in the past, elite and commoner, have centred on how women were represented in indigenous court narratives and literature such as the *Sejarah Melayu*, *Undang-Undang Melaka*, *Hikayat Siak*, *Tuhfat al-Nafis*, *Misa Melayu*, and *Hikayat Banjar*. See studies by Ismail Sarbini, Sharifah Zaleha and Rashila Ramli, Monique Zaini-Lajoubert and Siti Hawa Salleh. Anthropological studies concentrate on exploring tensions between Islam and *adat* laws and how they affected women's positions. See studies by Wazir Jahan Karim, Carol Laderman, Aihwa Ong, Michael Peletz, Penny van Esterik, Robert Winzeler and Ruzy Suliza Hashim. References for the above literature are detailed in the bibliography.

Fn.11 p.169

One of the problems faced by Mongol princes after converting to Islam was how to reconcile the very public status of women in their culture and with the very private status of women in Arabic mainland Islam. Judging from the numerous *khatun* (women who held political authority) in the Mongol and Turkish dynasties, it is clear that Islam was interpreted from the lens of local culture and traditions. Ibn Battuta was struck by the constant involvement of women in politics when he crossed the Mongol Empire. He noted that amongst the Turks and Tartars, their wives enjoyed a very high position that when they issued an order, they decreed it in the name of the Sultan and the Khatuns.

Fn.12 p.169

In her study on Muslim queens in history, Fatima Mernissi identified fifteen female sovereigns, two Mamluk Sultanahs, six Mongol Khatuns, three queens in the Maldives and four in Sumatra. She identified only two Arab Yemeni reigning queens from the Shiite Fatimid dynasty. Sitt al-Mulk also from the Fatimid dynasty administered the kingdom from 1020-1024 but the *khutba* was never preached in her name. There were, however, many more reigning queens in Southeast Asia from the 1500-1700 besides the four she mentioned in Aceh. See Chapter 1 of this thesis.

Fn.14 p.169

This tradition was established during the rule of the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties where Islamic jurisprudence took shape and theories on Islamic political thought that could be regarded as orthodox were formulated and elaborated. In traditional Islamic literature, theories on the art of governance and ideals of kingship are found in Arab-Persian treatises generally known as "Mirrors for Princes". Some examples are *Kitab al-Sultan* by Ibn Qutaybah, *Kitab al-Taj* by al-Jahiz, *Siyasatnama/Siyar al-Muluk* by Nizam al-Mulk, *Qabusnama* by Kay Kaus ibn Iskandar and *Nasihah al-Muluk* by al-Ghazali. This genre spread to other parts of the Islamic lands such as Mughal India. One example is *Mau'izah-I Jahangiri* by Muhammad Baqir Najm-I Sani. In the Malay-Muslim literature, this genre is exemplified in works such as the *Taj us-Salatin* by Bukhari al-Jauhari and *Bustan us-Salatin* by Nuruddin al-Raniri. Jelani Harun (ed), (2006), *Nasihah al-Muluk – Nasihat kepada Raja-Raja* karangan Imam al-Ghazali, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, pp.xiv-xv. See also, Ruth Roded (ed), *Women in Islam*, p.75.

The *Taj us-Salatin* adopted the style of advice (*nasihat*) and guidance (*petunjuk*) for kings prominently found in mainstream Islam. Although written in classical Malay, it incorporated many Arab and Persian words and quoted many Persian political treatises and famous stories such as the *Akhlak I-Muhsini* and *Tanbihul Gharilin*. See Khalid Hussain (ed), *Taj Us-Salatin*, p.xxi.

This is presumably, in an effort to include Malay works as part of the mainstream writing tradition and put Malay writings on par with the great political writing tradition of the Islamic world. In his formulation of the concept of leadership, Bukhari al-Jauhari was careful not to upset the mainstream ideas of leadership found in the great Islamic political writing tradition and he faithfully restated the mandatory qualities already cited by renowned classical political thinkers such as al-Farabi and al-Mawardi. Al-Farabi (d. 339H/950AD) was a Shii philosopher who was the first Muslim to harmonise Greek political philosophy with Islam. His ideas were later developed and extended by Al-Mawardi. Al-Mawardi (d450H/1058AD) wrote *al-Ahkam al-Sultaniya*, a key document for the theory of rule. He held the position of qadi in many towns namely Baghdad and acted for the Caliph Al-Qadirbillah (991-1031). See Ann K.S.Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp.71, 84.

Fn.20 p.170

According to Ruth Roded, Al-Mawardi in his *al-ahkam al-sultaniya*, chapter two, states that a woman may not undertake the position of a Minister even though the information she transmits is acceptable. This is because it involves powers, of a sovereign nature that could be regarded as foreign to women. He bases this interpretation on a *hadith* (some believed to

be a weak one) where the Prophet states that, "A people who entrusts their affairs to a woman will not prosper". A *hadith* is considered to be weak when it is related by a single narrator or it is an isolated *hadith*, that is, it is not supported and verified by a large number of people.

Fn.21 p.170

The stand that exclusively female biological defects prohibit women's participation in public life was first suggested by Aristotle in his *Politics* and the Greek philosopher's conclusions were re-echoed in both Islamic and Christian medieval treatises.

Fn. 26 p.171

According to Jelani Harun, a version of the Arab text of the *Nasihah* arrived in Aceh in late 16th or early 17th century brought by Gujarati or Arab merchants. A Malay version of this *kitab* dated 1700 is found in the University of Edinburgh library (Dc.6.73-74). In his study of both the *Nasihah* and the *Bustan*, Jelani concludes that the *Bustan* is clearly influenced by the *Nasihah*. Indeed, al-Raniri acknowledged his source from al-Gazali in his chapter II of the *Bustan*.

Fn.33 p.173

Aceh's institutions of state and laws were believed to have originated by Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah al-Kahar known as *Kanun Al-Ayi* and completed by Iskandar Muda. Owing to the role of this ruler in formulating and codifying these laws, they became known as *Kanun Meukuta Alam*.

Fn.36 p.174

According to Spellman, despotic rule normally begins by military conquest and marked by the unchecked power and capricious decision-making of one individual; despotism does not allow for political opposition, free expression, a known rule of law, an impartial judiciary and private property free from the depredations of the ruler. Under the despot, the subject has no temporal existence independent of the master, no private sphere where one's autonomy is respected.

Fn.42 p.176

This age-old practice formed the basis of Acehnese decision-making process from the level of the (*gampong*) village, to the *mukim*, (a collection of villages into districts) and the *sagi* (a federation of districts). Snouck Hurgronje wrote that Habib Abdurrahman told him that the *mupakat* (Arabic *muwafakah*) forms the strongest factor in the statescraft of an administrator. The administration of the *gampong* composed of three elements- the *keuchi* (village head), *teungku* (religious village head), *ureueng tuha* (man of wisdom). All three components had a role in the discussion and decision-making process.

Fn.53 p.178

Pieter Sourij made this remark during a Saturday audience day. Whilst he was waiting to discuss company affairs with the Sultanah, he observed that many criminal and civil cases were debated at the hall. A delinquent was brought to face the queen but after a request/appeal was made on his behalf (not mentioned who made this appeal) the queen Sourij wrote, with the soft character of a woman was moved to be merciful and pardoned the wrong-doer *doch door voorbidden (dat haar hoochbeighd naden sachten aart der vrouwen tot*

barmhartigheid beweechden) gepardoneert... It was evident that the Acehnese nowadays were subject to a *zeer debonnaire echter ontsaghelijck regeringe..*

Fn.62 p.180

Marsden wrote that “the nobles finding their power less restrained, and their individual consequence more felt under an administration of this kind than when ruled by kings (as sometimes they were with a rod of iron) supported these pageants, whom they governed as they saw fit.” He asserted that it was not probable that the queen had the power of appointing or removing any of these great officers. Mulaika Hijjas although agreeing with Marsden that the female rulers were pageant queens qualified this statement by concluding that although these women rulers presided over stately spectacle, this is not a sign of their frailty but rather of the robustness of the traditional Malay idea of the state. Auni Luthfi asserts that by the time of the second queen, “the powers of the queen was fully transferred to the Council of the twelve *orangkaya*.”

Fn.65 p.181

Snouck Hurgronje claimed that the *sagi* was in existence long before the Sultanate of Dar al-Salam. An old manuscript *Peta Aceh dan Susunan kabinet pemerintahan Aceh* showed that the *sagi* was already in existence during the reign of Iskandar Muda. Since the copier of this manuscript mentioned that this description was based on an even earlier *kitab – Tarakhir Tabakah*, then the *sagi* could even pre-date Iskandar Muda’s reign. Others, however, disagreed. It is not clear, however, whether the formation of the three *sagi* was undertaken during the reign of Sultanah Safiatuddin or her successor, Sultanah Naqiatuddin Syah. Takeshi Ito, states that Safiatuddin’s reign was characterised by the enhancement of the *orangkaya* and the formation of the three *sagis*. The *Adat Aceh* states otherwise. The *Adat Aceh*, consists of a collection of royal edicts (*sarakata*). The first edicts were compiled in 1607, during the reign of Iskandar Muda, the second during the reign of Safiatuddin Syah in 1645-46 and the third in 1708-09. The *Adat Aceh* was compiled in its present format in the 1810s. It mentioned that the *sagis* were formed during the reign of Sultanah Naqiatuddin Syah.

Fn.83 p.185

Bendahara Kayu Kelat had gathered about five thousand men to march to the palace to oppose Raja Ijau’s rule. When the Bendahara reached the palace steps, Raja Ijau adorned a green dress and a golden headscarf and went to greet him at the top of the steps accompanied by her bentara and court ladies. She threw her golden scarf to the Bendahara who immediately caught it and wrapped it round his head. He then placed his kris on the ground and kneeling, he paid obeisance to the queen by uttering the word “*daulat tuanku*”. He then left the palace and Raja Ijau went in. Curious about this dramatic turn of events, the Bendahara’s men queried him about his strange behaviour. He replied that the queen had asked him for her life in that symbolic gesture of throwing him the scarf. By accepting it, he had accepted the queen’s request.

Fn.91 p.187

The *Adat Aceh* is an important indigenous source since two-thirds of its content relates to seventeenth century Aceh. Although like most Malay texts where the author is unknown, according to Ito, internal evidence suggests many linguistic and descriptive parallels with the *Hikayat Aceh* and *Bustan us-Salatin* both written in seventeenth century Aceh. The *Adat Aceh* comprises of four parts, the first relates to the Orders for Rulers, the second, Genealogy of

Acehnese rulers, third, Customs of Kings and the fourth, List of the kingdom's sources of revenue and merchant ships. See also, Ramli Harun and Tjut Rahmah, (transliterators), *Adat Aceh*.

Fn.109 p.192

Like Iskandar Muda, Peter the Great continued to rely on personal connections at court, punished those who displeased him and relied on his force of personality but unlike Iskandar Muda, Peter the Great implemented rigid regulation, strict military discipline and regularized hierarchies of authority and jurisdiction and the tenor of official discourse favoured procedure, routine and system. But unlike Iskandar Muda, Peter the Great implemented rigid regulation, strict military discipline and regularized hierarchies of authority and jurisdiction and the tenor of official discourse did shift to favour procedure, routine and system.

Fn.114 p.194

Ito identifies indices to assess the level of commitment to the practice of Islam in a state. These are, the role of the *ulama*, public celebration of the two canonical festivals of the Muslim year, the level of observance of Friday congregational prayers, the five daily prayers, fasting in Ramadhan, the proportion of people making the hajj pilgrimage and finally the extent to which the syariah is put to effect. One immediate problem that arises when applying these kinds of indices, as Ito himself points out, is the lack of information from both indigenous and European to measure them. Nevertheless, there are some references to religious observances mentioned in European records and the third part of Adat Aceh provides useful information on how religious festivals were celebrated in the kingdom in the seventeenth century. Little information can be gleaned, though on the religious institutions, the patrons and officials, what more the daily observance of Islam amongst the people in general. See, Ito, *The World of the Adat Aceh*, p.206.

Fn.116 p.194

In this paper, Gallop states that until recently, only one royal Malay letter was known, from Iskandar Muda to King James I of England dated 1615. More recently, two other original letters have surfaced, one from Iskandar Thani of 1639 and another from Sultanah Tajul Alam of 1661. In this paper, Gallop attempts a critical examination of these three letters, with a special scrutiny of their philological, codicological and diplomatic features.

Fn.126 p.197

Elizabeth argued that she was the final arbiter of God's will so far as it manifested itself with regard to her realm. English clergymen who were initially uncomfortable with what they deemed as unnatural female rule, sort to reconcile this fact by identifying Elizabeth with Deborah. According to an interpretation of the recent past, Elizabeth was called to the English crown by God and on behalf of his people. By means of this extraordinary dispensation, he gave the English nation a second chance to effect a spiritual reformation after the declension into adulatory during Mary's reign.

Fn.135 p.200

I am indebted to Professor Jorge Santos Alves from Universidade Catolica Portuguesa, Lisbon, for this letter and his help in translation from Portuguese to English.

Fn.141 p.202

Syeikh Syamsuddin initiated Sultan Iskandar Muda into the *Naqshbandiyya* order. The study of Islam in the kingdom during that period was oriented towards speculative theosophical doctrines such as monistic Sufism initially expounded by Hamzah Fansuri and consolidated by Syeikh Syamsuddin. This doctrine states that God's essence is not different from man's, all that exists derives its existence from the light of God, the difference being only in the diverse manifestations. Human effort under appropriate guidance can unlock the secrets of divine unity and achieve union with the Creator. Al-Raniri considered this as a deviation from orthodoxy, even heretical arguing that one cannot equate the Creator and the created and the exercise to know God and to achieve unity with God is in vain.

Fn.154 p.205

I am indebted to Michael Laffan for this reference. Personal communication with Micheal Laffan, Leiden, 2005.

Fn.172 p.210

Little else is known about this structure and the layout of the mosque itself. A similar concept to this is the *maqsura* (a box or compartment built near the mihrab of the mosque where the *imam* leads the prayers, in the other parts of the Muslim empire. It is meant to protect the ruler from hostile attack.

Fn.176 p.211

The Malay *kerajaan* (having a Raja) must be inherited from the Malay world animistic and Indian influenced past. The Malay concept of *raja* could be traced to the Hindu concept of *devaraja*, in which the king was believed to be the reincarnation of the Hindu deities. Indeed kingship and pageantry are antithetical to Islam since Islam promotes equality of status whilst monarchical institution privileges hierarchical differences.

Fn.203 p.218

The curtain or *hijab* (in Arabic) is a three dimensional concept – visual, spatial and ethical. Understood in its visual dimension, it means to hide, spatially it means to separate, mark a border, a threshold, ethically, it means it belongs to the realm of the forbidden. Used in the political context, in governance, it marks a separation between the ruler and ruled. The *Hijab al-Amir*, Hijab of the Prince, or the Caliph, the most powerful man in the Muslim community, has recourse to the veil to escape the gaze of his entourage. The *hijab* refers to the curtain behind which the Caliphs sat to avoid the gaze of members of their court. Quoting the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Mernissi states that this custom was unknown to the early inhabitants of the Hidjaz, and seems to be introduced into Islam by the Umayyads under the influence of the Sassanid civilization. This custom was first practised by the fifth Caliph, Mu'awiya and was adopted by the rulers of Andalusia, North Africa and Egypt. The Fatimid dynasty (909-1171) institutionalised it into a veritable ceremonial. With the Fatimids, the sacred dimension of the Caliph acquired special significance. The Caliph, considered as the hypostasis of the Active Intelligence of the world became almost the object of worship. As such, he had to hide himself from the eyes of his faithful followers who were thus protected from the radiance of his countenance.

Fn. 209 p.219

A Dutch Resident in Siam during the reign of Prasat Thong described a procession on the river where the king was seated in the finest boat, under a decorated canopy, hidden in all kinds of costly things so that neither his body nor his face can be seen. In seventeenth century Siam, only Europeans defied the rule that no one should look upon the king as he passed on his elephant or galley. He is surrounded by nobles and courtiers who pay him reverence at the foot. The combination of outward display of wealth and the power of seclusion of the person of the ruler is a characteristic feature of Southeast Asian kingship during the period. Thus, seclusion is necessitated more by royal status rather than sex.

Fn.217 p.223

This copy fell into the hands of Muhammad Husin Hitam during the Dutch-Aceh war. Unlike Hamka, according to Rusdi Sufi, the indigenous manuscript that laid out the executive and legislative branches of the kingdom is entitled "*Qanun Meukuta Alam*". This writer is not able to locate either manuscripts but the institutions described in both these manuscripts are similar. They were the executive branch consisting of the Balai Laksamana, a kind of military arm led by an admiral and Balai Furdah, the commercial arm in charge of taxes and issuing money. The legislative branch, called the Balai Musyawarah, consisted of three branches, the Balairungsari, Balai Gadeng and Balai Majelis Mahkamah Rakyat. The Balairungsari consisted of the four senior *orangkaya*, the Balai Gadeng consisted of twenty-two prominent religious scholars in Aceh and the Balai Majelis Mahkamah Rakyat made up of seventy-three members, each representing a *muqim* in Aceh. See Rusdi Sufi, "Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah," pp.56-57. This writer found an old manuscript entitled *Peta Aceh dan susunan kabinet pemerintahan Aceh*, describing Aceh political institutions during the reign of Iskandar Muda. The institutions listed were similar to the above two manuscripts but with a few minor differences in terms of the numbers of *bulubalang* and *ulama* mentioned in the Balairungsari and Balai Gadeng. This particular manuscript does not list the members of the Balai Majelis Mahkamah Rakyat.

Fn.220 p.223

The *Adat Meukuta Alam* is a set of customs and traditions compiled during the reign of Iskandar Muda.

Fn.226 p.224

Unfortunately, no more information is available regarding this scandal. In all probability, this Muslim tutor was the same individual who the Dutch mentioned as the *oppersten paap* who was accused of having a sexual liaison with the Sultanah. See chapter 3 on the coup and counter coup that wrecked the Acehnese court.

Fn.250 p.231

Some possible ambiguities are the seemingly contradictory ideas that on the one hand women are spiritually equal to men, women have property, sexual and divorce rights and yet men have authority over women and could marry four wives (but only if certain conditions are met). Unfortunately, the very notions that women have property, spiritual and sexual rights that make it vital for men to regulate their contacts, thus men's insistence on women's seclusion. This is an ironic result of women's rights in Islam.

Fn.252 p.231

Even today, feminists dispute Islam: some holding up western standards of women's liberation urging that Islam must change whilst others contend that the answer to women's problems can be found in Islamic doctrine itself.

CONCLUSIONS

Fn.2 p.235

The concept of Stranger-hood formulated by Fernandez-Armesto is an important schema to help explain the various numerous cultural encounters in the early modern era and to understand the formation of early colonial societies. His stranger-as-arbitrator or even as king model is helpful here to understand why strangers were entrusted with power. The female ruler here could be seen as a stranger in two senses- firstly differentiated by her sex which was a novel phenomenon in Aceh and secondly she did not belong to any of the male dominated factions and thus was not bound to any. As a result, she was more likely to be accepted as non-partisan. This mediator and arbitrator role helped the Sultanah to survive her long reign.

Fn.3 p.236

Veth asserted that to maintain their influence, the nobility was very careful and jealously guarded the queens so that they would never marry. Similarly, Marsden too contended that they were particularly jealous of the Johor Sultan whose marriage with the Sultanah was not a distant probability and as a result could lay his claim on the throne of Aceh. Valentijn, too supported this view when he narrated that when the queen was about forty years old, there was a strange circumstance where the queen was reported to desire to marry a Dutchman. Although no details were given, he argued that it was the Company who refused this which he contended was prove of the Company's might over the Queen.

Fn.10 p.239

There was no philosophical confrontation of the issue of female rule amongst most Russian writers. In this respect, the Russian opinion of Catherine II and of female rule in general was more positive than that of West European contemporaries of Catherine. On the whole, Russian writers displayed much less agitation over the female issue. Catherine was desexualized to the extent that she was treated as an individual rather than as a woman.

Fn.11 p.239

Most of the writings that are favourable towards women's contributions in public affairs belong to the earlier period of Islam that is from the eighth to the ninth centuries. This is when Islamic societies appear to have allowed a great deal of prominence to women in general and in the arena of politics in particular. During the latter period, especially from the seventeenth century, women's involvement in politics is viewed derisively and women are seen as a factor contributing to the decline of the Ottoman and other Islamic dynasties. The rise of powerful concubines such as Hurrem, Sulayman I favourite concubine during his reign and Nurbanu the *haseki* and the first great *valide sultan* saw the beginnings of "the public culture of sovereignty" in the Ottoman Empire. But, Sunullah Effendi, the foremost guardian of Islam publicly lamented and described this as harmful and disruptive to the empire. He believed that women should have nothing to do with government and

sovereignty. Virtually all historians of the Ottoman Empire, whether local or Western have concurred that the influence of the harem, contributed to Ottoman decline. Interestingly enough, during this period of Islamic history, the same event of Aishah leading the Battle of the Camel is being used to argue in favour of the exclusion of women from public life. This battle is seen by most as disastrous because it resulted in the major schism that splits the Muslim community into the Sunni and Shi'i sects. This is in contrast to Safavid Iran, which held both royal men and women with an air of sanctity and elevated them almost to sainthood. Both men and women were believed to be laced with divinely-bestowed charisma and Safavid women such as Pari-Khan Khanum and Shahzadeh Sultanum were considered to have wielded considerable authority.

Fn.23 p.248

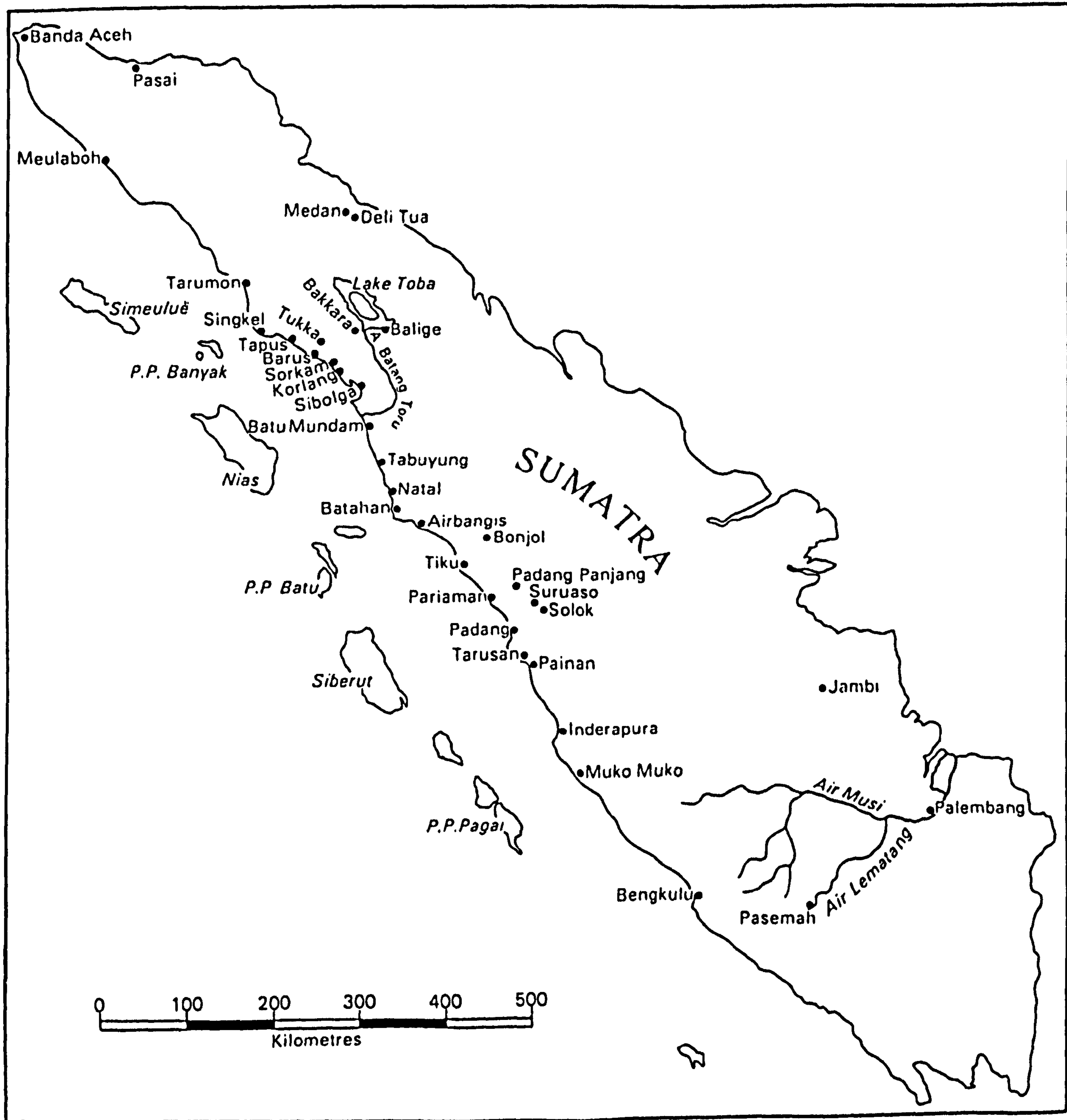
In general merchants were not regarded as diplomats nor did diplomats consider themselves merchants. In the opinion of many diplomats trading was taboo, especially in the seventeenth century. Furthermore, the Dutch Republic had not yet obtained clear sovereign status, this happened only in 1648, after the Peace of Munster. Until then, the position of the representatives of the Republic had been vague. Foreign European noblemen looked upon Dutch diplomats with disdain according them a status no higher than a merchant's. Van Goor, J., "Merchants as Diplomats: Embassies as an illustration of European-Asian relations", p.5.

Fn.25 p.249

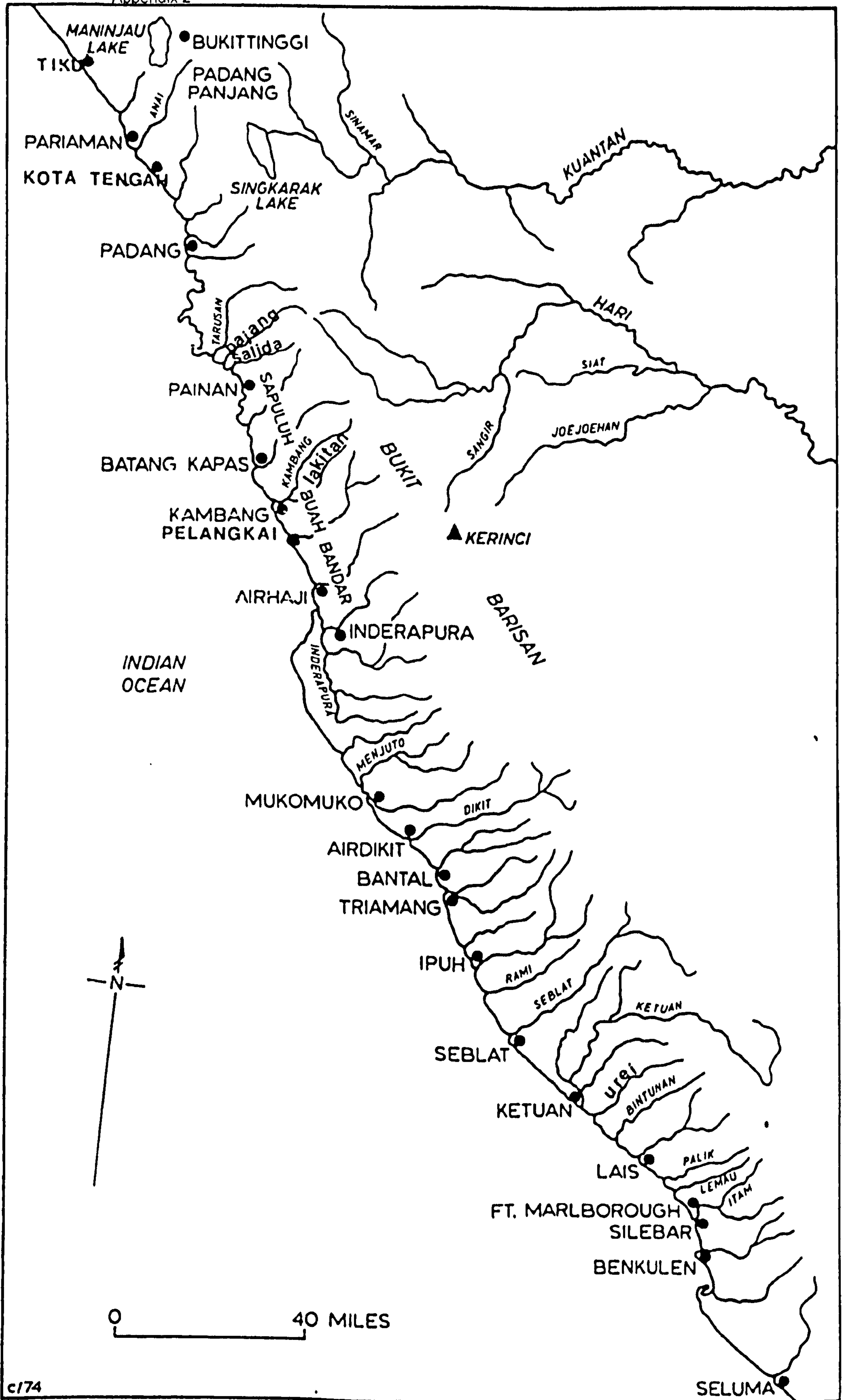
From 1669, the English and the Dutch were intensely engaged in defining such terms of trade in the East Indies. One main issue of contention was the "common right" for freedom to trade with nations not under the subjection of either company. The Secretaries of State judged it important that an article be framed to prevent future misunderstandings in places, where differences had arisen about trade such as the coast of India, in Trincomale, Ceylon, on the island of Sumatra such as Aceh, Tiku, Priaman, Indrapura, Palembang, and other places such as Benjarmassin, Macassar and Celebes. The General Article drawn up by order of the Lord Keeper, July 27, 1669.

Fn.27 p.249

Queen Elizabeth frequently wrote to the Moroccan ruler requesting legal action on behalf of her subjects, sometimes she wanted him to arbitrate among her merchants and at others between her merchants and other European traders. The English submitted to Muslim law and court in European lands. In an attempt to ensure good relations with Morocco after the Moroccan ambassador had visited England the year before, the Queen authorized passes for the two men and urged payment of all their expenses.



Map 1. Sumatra



Map taken from K-Wells. "Inderapura Sultanate".

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MS 1, Salasilah keturunan Sultan-Sultan dalam negeri Aceh; iaitu keturunan anak cucu Sultan Iskandar Zulkarnain

MS 2, Kesultanan dan pemerintahan di zaman kegemilangan kerajaan Aceh

MS 3, Kanun Syarak Kerajaan Aceh di zaman pemerintahan Sultan Alaudin Mansur Syah

MS 4, Peta Aceh dan susunan kabinet pemerintahan Aceh

MS 5, Salasilah taraf hulubalang serta hukum laut dan dagang

MS 6, Hukum menenggala sawah; hukum hutang piutang emas, gelaran resmi menteri-menteri kerajaan Aceh dizaman pemerintahan Sultan Iskandar Muda Mahkota Alam

MS 10, Hukum hak milik tanah dan perintah kerajaan Aceh kepada rakyat supaya belajar dan mengajar ilmu dunia dan akhirat

MS 11, Hukum kapal-kapal yang belayar diperairan negeri Aceh dan hukum memahalkan harga makanan dan pakaian

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