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A NOTE ON ABDULLAH'S ACCOUNT OF THE KELANTAN CIVIL WAR IN HIS KESAH PELAYARAN ABDULLAH

No doubt Abdullah can be said to be a great chronicler of his time, but as pointed out by the late A. H. Hill in his translation of *Hikayat Abdullah*, Abdullah cannot be relied upon for his facts and dates.¹ A. E. Coope prefers to call him the "first Malay reporter",² and in his *Kesah Pelayaran Abdullah*, he does give a picture of himself as a reporter, with his note-book and pencil jotting down the things he saw and conversations he had with the various people he met.³ But even as a reporter, Abdullah seems to fall somewhat short of expectation. Abdullah made the voyage to Kelantan as an interpreter to a mission sent by some Singapore merchants in connection with four *sampan pukat* belonging to the Singapore merchants which were detained in Kelantan because of a civil war taking place in that state.⁴ But in his account of this voyage, Abdullah dwells very little on the subject of his mission or of the civil war itself; and in the light of what actually took place, Abdullah's account has a lacuna which needs to be filled in.

Most of the information on the civil war was obtained by Abdullah from Raja Bendahara, one of the warring parties. From Abdullah's account we find that on one side we have Raja Bendahara and Raja Temenggong as the main participants and on the other the Yang Di-Pertuan Kelantan. This is what Abdullah has quoted from the mouth of Raja Bendahara as to the cause of the war:

¹ see A. H. Hill, *Hikayat Abdullah*, *Journal of the Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 28 Pt. 3, 1955, p. 33.

² *British Malaya*, November 1953.

³ Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munshi, *Kesah Pelayaran Abdullah*, edited by Kasim Ahmad, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1960.

⁴ A. H. Hill op cit p. 328 note no. 11.

To start from the very beginning, one night six or seven of my men went to Kampong Laut to see the *medora* (*menora*). And his (Yang Di-Pertuan Kelantan's) men were also there, more than twenty of them. For unknown reasons a fight took place between his men and mine; and his men mobbed and knifed my men killing one of them. There was a commotion. Then all his men went to his house and he had the gate locked. I ordered my man who was killed not to be buried and sent four or five men to investigate the circumstances of the killing. And when my men went to do as commanded, he refused to admit them. Then I said, 'take the murdered man and throw the body at his gate; there is not going to be a burial if the circumstances of the death not clear.' When he saw that there was a big gathering, he thought that they were going to attack him. So he pulled up his guns and fired at my house; members of my family jumped down weeping and were in confusion. And my house was perforated by cannon balls. Because right was on my side, none of the shots hit me. Then when I saw all this, I ordered retaliation. Raja Temenggong and also Raja Kampong Laut were on my side; that is the cause of this war.

And moreover, do listen Tuan Syed (obviously Raja Bendahara mistook Abdullah for an Arab!), when my late father (*marhum ayah*) was dying, he did not indicate as to which one of us, his four sons, was to succeed him except saying 'fight among yourselves, whoever wins, he will be the Yang Di-Pertuan Kelantan: it was the same with me before, because of my strength and bravery, I became the ruler of Kelantan.'

And the late ruler passed away. After that all of us held a council. He was made the ruler of the state, and he gave me the title of Bendahara, my middle brother Temenggong, and another brother Raja Kampong Laut. Now this is what we get in return. Now I do not want this title of Bendahara, and he is also not the Yam Tuan. Now whosoever's luck it is, he will be the ruler of Kelantan. At present every one of us has sent an emissary to Siam with valuable presents. Whoever is graced by the King of Siam, he will be the Yang Di-Pertuan Kelantan. . . . 5

Apparently Abdullah accepted this trivial motivation as the cause of the civil war. Perhaps Abdullah was not interested in the event itself; it appears that more important to him was the plight of the common people, the *ra'yat*, caught in the turmoils of the war. And it satisfied him that what brought about the civil war was nothing more than just the whimsical behaviour of the *Raja* class. When he was heading for home, he could not but reflect again on the legacy left by the late Sultan, and he was appalled at the suggestion that succession to the throne had to be fought out among the brothers.⁶ However, on further examination, we shall see that there was more to it than what was told by the Raja Bendahara. And who was this Raja Bendahara?

To answer this, we can begin with the question of date first. Abdullah states in his *Kesah Pelayaran Abdullah* that the voyage takes place in the year 1253 A.H. and in greater detail he writes that the Singapore mission leaves "at midnight on 1st of Muharram on the

⁵ Abdullah, *op cit* p. 71—72.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 107.

eve of Wednesday that is on 27th March, 1838 A.D.”.⁷ There seems to be a discrepancy here between the two dates; if we take the Hejira date as the right one, then the Gregorian date should be 7th April, 1837.⁸ Abdullah arrives back in Singapore “at about seven p.m., on 29th Muharram, 1254 A.H., on the eve of Saturday....”.⁹ Could it have been 1253 A.H.? For if it is 1254 A.H., then voyage must have taken just over a year according to Muslim calendar. And according to him he finishes writing the account of his voyage on “Friday morning 1st Dzulqaedah 1254 A.H.... that is on 25th August 1852”.¹⁰ Here again we find that Abdullah is rather confused with his dates: the Gregorian date should be 16th January, 1839. But if we take the end of his journey as 29th Muharram 1254 A.H. and he finished his work on 1st Dzulqaedah 1254 A.H., then there was a lapse of only 9 months. Considering this short span of time, Abdullah’s memory of his journey must have been still fresh and moreover, according to him, he had taken down notes of the incidents. But could Abdullah have taken one whole year to make the journey to Kelantan, that is between 1st Muharram 1253 and 29th Muharram 1254 A.H.? Even considering the hazards of a seavoyage at that time, a period of 29 days is more plausible, that is between 1st and 29th Muharram, if the year is 1253 A.H. In fact the account of the voyage does not give the impression that it was a long voyage. However, in *Hikayat Abdullah*, Abdullah writes: “hingga sampai-lah kapada suatu tahun aku pergi ka-Pahang, Trengganu dan Kelantan....”.¹¹ Though this may be interpreted as the voyage taking one whole year, it can also be interpreted as the voyage taking place in a certain year. However, there is another possibility that we can consider. The Gregorian date as given by Abdullah as to the beginning of his voyage, i.e. 27th March, 1838 A.D., is equivalent to 1st Muharram 1254 A.H. If Abdullah has

⁷ Ibid.: “....pukul dua belas malam, ia-itu kapada tarikh sanat 1253 tahun, kapada sa-hari bulan Muharram, kapada malam Arba’a, ia-itu kapada 27 haribulan March, tahun masehi sanat 1838....” p. 23.

⁸ The conversion of the Hejira to Gregorian date is based on the method in G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville, *The Muslim and Christian Calendars*, Oxford University Press, London, 1963.

⁹ Abdullah, op cit: “....Kira2 pukul tujuh malam, ia-itu sembilan lekor hari-bulan Muharram, sanat 1254 tahun, malam Sabtu....” p. 119.

¹⁰ Ibid.: “Maka tamat-lah kesah ini kapada tarikh sanat 1254 tahun pada sa-hari bulan Dzulqaedah, hari Juma’at.... ia-itu pada tahun Masehi 1852, kapada lima lekar haribulan August.” p. 124.

¹¹ *Hikayat Abdullah*, R. Roolvink and Datoek Besar (ed.) Djambatan, Djakarta, 1953, p. 391.

made a mistake as regards the Muslim year, then the voyage must have begun on 1st Muharram 1254 and lasted only 29 days. Both Anker Rentse and A. H. Hill have placed Abdullah's voyage to Kelantan in 1837, and in the confusion of dates in *Kesah Pelayaran Abdullah*, the voyage could either have taken place between 7th April and 5th May 1837 or between 27th March and 24th April 1838. And in those two years, there were two incidents in the nature of civil war taking place in Kelantan.¹²

In the year 1253 A.H. or 1837 A.D. there took place in Kelantan a civil war which involved the question of succession to the throne. This incident took place not long after the death of Sultan Muhammad I who died in 1251 A.H. or 1835 A.D.¹³ Sultan Muhammad I had no children (hence his popular title *Mandul*), but had adopted a son of his brother, Long Tan Temenggong, who was called Tuan Senik. This prince who later became Sultan Muhammad II was nicknamed "Mulut Merah" or "Red-lipped". Another brother of Sultan Muhammad I, Long Zainal (Jenal) Bendahara conspired with the Chinese at Galas¹⁴ to kill Long Tan Temenggong; and when this was found out, Long Zainal was driven out of Kelantan. However, on the death of Sultan Muhammad I, he returned to Kelantan. He was accepted to be the Sultan of Kelantan; but Tuan Senik and his brothers made him promise to rule justly.¹⁵ The brothers, the sons of the late Long Tan Temenggong, were then given the following titles: Tuan Senik Mulut Merah was given the title of Temenggong and his brother Tengku Senik Penambang (or simply Raja Penambang) became Raja Bendahara. The reign of Long Zainal was a short one (1251—1253 A.H.) and was besetted with disorders because of his unjust (*dzalim*) rule. And this seems to have been the cause of his nephews, mainly Raja Temenggong Tuan Senik Mulut Merah and Raja Bendahara Tengku Senik Penambang, unfurling the flag of rebellion.¹⁶ This struggle ended with Long Zainal being driven to Bangnara in Siamese territory

¹² The sources are mainly *Hikayat Seri Kelantan*, *Rengkasen Chetera Kelantan* and a Trengganu text edited by H. Marriot (see Bibliography).

¹³ The actual date given in the Trengganu text edited by H. Marriot is 27th Safar 1251 A.H. which is equivalent to 24th June, 1835.

¹⁴ Different sources give different places; see *Hikayat Seri Kelantan* p. 20.

¹⁵ *Rengkasen Chetera Kelantan* p. 37.

¹⁶ The fact that Tuan Senik Mulut Merah and Tengku Senik Penambang were the main opponents of Long Zainal is clearly stated by the Trengganu text ("...maka muafakat kedua Tuan Senik akan mengambil kerajaan Long Zainal....").

and Tuan Senik Mulut Merah being chosen by the Siamese king to be the ruler of Kelantan towards the end of 1253 A.H.¹⁷ Though the Malay sources give no better motivation for the rebellion than that of Long Zainal not being a popular ruler, there is a strong suspicion that what caused the civil war was the contention for the throne at the death of a ruler. The history of Kelantan has shown that the state had always been beset by troubles involving the succession to the throne following the death of a ruler.¹⁸ In fact, soon after Tuan Senik Mulut Merah became the ruler, trouble broke out again between him and his brother, Raja Bendahara Tengku Senik Penambang. This is the second incident.¹⁹ At the end of the previous incident, Tengku Senit Penambang was given the title of Sultan Dewa (the Siamese title is *Phya Che Puan*) and the status of that of an "elder statesman" or an adviser ("*orang tuaz lihat negeri*").²⁰ However, Tengku Senik Penambang did not behave as one with the status of an "elder statesman" because when one of his men, Awang Chik by name, was arrested, he gave the man his protection. That, according to the Malay sources, sparked a conflict between him and his brother, Tuan Senik Mulut Merah, who at that time was the Yang Di-Pertuan Kelantan. This incident ended with Siamese intervention and Tengku Senik Penambang was removed to Siam. Undoubtedly what really caused the trouble was the dissatisfaction of Tengku Senik Penambang in not being made the ruler himself by the King of Siam. We notice that according to Raja Bendahara as quoted by Abdullah every one of the parties involved sent emissaries to Siam with valuable presents. It is clear that in the civil war of 1837, Tuan Senik Mulut Merah was favoured by the Siamese and Tengku Senik Penambang, not being at all happy about this, seized the first opportunity to topple his brother.

Coming back to our question of who is the Raja Bendahara of Abdullah's account, we have to discuss what the Raja Bendahara told him in the light of the two civil wars related above. From Raja Bendahara's version of the incident, the struggle was between brothers. This would straight away point to the second incident, for in the first

¹⁷ *Rengkasen Chetera Kelantan* p. 40.

¹⁸ Even in the second half of the nineteenth century, there have been troubles over the question of succession. See W. A. Graham, *Kelantan*, Glasgow, 1908, pp. 49—54.

¹⁹ The Trengganu text does not give this incident and *Rengkasen Chetera Kelantan* places it three years after the ascension of Tuan Senik Mulut Merah.

²⁰ *Hikayat Seri Kelantan* p. 115.

incident the struggle was between Tengku Senik Penambang and Tuan Senik Mulut Merah on one side and their uncle, Long Zainal, on the other (see the accompanying genealogy). However, if we look at the parties involved, we are inclined to believe that it is the first incident because when Long Zainal became the ruler, his main opponents, Tuan Senik Mulut Merah and Tengku Senik Penambang, were already given the titles of Temenggong and Bendahara respectively. And on both occasions we find that Tengku Senik Penambang had been in the opposition. Could Tengku Senik Penambang then be the Raja Bendahara whom Abdullah met? It is possible, especially if it is the first incident that Abdullah refers to, because in that incident Tengku Senik Penambang was already known as Raja Bendahara. If it is the second incident, it is still possible that the person in question is Tengku Senik Penambang for even if he had by that time assumed the title of Sultan Dewa, he could still be referred to as Raja Bendahara, considering the short space of time between the two incidents. Moreover, it would be to his advantage to still call himself Raja Bendahara if he was asserting his claim to the throne. In other words, by doing that, he was implying that he did not recognise the decision of the Siamese. And to lend further strength to this assertion, we note that according to Abdullah, the *kampung* of the Raja Bendahara is about one mile from the place called "Pengkalan Tambang". And this place, even today, is known to the people of Kelantan simply as "Penambang". Because this place was under the immediate control of Tengku Senik, he was called Tengku Senik Penambang (or just Raja Penambang) so as to distinguish him from his brothers. Another family relationship as accounted by Abdullah needs clarification. Raja Bendahara refers to the late Sultan as "*marhum ayah*". This late ruler cannot be anyone else except Sultan Muhammad I. And Sultan Muhammad I whose *wasiat* seems to be strangely at variance with the usual *wasiat* of dying kings in Malay historical works was an uncle to both Tengku Senik Penambang and Tuan Senik Mulut Merah and a brother to Long Zainal. According to Abdullah's understanding of the matter, the relationship between the late Sultan and Raja Bendahara is that of father and son,²¹ but whoever is the Raja Bendahara, this relationship is not possible as Sultan Muhammad I left no children (see above). It is possible, on the other hand, that the term "*marhum ayah*" was meant to refer to an uncle, or any other older relative within the royal

²¹ Abdullah, *op cit*, p. 107.

family circle.²² Thus, the most probable person to be the Raja Bendahara of Abdullah's account seems to be Tuan Senik Penambang. And as to which incident is the civil war referred to by Abdullah, the little that we can gather from his work seems to point to the civil war of 1837.

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²² Actually, in another text of *Kesah Pelayaran Abdullah* edited by R. J. Wilkinson, the term used is "farhum paduka ayahanda". (Malaya Publishing House, Singapore, sixth edition, p. 60).

APPENDIX

A GENEALOGY SHOWING THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE TWO CIVIL WARS