Farida R. Wargadalem, *Kesultanan Palembang dalam Pusaran Konflik (1804–1825)*.

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In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Sultanate of Palembang amazed almost all European writers because of its wealth and vast influence. Thomas Stamford Raffles described the Sultan of Palembang as one of the richest Malay kings in the archipelago. The Sultan's warehouses were supposedly filled with all sorts of foreign currency, shimmering gold, and other luxurious items. Despite its affluence and expansive power, however, few contemporary scholars have written about Palembang.

Even before the Sultanate was founded, the Palembang region was the homeland of Sriwijaya, one of the most important and influential kingdoms in Southeast Asia. But again, taking into consideration Sriwijaya's vast influence spanning a couple of centuries, its expansive trading routes, alliances, and vassal states throughout Southeast Asia, a surprisingly small number of comprehensive studies have been conducted on this empire. This is probably due to the fact that the Palembang area is located in wet marshy riverine areas. Numerous artifacts have been unearthed by archaeologists, yet much additional evidence of the two empires certainly remains buried under the mud of the Musi River and its marshes. Archival records on Palembang from the VOC, which was on the verge of bankruptcy during period of contact, are also comparatively few.

Kesultanan Palembang dalam Pusaran Konflik (1804–1825), written by Farida Wargadalem on the basis of her PhD thesis at the University of Gajahmada, Yogyakarta, is therefore a welcome addition to the limited literature available on Palembang history. The Sultanate of Palembang was founded by Sultan Abdul Rahman (1659–1702). His long reign was replaced by that of Sultan Muhammad Mansur (1702–1714), followed by Sultan Komaruddin (1714–1724), Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin I (1724–1757), Sultan Ahmad Najamuddin (1757–1776), Sultan Mahmud Bahauddin (1776–1804), and last but definitely not least, Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II (1804–1821). Farida Wargadalem's book focuses on the period spanning the reign of the latter Sultan. It was an exciting and intriguing period. Despite Palembang's marginal position in Indonesian historiography, the author calls attention to a wealth of historical documentation in English, Dutch, and local Palembang sources.

Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin was an intelligent statesman-poet with an imposing character ('dictatorial', according to Dutch sources). His son Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II was the epitome of heroism in the eyes of the people of Palembang: cunning, clever, and charismatic. It is no surprise that his name evokes pride in many Palembang hearts. As the eldest of Sultan Muhammad

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Bahaudin's four sons, Mahmud Badaruddin was born as Raden Hasan Pangeran Ratu. After his father's death, he became sultan under the name of Mahmud Badaruddin II. He appointed his brothers to help him in governing the sultanate: Pangeran Adi Menggala became Pangeran Adipati, Pangeran Adi Kesuma became Pangeran Aryo Kesuma, and Pangeran Nata Kesuma became Pangeran Suryo Kesumo. Pangeran Adipati had the important task of instructing the crown prince (Pangeran Ratu) on the ins and outs of becoming a sultan later on. The other three brothers were tasked as advisors and aides of government.

During Mahmud Badaruddin's reign, power struggles between the Dutch, English, and French wrought war and havoc in Europe. The Dutch king decreed the Netherlands Indies to be handed over to the English rather than surrendering the colony to the French. However, after some time, the Dutch wanted their colony back and demanded the English to surrender their hold on the archipelago. This was the start of what Farida Wargadalem calls the vortex of conflict (*pusaran konflik*) in the history of Palembang. At the same time, another vortex of conflict, that of internal strife within the Sultanate, was also raging. According to Wargadalem, this internal conflict, probably more than any other factor, was determinant in causing the downfall of Mahmud Badaruddin II and the Sultanate of Palembang. This proposition makes Wargadalem's book most interesting. Not many historians from Palembang have dared to even suggest the existence of rivalry, strife, and contention within the Sultanate. Even fewer have been so bold as to propound that ambition and avarice caused its ruination. The book is also intriguing because, as a Palembang woman, Farida Wargadalem has a unique indigenous insight in the dynamics of the Palembang aristocratic family.

As we read in the book, Mahmud Badaruddin II had appointed his brother as Pangeran Adipati, who was tasked with the upbringing and training of the crown prince—Putera Mahkota—to become sultan in due time. As a second son, it was impossible for the Pangeran Adipati to ever become Sultan, although he passionately dreamt of it. The presence of the Dutch and English in Palembang, and their machinations to subjugate Mahmud Badaruddin II and conquer the Sultanate, could be seen as a godsend for Pangeran Adipati. They presented the perfect opportunity for him to hazard an attempt to seize power and become Sultan. Thus, the vortex of internal conflict within the Sultanate unfolded.

The closing pages of Farida Wargadalem's book evokes several *what if* questions. What if the Dutch and English had not competed to gain control over Palembang? Would Pangeran Adipati still have tried to gain a stronger foothold in the Sultanate? Would he have tried to achieve his ambitions through another way, by murdering his brother, or through revolt and revolution? What if Mah-

mud Badaruddin II had been spared this internal conflict with his brother and only needed to face the Dutch and English? Would it have enabled him to better confront and resist their assaults? What strategies, in that case, would the Dutch and English have taken to overthrow the Sultan? And finally, if greed and avarice had not beset Pangeran Adipati, would Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin have been able to prolong or sustain his reign, as the kings of Java had done under Dutch colonialism?

Farida Wargadalem raises intriguing new questions, leaving the reader with a feeling of wanting to know more. This is more than enough indication that her book is worth reading.

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