

A RUSSIAN IN KELANTAN?

by

A. J. S. REID

Reprint from "PENINJAU SEJARAH" Vol. 1 No. 2 DECEMBER 1966

A RUSSIAN IN KELANTAN?

by A.J.S. REID

Department of History, University of Malaya.

A fascinating addition to the international field of Southeast Asian scholarship has recently come from an enthusiastic group of pioneers in Russia.¹ In the historical field the most notable is Elizaveta Ivanovna Gnevusheva, lecturer in Indonesian history at the University of Moscow. Her article last year in the learned Dutch journal the *Bijdragen*² marks the recognition that her work is not of significance to Russians only.

Her *Bijdragen* article is primarily concerned with the dramatic part played by a Russian adventurer, Vasily Mamalyga, in assisting the defence of Lombok against the Netherlands colonial army in 1892-4. She also sheds an interesting light on a little known aspect of Malaysian history, however. This is the Anglo-Siamese contest for Kelantan in 1897-1902, which has usually been dismissed cursorily by British writers in a manner which suggests the people of Kelantan had little part in deciding their own fate. Miss Gnevusheva, on the other hand, has depicted a gallant fight on the part of Kelantan, aided by the Russian hero of her story, for independence from both powers.

Miss Gnevusheva's story, as far as it affects Malaysia, is as follows.

After four years in a Dutch prison, Mamalyga had been allowed to return to his native Moldavia in 1899. Two years later he returned to the East as cook on board a Russian steamer, and disembarked in Singapore in June, 1901. He had apparently intended to continue to Java, but was naturally forbidden to do so by the Dutch. Remaining in Singapore, he was the subject of two despatches (August, 1901 and October, 1902) from the Imperial Russian Consul in Singapore, Baron Kister, which provide the basis of Miss Gnevusheva's material for this part of her account.

According to Miss Gnevusheva's information, Kelantan was at that time an independent state, being subjected to strong pressure from Siam. The ruler of Kelantan looked to Britain for help against the Siamese. In the words of Baron Kister, "The Governor (Swettenham) was prepared to cooperate with Kelantan, but sought in exchange that Kelantan should join the Federated Malay States, in

1. This work only became generally known outside Russia at the International Conference of Orientalists in Moscow in 1960. One of the papers presented was a Marxian interpretation of the main characters of the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, by the Russian B. Parnicki. Later, in 1962, E.I. Gnevusheva published a collection of biographies of Russian men of letters, mainly biologists, who had written on Indonesia before 1917.

2. E.I. Gnevusheva, "De Levensgeschiedenis van W.P. Mamalyga (Malygin). "Rust-verstoorder" in Nederlands-Indie (trans. L.E.L. Sluimers) *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde*, 121 (1965), Part 3, pp. 303-349.

A RUSSIAN IN KELANTAN?

by A. J. R. RUSSELL

Department of History, University of Malaya

A preliminary addition to the international field of Southeast Asian scholarship has recently come from an unexpected group of scholars in Russia. In the past, the field has been dominated by the Russian Far East, but in the last few years it has been the turn of the Malay Peninsula. The Russian Far East has been the focus of much of the work in the field of Russian history, and the Malay Peninsula has been the focus of much of the work in the field of Malay history.

It is a Russian scholar, V. A. Gerasimov, who has written the history of Kelantan. He has written the history of Kelantan in 1901-4. The book is an interesting study of a little known aspect of Malay history. It is the first book to be written about the Kelantan in 1901-4, which has usually been dismissed as a period of little interest. It is a book which suggests the people of Kelantan, but it is not a book which suggests the people of Kelantan. It is a book which suggests the people of Kelantan, but it is not a book which suggests the people of Kelantan.

The Chinese in Kelantan, by V. A. Gerasimov, is a book which suggests the people of Kelantan, but it is not a book which suggests the people of Kelantan.

After that, there is a book by V. A. Gerasimov, which suggests the people of Kelantan, but it is not a book which suggests the people of Kelantan. It is a book which suggests the people of Kelantan, but it is not a book which suggests the people of Kelantan. It is a book which suggests the people of Kelantan, but it is not a book which suggests the people of Kelantan.

It is a book which suggests the people of Kelantan, but it is not a book which suggests the people of Kelantan. It is a book which suggests the people of Kelantan, but it is not a book which suggests the people of Kelantan. It is a book which suggests the people of Kelantan, but it is not a book which suggests the people of Kelantan.

It is a book which suggests the people of Kelantan, but it is not a book which suggests the people of Kelantan. It is a book which suggests the people of Kelantan, but it is not a book which suggests the people of Kelantan. It is a book which suggests the people of Kelantan, but it is not a book which suggests the people of Kelantan.

other words should completely submit to England."³ Raja Ismail of Selangor (wrongly portrayed by Miss Gnevusheva as Sultan of Selangor) warned the Raja of Kelantan against accepting British help. In 1902, he sent Mamalyga to Kelantan at the head of 100 men, to organise its defences on an independent basis. Mamalyga carried a letter of recommendation from Raja Ismail, "in the guise of a man who intended to obtain concessions for the exploration of mineral deposits, etc."⁴ Baron Kister warned Raja Ismail against employing a man like Mamalyga, but received the reply that all Malays knew 'Malygin' and placed full confidence in him.

Here the narrative breaks off. Miss Gnevusheva was unable to trace any records as to Mamalyga's further moves, though she still has hopes that something may turn up in Russian archives or those of the Tsarist Embassy in Britain, to which Kister reported.

Those more familiar with Malaysian history do not need to be reminded that Baron Kister's picture was not an entirely accurate one, though it reflected the popular view in Singapore at that time. Siamese influence in Kelantan was of long standing, symbolised by the controversial 'bunga mas' sent to Bangkok as early as 1810.⁵ The Kelantan sources themselves make clear the crucial influence of Siam in the settlement of the disputes which broke out over almost every nineteenth century succession to the throne.⁶

In general the British Government respected the special position of Siam in Kelantan and Terengganu. The frequent attempts of local officials to reverse this policy were resisted on the grounds that the integrity of Siam, *vis-à-vis* France in particular, was a vital British interest. Specific recognition of Kelantan and Terengganu as 'dependencies' of Siam was finally granted by Britain in 1899 as part of the settlement of the Perak-Raman boundary.

With the appointment of the energetic and able Phya Sukhom as governor of the Songkhla region in 1897, the occasional Siamese interventions of the past were replaced by a much more modern, systematic and pervasive presence. A resident commissioner, a post office, a gunboat and a permanent garrison under a Danish officer were all introduced into Kelantan by Phya Sukhom in the period 1897-1901.⁷ This naturally gave rise to some Malay resentment. Raja Senik,

3. *Ibid.* p. 346.

4. The words are again Baron Kister's; *ibid.* p. 346.

5. Nik Ahmad b. Hj. Nik Hassan 'Kajian Rengkas Mengenai Keturunan Long Yunus Kelantan Duri Tahun 1756 Hingga Tahun 1920', *Jurnal Persatuan Sejarah Kelantan*, 1 (1964-5), p. 41.

6. Mohd. Taib b. Osman (ed.) *Hikayat Seri Kelantan* (unpublished thesis, University of Malaya, 1961); Kassim Ahmad (ed.), *Shah'ir Musuh Kelantan* (unpublished thesis, University of Malaya, 1961); H. Marriot, 'A Fragment of the History of Trengganu and Kelantan', *JSBRAS* 72 (1916).

7. Phya Sri Samadheb to Lansdowne 6 Sept. 1902; Swettenham to Chamberlain 10 Sept. 1902; *Foreign Office Confidential Prints (FOCP)* 'Further Papers Respecting Siam', Vol. XIV.

later known as Sultan Muhammad IV (1899-1920), became increasingly fearful for his own traditional position in the state. His fears were compounded in February, 1902, when the Siamese imprisoned Raja Abdul Kadir of Patani, whose wife was Senik's own aunt, and whose state was bound to Kelantan by very close cultural, historic and personal ties.

On the British side there were those only too eager to encourage Kelantan to assert its complete independence of Siam and to rely on Britain to defend it. First among these was R.W. Duff, who had obtained from the Raja exclusive commercial rights over half of Kelantan and wished to retain them free of any Siamese control. The Governor of the Straits Settlements, Sir Frank Swettenham, also aimed to restrict Siamese influence to the absolute minimum in Kelantan, as well as in Terengganu and Patani. Swettenham was too well aware of his government's policy to have made any such suggestion as described by Miss Gnevusheva. It is true, however, that he did all possible to change the British policy for a stronger one by dwelling in his despatches on the past independence of Kelantan and the present danger of revolution and foreign intervention. He eventually succeeded to the extent that Britain forced Siam to appoint an Englishman as Siamese Resident in Kelantan under the terms of a new Siam-Kelantan treaty of October 1902.⁸

British records give a very clear picture of Raja Senik's desperate fear of the Siamese after the arrest of the Raja of Patani. In May, 1902, Senik visited Singapore and appealed to Swettenham for a British Protectorate against Siam.⁹ This was declined, although Swettenham probably encouraged the Raja privately. To allay Long Senik's fears of a Siamese coup, Swettenham even sent him back to Kelantan in a British gunboat. Before leaving Singapore the Raja recruited a small number of Sikh policemen to protect him personally and strengthen his position against the Siamese.¹⁰ On August 20th, a hundred more Sikhs left Singapore on the S.S. *Flevo* to serve the Raja of Kelantan. According to the newspaper account, these had been brought together by "the Singapore agent for the Sultan of Kelantan"¹¹ — possibly a reference to Raja Ismail. On arrival in Kelantan, the Sikhs apparently succeeded in inducing a more cautious attitude on the part of the Siamese.

Swettenham's despatches support the notion that the Raja of Kelantan was prepared to fight for his independence against the Siamese. He was clearly not prepared to do so, however, in the face of a united Anglo-Siamese front, such

8. Duff's case can be seen in Arnold Wright and T.H. Reid, *The Malay Peninsula. A Record of British Progress in the Middle East* (London, 1912), pp. 153-65. A moderate Siamese case is put by W.A. Graham, *Kelantan* (Glasgow, 1908), pp. 49-54.

9. Swettenham to Chamberlain 3 June 1902, telegram, *FOCP* 'Further Papers respecting Siam', Vol. XIV.

10. Memo by Clifford 23 Sept. 1902, in *ibid.* Swettenham to Chamberlain 23 Aug. 1902, C.O. 273/283.

11. *Malay Mail* (Kuala Lumpur), 12 Sept. 1902.

After this rebuff, Raja Ismail appears to have drifted into the relatively sophisticated Muslim circle of Singapore, which was dominated by Syed Mohammed Alsagoff and Sultan Abu Bakar of Johor. In 1892 he was employed by these

15. Minutes of the Second Meeting of the Selangor State Council, 12 June 1877. I am indebted to Dr. I. Kathirithamby for this reference.

In the period 1885-93 the Dutch had been following a very cautious policy in Aceh, motivated by economic crisis and popular disgust with the war. They limited themselves to the occupation of a few square miles of territory around Kota Raja and three small posts in the territories of their coastal allies. Meanwhile they made various attempts to induce the Sultan's party at Keumala to place themselves under Dutch sovereignty in a compromise settlement of the war. To this end the intervention of influential Muslims from Malaysia with the Achenees was tolerated by the Dutch authorities. The Achenee leaders welcomed all such missions of peace, which tended to raise the status of the Sultanate among Achenees and to increase hopes of outside help. They always avoided giving a definite reply to the Dutch terms, however.

Just what advice Raja Ismail gave to the Acheneese can only be guessed. Maxwell, the British Colonial Secretary, and Lavino, Dutch Consul-General in Singapore, who were both consulted before the mission, believed it was motivated by a genuine desire for peace. Ismail reportedly fully to both these men on his return in terms which suggested that he had tried to persuade the Acheneese leaders that their best hope was in coming to some compromise with the Dutch.¹⁷ On the other hand the Dutch military in Aceh were very suspicious of Ismail, believing that he had done more to raise Acheneese hopes of outside help than to lower

16. Interestingly, the bearer of this appeal was Syed Dzin, born in Acheh of a Kedah Arab father, and well connected in Acheh and Deli. Could this be the same man as the Syed Dzin who fought on the same side as Ismail during the Selangor civil war (Gullick, p. 38)?

17. Smith to Ripon 19 Oct. 1892, C.O. 273/183. Lavino to Pijnacker Hordijk 3 Aug. 1892, copy G.G. to Kolonien 11 Aug. 1892, Algemeene Rijksarchief Kol. Kab. X16, Dossier 6214.

them.¹⁸ The following year an Achenese mission reached Penang on its way to appeal for Turkish intervention.¹⁹

The material provided by Miss Gnevusheva, therefore, helps us to form a shadowy picture of one of the most interesting Malays of his time. He was obviously intelligent and sufficiently adaptable to win the trust of Europeans and Malays of very different persuasions. It seems likely that he had a genuine concern to preserve as much as possible of the pride and independence of the Malay people, not by a futile attempt to return to the past, but by facing up to the realities of power during this heyday of imperialism.

Miss Gnevusheva is to be congratulated for having made a start. We must be grateful that her work is stimulating a scholarly interest in Southeast Asian history in the Soviet Union. Let us hope that one consequence is the gradual opening of Russian archival material on a wider range of subjects.

18. Deijkerhoff to Lavino 26 Sept. 1892, copy G.G. to Kol. 13 Oct. 1892, A.R.A. Kol. Kab. XI6, Dossier 6214.

19. Kruyt to Pijnacker Hordijk 6 Apr. 1893, copy Buitenlandse Zaken to Kolonien 2 May 1893, A.R.A. Kol. Kab. R5, Dossier 6218.