

PREFACE

The Achehnese epic published here in text and translation was mentioned for the first time in Van Langen's *Handleiding voor de beoefening van de Atjehsche taal* ('Manual of Achehnese'), published by the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde in 1889. In this book we find (pp. 151-156) a short and apparently somewhat adapted fragment of the story told in the 6th episode of Part I of the edition below. Then, in 1894, Snouck Hurgronje dedicated ample space to it in his famous *De Atjèhers* (Vol. II, pp. 92-106; *The Achehnese*, Vol. II, pp. 88-100).

Besides giving an excellent synopsis of its contents Snouck Hurgronje praised it warmly on account of its historical value and outstanding literary merits. But owing to the rudimentary condition of the study of the Achehnese language and, in particular, the lack of a comprehensive dictionary, there was little prospect of its being edited, let alone translated, for some time to come. Not until the publication of Hoessein Djajadiningrat's two volume *Atjèhsch-Nederlandsch Woordenboek* ('Achehnese-Dutch Dictionary') could this work be taken in hand. From Hoessein Djajadiningrat's careful collation of the two redactions available in his time, which is found in Cod. Or. Leiden 8018, it might perhaps be inferred that he toyed with the idea of editing this important text. At all events he thoroughly studied the Achehnese epics, and his Dictionary abounds with quotations from them, and this proved very helpful.

In 1926 I started collecting copies of the Hikajat Potjut Muhamat, and in the thirties I began preparing a popular edition for publication by Balai Pustaka, based on the copies in my possession. However, this plan had to be given up after the completion of one third of the text. During World War II Mr. H. T. Damsté, an expert on things Achehnese, well-known for his numerous publications on the recent history and literature of Aceh, worked on an edition of the text and the preparation of a Dutch translation, basing himself on a copy from the estate of Snouck Hurgronje. Although the translation was completed, the work was not ready for the press when Damsté passed away (1954). So it

remained unpublished; it is now in the Leiden University Library, Cod. Or. 8669.

For completeness' sake I make mention of two papers by James T. Siegel, the titles of which will be found in the bibliography. Apart from sometimes questionable translations of a number of lines culled from the epic and highly subjective speculations in connection with these they contain hardly anything new. (While this book was in the press, my attention was drawn to a translation of the Hikajat which is included in Siegel's new publication *Shadow and Sound, the Historical Thought of a Sumatran People*, University of Chicago Press, 1979.)

When preparing this edition and translation I did not make use of Damsté's transcription and translation, for one thing because I did not wish to plough with another man's heifer, and, moreover, because after taking cognizance of all the available MSS. I fixed on another redaction of the text as more appropriate for edition. The manuscript edited and translated here is MS. Jakarta 48 Dj., a well written copy in Arabic character, which offers the most comprehensive text of the complete story.

Sure enough this is not the original text as it was recited by Teungku Lam Rukam, the author of the epic. This redaction has passed through many hands before it grew into what it is now. It may perhaps be assumed that the short redactions, and in particular MS. A, where we find the most detailed colophon and where the story of the Rawa war is missing, are nearest to the original. But the diversity of redactions bears evidence to the fact that several copyists have set themselves the task of amplifying the original text and elaborating the scenes in which the events revolving around the principal characters are enacted. Even so, the reader will observe that in our text there are two sections left which would have benefited considerably from a lengthier and more detailed treatment, *viz.*, the opening scene and the description of Pangulèe Peunaroë's tragic undoing. Fragments borrowed from other manuscripts in which these episodes are more satisfactorily dealt with, will be found elsewhere in this book.

As regards the spelling of my transcription, I have followed the orthography of Djajadiningrat's Dictionary, with some slight differences, the most notable of which are that I use *u* instead of *oe*, *o* instead of *ò*, and omit the diaeresis on *e* following *è* and *eu*, as, for example, in *lhèe* and *keubeue*.