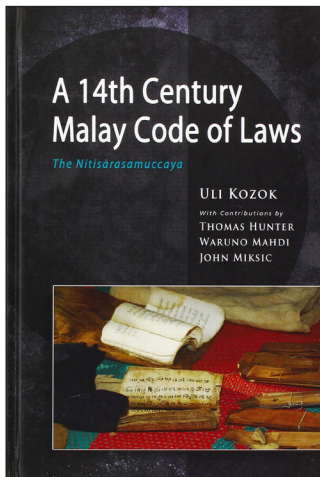


## Book review

Uli Kozok, *A 14th century Malay Code of Laws; The “Nītisārasamuccaya”*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2015, xvii + 408 pp. ISBN 978-981-4459-74-7 (hard cover), ISBN 978-981-4459-75-4 (E-book PDF). Price: USD 42.90 (hard cover).



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It is the dream of every aspiring scholar to come across an object that holds the key to a wide range of new insights. Uli Kozok has discovered, or rather re-discovered, just such a document. The book here under review is the outcome of Kozok’s detailed study of a 40-page manuscript of the *Nītisārasamuccaya*, a Sumatran legal code. It builds on the author’s earlier publications on this material (Kozok 2004, 2006), yet is substantially revised and enlarged. The present version contains additional chapters by Thomas Hunter, Waruno Mahdi, and John Miksic. It also features noteworthy contributions to the fifth chapter by Eric van Reijn and Jan van der Putten, and a long note in the sixth chapter by Arlo Griffiths (pp. 369–370 fn. 36), who also provided suggestions for the transliteration.

The central manuscript, known as *Tambo Kerintji* or TK no. 214, is one of the sacred heirlooms belonging to the Tanjung Tanah village (Kerinci Regency, Jambi) and was first described by Petrus Voorhoeve in 1941 (p. 50). Uli Kozok obtained permission to see the manuscript in 2002 (p. 52). It is written on mulberry paper (*daluang*) in what the author calls a “Pallavo-Nusantaric” script. Radiocarbon analysis of the bark paper places it in a latter fourteenth-century context (pp. 52–57). This dating is supported by a reference in the text to the thirteenth to fourteenth-century Dharmasraya polity (hinterland Jambi), whose ruler apparently oversaw the writing process (p. 85). This makes TK 214 the world’s oldest extant Malay manuscript and the only one written in a pre-Jawi script (p. 55).

The book’s first chapter, by Kozok, provides a commentary on *pusaka* manuscripts and their preservation. It is followed by a chapter on the ancient

history of Kerinci and the wider Jambi area, in which Miksic brings together textual and archaeological sources. The book's core is the third chapter, by Kozok with contributions from Mahdi. It contains detailed information of TK 214, a transliteration, translation, commentary, and wordlist. Most of the manuscript is written in an archaic Malay isolect analysed in detail by Mahdi (Chapter 4), while two pages are in a Kerinci script (pp. 129–154) and its colophon and several other passages feature a localized variety of Sanskrit discussed by Hunter (Chapter 6; also Griffiths 2010; Aciri 2014). Interestingly, a seventeenth-century Jawi-script reworking of TK 214 has also been found among the sacred heirlooms and is elaborated on in Chapter 5, first-authored by Kozok.

While essentially pre-Islamic, TK 214 displays some Perso-Indian influence. The very name of its author, Kuja Ali, reflects this (pp. 211–212, 348–353), as does a reference to steel from Khorasan (pp. 98, 211, 351–352, 377 fn. 79). Mahdi tentatively derives *baju* 'clothing' from Persian *bāzū* (بازو) '[upper] arm' (p. 211), which is no doubt the word's ultimate etymology. However, it probably reached Southeast Asia via the Indian subcontinent, where it denoted "a kind of short shirt, reaching down to the hips, with very short (if any) sleeves; sometimes open at the upper part of the chest in front" as described in the Qanoon-e-Islam (Herklots 1832: appendix p. xv). Similarly, we may connect *distar* 'headcloth' to Perso-Indian *dastār* (دستار), glossed in the same work as "a turban, which consists of a piece of cloth of from forty to seventy cubits long, and from twelve to eighteen inches broad" (Herklots 1832: appendix p. ix). Both items of clothing also feature in contemporaneous Javanese literature (*waju*, *dastar*). The construction *barekuat barsuluh* 'light up a torch' appears to contain the Malay word *kuat* 'strong', thus going back to Perso-Indian (and ultimately Arabic) *quwwat* (قوة) 'powerful'.

Some additional lexicographic remarks may be due here. The word <*kunḍr*> 'unit of weight', reflecting Tamil *kunṛi* (கன்றி) (p. 91), should probably be read as *kunderi* (compare p. 186) rather than *kundir*. The latter form is poorly documented beyond colonial-era dictionaries and strikes me as a hypercorrection of *kundi*, its Minangkabau equivalent. If the toponym *Kurinci* indeed goes back to a Tamil word for 'mountainous region' (compare pp. 106–107), that word should be *kuricci* (குறிச்சி; incidentally a toponym in Coimbatore) rather than *kuriñci* (குறிஞ்சி) in the light of attested Tamil-Malay sound correspondences (Hoogervorst 2015; Tamil *kuriñci* would have yielded Malay \**kurinji*). The word *jahi* is tentatively glossed as 'a game of hazard' (p. 211). In Balinese, *jahi* refers to a Chinese coin used in gambling games (Van der Tuuk 1897–1912, Vol. 4, p. 343). These words are clearly related, yet their origins – Chinese or otherwise – remain enigmatic. I propose that the untranslated (*baja*) *tupang* denotes a type of high-quality layered steel; we can compare Old Javanese *tumpang* 'layer'. Finally, the unexplained *panyalin* (*penjalin* in the seventeenth-century Jawi version; the /ny/ might reflect dialectical influence) can be connected to *jalin* 'to tie together' and apparently denotes plaited or lashed items (baskets, ropes, fish-traps, etcetera), if not

instruments to make them.

The spelling of names is not always consistent throughout the book, for example, *Minye Tujuh* (7x) versus *Minye Tujoh* (6x) and *Trengganu* (6x) *Terengganu* (5x). We find no uniform Romanization for Chinese (Wade-Giles on p. 85 and p. 367, Pinyin in most of Chapter 2, but not always with tone diacritics). Chapter 2 mixes several Indic transliterations, so that we encounter *Amoghapasalokeshwara* (p. 29; *Amoghapāśalokeśvara*) in close proximity to *Deśavarṇana* (p. 31) and *ṣri-Udayadityavarmma* (p. 35; *Śrī Udayādityavarma*), just to mention a few. *Silī Zhūluōwúnífómádiàohuá* (p. 24) unmistakably reflects *Śrī Cūlāmaṇivarmadeva*. Blagden (1924) is absent in the bibliography, while Griffiths (2010) features in it twice.

Needless to say, none of these points diminishes the book's overall importance. Reading it will involve pleasurable hours of page-flipping between its informative chapters, transliterations, translations, comments, and endnotes. The book deserves to be read in its entirety, yet I suspect that archaeologists will find most of their interests covered by Miksic (Chapter 2), linguists by Mahdi (Chapter 4), and Sanskritists by Hunter (Chapter 6). Historians, too, will be remiss not to engage with it when discussing Sumatra's past, Southeast Asian legal systems, and the transition from Hindu-Buddhism to Islam – among other things. Uli Kozok's *A 14th century Malay Code of Laws* contains a wealth of information and is enriched by high-quality photos. The book's disclaimer that the relation between the *Nitisārasamuccaya* and other (Javano-)Sanskrit legal codes lies beyond its scope (pp. 79–80) fills me with hope that this topic will continue to attract scholarly attention in the future.

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