

***A description by Admiral Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge of the four
Johor Rulers: Alauddin Riayat Shah III, Raja Bongsu, Raja Siak and
Raja Laut, 1606¹***

**(Original Dutch text with translation and annotations by Peter Borschberg, Department of
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[During his visit to the Batu Sawar court in August 1606, Admiral Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge met many of the nobles and especially the four sons of the late Johor ruler, Ali Jalla Abdul Jalil.² The following excerpt taken from his travelog, provides a frank and candid assessment of the four sons. This document evidences that the Admiral, like many other senior VOC officers who visited the court of Batu Sawar during the first decade of the 17th century, greatly respected Raja Bongsu, who was also known as Raja Sabrang or Raja di Ilir. We know from personal reading notes made by Grotius from a (printed) copy of Matelieff's travelog that he had read this description of the four royal brothers.³ These reading notes are of uncertain date or origin, but

¹ “Historische Verhael Vande treffelijckke Reyse, gedaen naer de Oost-Indien ende China ... door ... Cornelis Matelief de Jonge”, *BV*, III, pp. 10-11.

² Winstedt, “A History of Johore”, *JMBRAS*, 10.3 (1932), p. 52.

³ The Hague, National Archives, *Collectie Hugo de Groot, Supplement I* (ms. 1.10.35.02 no. 40), fol. 382 (2), “Ian de Patuan, Raia Siaca ... Raia Sabran Raia Laud.” The printed edition Grotius worked with features this description on p. 21.

judging by the page number references jotted down next to the individual notes appear to have been prepared on the basis of a printed edition of Matelief's travelog.]

Den 17. May kreeg den Admirael tijdinge, dat de Coning van Iohor alreede by de Schepen was met sijn Galeyen ende Fusten, waer op hy in alles mocht hebben ontrent 300. man, meest slaven. Het was Raya Bonsu, oft Raya Zabran, de selfde die de Gesanten in Hollandt ghesickt hadde met het present aen sijn Ex.ti. Om wiens gelegentheyt te beter te verstaen, men weten moet, dat den ouden Coningh van Iohor, die een goet krijghsman was, ende oock dickwils tegen de Portugesen gheoorlocht heeft, 4. soonen heeft nagelaten, waer van den outsten met tegenwoordich regerende van de Malayen gheuoemt wort Ian de Patuan, het welck nochtans niet sijn naem maer sijn tijtel schijnt te wesen. Van een ander vrouwe heeft hy gehad Raia Siacai t'welc te seggen is Coning van Siaca, dat een leen is van de Croon van Iohor. Dese heeft getrouwt de dochter van Patane, zijnde een man van kleynen bedrijve, ende niet met eenige Coninglicke deugden verciert, maer een slecht bloet, die hem altijd hout binnen Siaca, enn weynich komt tot Iohor. De Coning Ian de Patuan is oock een persoon van weynich bedrijs, gewoon tot by den middag te slapen, dan te eten en te wasschen, ende voorts droncken te drincken, so dat na den middagh met hem niet en is te handelen, want men moet al mede met hem drincken, enn droncke-mans dingen doen. Hy bemoeyt hem geen dingen, maer laet het al op de Edelen ende Raya Zabrang staen, mach van geen swaricheyt hooren, ende als men hem aanspreeckt van yet te doen, als volc op te brengen oft diergelijcke, so swijght hy al, en al vraegtmen hem 2. oft 3. mael, het is al 't selfde. In somma is nergens min bequaem toe, als tot Coning te wesen, denckt noch op Rijck noch op onderdanen, als hy slechts wijn heeft en vrouwen. Noch heeft de Coningh van Iohor by sijn tweede vrouwe gehad Raya Bonsu, die nu werdt gheuoemt Raja Zabrang, dat

is Coning van d'ander zijde, door dien dat hy over d'ander zijde van de Rivier woont tegen over de Stadt Battusabar, daer hy oock een sterckte heeft ende een deel Ondersaten, doch is leen-man van Ian de Patuan, een man van ontrent 35. jaer, by nae wit, de grootste niet, maer discreet, langmoedich, niet colerijck, ende verre siende, een vyandt van de Portugesen, neerstich in sijn saken, die hy ooc wel hart drijven soude, indien hy macht hadde, in somma weerdich Coning van Iohor enn Malacca te wesen, by wien oock de hulpe die men aen hem besteden soude, wel erkent soude worden, ende die soo veel men aen hem vermercken konde den onsen heel was toe gedaen: sijnen broeder Ian de Patuan altijd respecterende, die ooc veel van desen hout, doch heymelijck en laetter niet al wat jalousie by Ian de Patuan te wesen. Bij sijn derde vrouwe heeft den ouden Coning van Iohor een sone genaemt Raya Laud, dat is Coning van der zee, een man nergens bequaem toe, als om Tabac en Arack te drincken, en Betele daer op te eten, ja waerdig handen en voeten gebonden in in Zee gesoncken te worden, een grooten dronckaert, dootslager, een hoereerder, die alles wat an die 3 puncten dependeert van buyten geleert heeft. Alle de broeders drincken wijn, uytgenomen Raya Zabrang, die noyt wijn noch stercken dranck geproeft heeft, enn gelijk de Heer is, so sijn oock de Edel-luyden van alle dese Coningen.

English translation

On 17 May the Admiral received news that the King of Johor had already arrived at the ships with his galleys and foists, on which he might have had about 300 men, mostly slaves. It was Raja Bongsu, also known as Raja Sabrang, the same one who dispatched the envoys to Holland

with a present for his Excellency.⁴ In order to understand the situation better, one should note that the old king of Johor, who was a great warrior and also sometimes went into battle against the Portuguese, left behind four sons, of which the oldest is currently ruling over the Malays and is called Yang di Pertuan. This does not appear to be his name, but his title. From another wife he had the Raja of Siak, that is to say the King of Siak, which is a fief belonging to the crown of Johor. This raja is married to a daughter of [the queen of] Patani. He is a man of little ambition, and is not endowed with any royal virtues, but is an evil person, [a fact] which holds him back in Siak and he rarely comes to Johor. The King of Johor is also a person of little ambition, who is accustomed to sleeping until midday, then washes himself and proceeds to drink himself drunk. As a result, after noon it is not possible to negotiate with him [anymore], for one has to drink along with him and do the things drunken men do. He does not care about anything, but places responsibility all on the nobles and on Raja Sabrang. He does not like to hear of any difficulties, and when you approach him to do something, such as to muster people, he just remains silent. And even if you ask him two or three times, it is all the same. In sum, there is nothing less he is qualified to be than king, [for] he thinks neither about his empire nor about his subjects, as he only wants wine and women. The [old] king of Johor had from his second wife [another son], Raja Bongsu, who is now called Raja Sabrang, that is the King of “the other side”, because he

⁴ The following passage concerning king Alauddin is also featured in Dutch text in Rouffaer, “Was Malaka Emporum vóór 1400 A.D. genaamd Malajoer?”, *BKI*, 77 (1921), p. 445.

lives on the other side of the river across from the city of Batu Sawar.⁵ He also has a fortress and a part of the subjects there.⁶ Still, [Raja Sabrang] is a vassal of the Yang di Pertuan and is about 35 years old, almost white,⁷ not the tallest, but intelligent,⁸ tempered, not choleric, far-sighted, an enemy of the Portuguese, [and] diligently engages in his affairs, which he would vigorously pursue, if he [only] held [formal] authority. In sum, he is worthy to be King of Johor and

⁵ The following description of Raja Bongsu, alias Raja Sabrang, is also reproduced in Dutch in Rouffaer, “Was Malaka Emporium vóór 1400 A.D. genaamd Malajoer?”, *BKI*, 77 (1921), pp. 445-6.

⁶ This fortified settlement is described in more detail in appendix 9.

⁷ This is a reference to his skin colour, as is also mentioned in the German language description of Johann Verken of Meissen. See Verken, “Molukkenreise 1607-1612”, in *Reisebeschreibungen von Deutschen Beamten und Kriegsleuten im Dienst der Niederländisch West- und Ost-Indischen Kompanien, 1602-1797*, edited by S. P. L'Honoré Naber, II, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1930), pp. 58-9, esp. p. 59, “[Raja Bongsu] was in his appearance and body a well-proportioned person, fairly tall, softly spoken, and fair skinned both on his body and his face.” As to whether or not Raja Bongsu was to be considered “tall” really depends on one’s vantage point. He was probably not as “tall” as some of the lankey Dutchmen employed by the VOC, but he was probably comparatively tall in relation to other members of his court and entourage.

⁸ This understanding of the Dutch term “discreet” suggested by Rouffaer, “Was Malaka Emporium vóór 1400 A.D. genaamd Malajoer?”, *BKI*, 77 (1921), p. 446.

Malacca, and will also recognise the help offered to him, as can be easily seen, and as far as one can ascertain is well disposed toward us. He always respects his brother the Yang di Pertuan, who also thinks highly of him, but secretly arouses a certain degree of jealousy with the Yang di Pertuan.⁹ From his third wife the old king of Johor had another son named Raja Laut, that is the “King of the Sea”, a man qualified for nothing.¹⁰ He only consumes tobacco, drinks arak, and downs betel over that; verily, he is worthy to be thrust with bound hands and feet into the sea; a great drunkard, manslayer, and womanizer who knows all that there is to know about these three things. All the brothers drink wine, except for Raja Sabrang, who has never consumed strong drink and is like a true lord. The nobles [in the entourage] of these kings are [much] the same.

⁹ The interpretation of the Dutch wording “en laetter niet al” as “ontbreekt er niet geheel” is based on the interpretation suggested in Rouffaer, “Was Malaka Emporium vóór 1400 A.D. genaamd Malajoer?”, *BKI*, 77 (1921), p. 446.

¹⁰ This description of the Raja Laut is also found in Netscher, *De Nederlanders in Djohor en Siak*, p. 11, and Rouffaer, “Was Malaka Emporium vóór 1400 A.D. genaamd Malajoer?”, *BKI*, 77 (1921), p. 446, note 2. Rouffaer concluded that the Raja Laut is almost certainly the same individual as the laksamana or “admiral” of Johor. See *ibid.*, p. 488, note 1.