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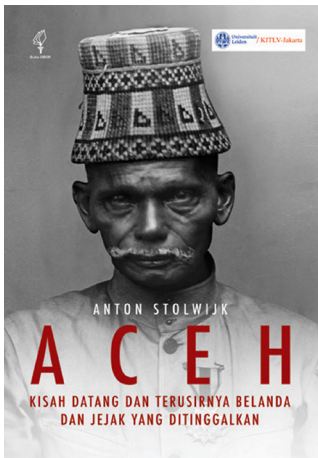
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Book reviews

Anton Stolwijk, *Aceh; Kisah datang dan terusirnya Belanda dan jejak yang ditinggalkan*. Translated by Susi Moeimam and Nurhayu Santoso, Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor in cooperation with Universiteit Leiden/KITLV-Jakarta, 2021, xxiii + 248 + 14 pictures (un-numbered pages). ISBN 978 623 321 121 5. Price: IDR 140,000 (softcover).



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Aceh is the area in the archipelago which the Dutch took the longest to conquer and was the theatre of their most expensive colonial war. It is natural that it has attracted many Dutch authors who have written about it. The KITLV collection contains 1,200 books about Aceh, which are currently housed in the Leiden University Library; about 449 of them in Dutch, mostly, if not all, written by the Dutch authors, who also wrote in other languages. This does not include archives, newspapers, and magazines. However, it has been rare for anything to have been written about Aceh by the Dutch writers, especially in Dutch language. Anton Stolwijk's book, originally entitled *Atjeh: Het verhaal van de bloedigste strijd uit de Nederlandse koloniale geschiedenis*, has broken this long silence.

This book has been very well translated by Susi Moeimam and Nurhayu Santoso and consists of twenty-six chapters, excluding the prologue and epilogue. In the Preface, Bonnie Triyana, the editor-in-chief of *Historia.ID*, calls it a "live report from the past" and considers Stolwijk to have set about working like an archaeologist (pp. vii, xii). Stolwijk's book is both a travelogue and a historical archaeology of the Aceh war. The author begins and ends each chapter with a contemporary travelogue section while the middle contains historical narratives about Aceh, especially through the eyes of the Dutch, as recorded mainly in Dutch diaries, archives, newspapers, and magazines. The exceptions to the rule are Chapters 20 (Panglima Polem), 21 (The Di Tiro Family), and 24 (The Chinese in Aceh), which are largely based on interviews with the descendants of Polem, Di Tiro, and Thio Kie San. By and large, it

concentrates on the political history of the Dutch conquest in Aceh, except for Chapters 16 (Oil), 22 (Aceh Tram), and 24 (Chinese people in Aceh), which are more a socio-economic history. A historian will have no trouble at all reading the historical narrative section.

As reflected in many parts of this book, the testimonies of the Dutch who were present in Aceh in the past provide information to balance local history which tends to tip over into hagiography. For example, for the people of Aceh, Sultan Iskandar Muda is the epitome of an ideal sultan. However, John Davis, the skipper who worked under Cornelis de Houtman, revealed that this sultan was a fat old man, armed with four daggers inlaid with diamonds, with forty wives, who ate and drank all day long (pp. 1-2). Of course, such word portraits should be viewed critically, as accounts can always be both objective and subjective.

Habib Abdoerrahman Al-Zahir is still held in respect in Aceh today. Not only because he was the descendent of the Prophet, but he was also the main advisor to the sultan, a *qadi* (supreme judge), and the Acehnese ambassador to Turkey and the Netherlands. Stolwijk does indeed highlight Al-Zahir social and diplomatic skills (Chapter 2), but also notes that Alexander's biography of Habib (honorary title for a male descendent of the Prophet Muhammad) 'compiled according to his [Habib's] own statement' records that the Habib drank wine and was not assiduous in his prayers, travelled in luxury staying in the most expensive hotels, eating in the best restaurants and wearing the finest clothes. And, at the end of his career, Habib compromised himself to the Dutch by accepting a pension of 2,500 guilders a month and promising never to return to Aceh (p. 18).

This book is also a meticulous record of numerical data, both the dates of and the amounts spent on something. In general, when events are mentioned, the local history only names the event without specifying the date; or the amount is usually reduced to such phrases as "a few" or "many", without mentioning the exact amount. Here, European positivistic reasoning reveals the quantitative data. Most, if not all, the events are followed by their dates. One good example of numerical accounting occurs in descriptions of the second invasion which the Dutch felt they had won. It was recorded that almost 1,500 Dutch soldiers died, to whom should be added the 7,500 who succumbed to illness or injury while on active service (p. 52). When Teuku Umar deployed his stratagem (Chapter 12), he was supplied by the Dutch with 880 rifles, 25,000 rounds of ammunition, 500 kilograms of gunpowder, a very large amount of opium plus 18,000 Spanish dollars (pp. 94-96). Of course, they were all then used to attack the Dutch themselves.

The (ab)use of social science to excuse colonialism is also shown in the efforts made by Lodewijk van den Berg, a professor of Islamic Studies at Delft, in which he did not succeed, and Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, scholar of Oriental cultures and languages and advisor on native affairs to the colonial government, who not only did succeed in producing an in-depth ethnographic study of Aceh in two volumes, but also in his colonial policy advice on Aceh's

weaknesses: highlighting the difficult relationship between the nobility and the ulama, which meant that they had to be kept separate (Chapter 13). This strategy worked.

There are many other interesting aspects contained in Stolwijk's book, both in terms of methodology and historical contents. He is able to present the history of the past by placing it in the present context because he has been physically present in the locations in which the history occurred from which he can then refer back to the past. Although very few indigenous sources have been used, the author's perspective is mainly decolonial.

The author argues, although not explicitly, that the Aceh war did not end with the conquest of the palace or the establishment of a Dutch administrative centre in Aceh, but with the capture of Lieutenant Van Zanten, the last Dutch soldier to survive in Aceh who was later executed by the Japanese in Takengon in 1942. This is encapsulated in the final sentence in the last chapter (Chapter 26): "The Aceh War is now truly over". In addition, as he writes in the Epilogue: "Actually Aceh was the first independent territory in the archipelago". But, as far as the people of Aceh are concerned, they were always an independent people and had never really surrendered to Dutch power.