

Reviews

Britain, the Brookes and Brunei. By Nicholas Tarling. Oxford University Press, London, 1971. xii, 578 pp. U.K. price: £9.50.

THIS SUBSTANTIAL volume traces the relationship between the Sultanate of Brunei and her eventual protecting power, Great Britain, from earliest contacts down to the assignment of a British Resident in 1905 which, as things turned out, insured the survival of Brunei as an independent political entity. The author describes his book as concentrating on 'the development of the sultanate' as well as diplomatic contacts with Britain, but in fact the emphasis is overwhelmingly on external relations, with and among the European actors, something that will come as no surprise to those familiar with Dr Tarling's previous writings. He is undoubtedly one of the world's leading scholarly authorities on the material in the British Public Record Office pertaining to the Malay world, and he has once again relied heavily on that rich mass of documents to produce a detailed and probably definitive account of his subject.

This is not an easy book even for one who has specialized in the history of island Southeast Asia. Dr. Tarling presents his material in copious detail. He assumes at every stage that the reader has fully absorbed the preceding complex narrative. It is an account of interaction between a divided imperial authority and a trio of Borneo mini-territories characterized by extreme ethnic diversity and governed by a cast of would-be British rulers (among whom the Brooke White Rajas of Sarawak are the best known) whose strong personalities and mutual jealousies were a constant complicating factor.

With the exception of a useful concluding chapter, the presentation is almost purely descriptive. Elsewhere one senses the need for more analysis. Northern Borneo, it must be recognised, was not in the mainstream of colonial era island Southeast Asian history. It was an area of secondary or even tertiary concern to the British policy-makers of the day, which was one reason why they tended to treat it with inconsistency and neglect. It may be argued in dealing with such an essentially marginal topic there is even more cause than usual to isolate what is significant from what is not. Too often in the present volume it is impossible to see the woods for a profusion of trees which are of little intrinsic individual importance.

What, then, is 'significant' in this kind of history? Obviously the fact that these events determined the survival of Brunei as an independent state, and as a complicating factor in later history, is of interest. And although Dr. Tarling recounts in detail the events through which Brunei survived, he never concisely analyses the sporadic accompanying debate in the Colonial Office. For example, the degree to which such men as

Stubbs and Lucas felt that Raja Charles Brooke was an anachronistic, slightly barbarous figure, and from this concluded that his ambition to absorb Brunei should be thwarted, could be delineated with more clarity. Nor do we ever discover the extent to which the Colonial Office considered that the appointment of a Resident to Brunei was a first step toward the eventual unification of the Borneo territories, a development which might have had momentous consequences. Dr. Tarling tells us that such an idea was current, especially among junior officials in the Colonial Office, and while its non-fulfilment obviously took place at a period beyond the scope of his book, one would like to know more about both the origins and the fate of this superficially sensible notion.

There is also the interesting question of the extent to which the Brunei Sultans, Hashim in particular, exploited a complicated political environment to preserve the integrity of their much reduced state. Dr. Tarling concludes that in dealing with the British, they consistently relied on traditional techniques of Malay diplomacy, attempting to play off one European against another, much as they had always manipulated the different tribal groups who inhabited the various rivers of their loosely-knit kingdom. Dr. Tarling concludes that this was a dangerous policy, which diminished the sultanate. But it is also arguable that it was the only policy for a penniless ruler, and that in the end it worked. At the very least it contributed to the survival of the state. It is possible that a good deal more light could be shed on the stubbornness with which the Brunei aristocracy (for all its foibles) clung to the notion of national self-preservation by interviewing descendants of the participants in Brunei, where a strong sense of history is still very much in evidence.

In sum, one would like to see the author exercise to a greater extent his talent for synthesis, analysis and even speculation, a talent which he has displayed in his *Concise History of South-East Asia* and elsewhere. Perhaps we shall see Brunei treated along such lines in one of Dr. Tarling's future volumes. In the meantime the present work will stand as a useful study of the colonial policy (or non-policy) which lies behind the continuing existence of the world's only independent Malay sultanate.

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Jakarta

Britain and the Australian Colonies 1818-1831: the Technique of Government. By J. J. Eddy. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1969. xviii, 326 pp. U.K. price: £3.15.

FATHER EDDY has chosen for his subject an important period in Australian history. Lord Bathurst's decision to take a closer look at the system of convict transportation begins a transition which had already gone far by 1831, when Lord Howick, as under-secretary for the colonies, 'could declare unequivocally in favour of the ultimate extension to the Australian colonies of a full range of civil liberties including representative assembly.' So far as the change in the spirit of the administration came about within the Colonial Office itself, it originated not with the Secretaries of State,