Chapter 5
Popular Mysticism and the Colonial State, 1811–1936

In this chapter, I explain how Arung Palakka, the Bugis noble from Bone who allied himself with the VOC to defeat Sultan Hasan al-Din of Gowa in 1667, was transformed into Andi’ Patunru, the hero of a popular Makassar narrative called the *Sinril’ Tallumbatua*, or *Epic of the Three Boats*. This transformation occurred in tandem with the decline of the royal houses of Gowa and Tallo’ and the continued prosperity of the royal house of Bone during the eighteenth century. By 1786, Sultan Ahmad al-Salih of Bone (1776–1812) had expanded his influence over all of South Sulawesi and had persuaded many Makassar that he was the rightful heir to the throne of Gowa. This enabled subsequent generations of Makassar to overlook the preceding conflicts between the royal houses of Gowa and Tallo’ and to regard Arung Palakka as a Makassar prince.

The Government of the Netherlands East Indies fought three wars (in 1824, 1859, and 1905) to subdue Bone. As the power and prestige of all the kings declined during the nineteenth century, the shaikhs of the Sufi orders moved out of the royal courts and into the villages of South Sulawesi. The most popular of these orders was the Sammaniyya. Like the many of the other “neo-Sufi” orders in the eighteenth century, its shaikhs combined a rigorous training in the mystical tariqa with an equally rigorous study of the hadith. Immersion in the hadith tended to replace devotion to one’s Sufi master with devotion to the Prophet Muhammad. This was expressed through the collective recitation of devotional texts such as the *Maulid al-Nabi* of Jaffar al-Barzanji, or *Barasanji*. The *Barasanji* presents a distinctly populist image of Muhammad as a poor orphan whose charismatic power was acknowledged by all the great kings of his age.
I argue that it was this portrayal of the Prophet as a charismatic orphan that provided the model for the Sinrili’ Tallumbatua’s portrayal of Arung Palakka’ as a pious Makassar prince who was forced to flee his homeland by an arrogant king. By the time the Sinrili’ Tallumbatua was recorded in 1936, the colonial state had taken over the political functions of the royal courts of South Sulawesi, while popular Islamic institutions had taken over their religious functions. It was only after this separation between state and mosque had been accepted by most Makassar that it was possible for them to view Arung Palakka’s alliance with the VOC in the seventeenth century as part of a pragmatic strategy rather than as an act of apostasy.

Origins of the Early Colonial State, 1811–1860

Keeping the kingdoms of Gowa and Bone separate and at odds with one another was the cornerstone of VOC policy in South Sulawesi (von Stubenvoll 1817 II: 12, 28). As we saw in chapter 4, the strongest political leaders in South Sulwesi between 1739 and 1760 were Sultan Shafi al-Din of Tallo’ and his wife and first cousin Amira Arung Palakka. Amira was the daughter of Sultan Ismail of Bone by his Gowanese wife, Karaeng Pabineang, who was the sister of Sultan Siraj al-Din of Gowa. Amira was thus eligible for the thrones of both Bone and Gowa in her own right, and successive Dutch governors were constantly anxious that she would manage to unite the two kingdoms under a single ruler.

Like Shafi al-Din, Amira Arung Palakka was deeply hostile to the Dutch presence in Sulawesi (von Stubenvoll [1759] 1817 II: 20). Shafi al-Din and Amira never claimed the throne of Gowa themselves, but ruled shrewdly through their children and grandchildren. In 1735, they placed their twelve-year-old son, Abd al-Khair (r. 1735–1742), on the throne of Gowa. At the height of Bontolangkasa’s uprising in 1738, they were able to place their daughter Siti Nafisah on the throne of Bone. When Abd al-Khair died in 1742, they placed their nine-year-old son, Abd al-Qudus (r. 1742–1753), on the throne of Gowa. When Abd al-Qudus died in 1753, they placed their four-year-old grandson, Amas Madina Batara Gowa Fakhr al-Din (r. 1753–1767) on the throne of Gowa.

When Shafi al-Din died in 1760, Batara Gowa was only eleven years old and Amira Arung Palakka exercised effective power. When Batara Gowa reached the age of seventeen in 1766, he was able to govern without a regent. Almost immediately, however, he abandoned his kingdom and sought refuge with his mother in the kingdom of