The Ancient Kingdom of Bruas

by

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The earliest known centre of Government in Perak was in the area which is now called Bruas and the Dinding. The ancient name was Gangga Negara.

According to local tradition the Kingdom was founded by a raja named Ganji Sarjuna who came from Kedah in about the fifth century A.D. There is another tradition which suggests that the region was opened up by Khmers from Cambodia. The capital of Gangga Negara was called 'Beruas' which is the name of a forest tree — the wild mangosteen — which grew in large numbers in the area. The name Beruas was sometimes given to the Kingdom, but it was also referred to as 'Zabaj' by Arab writers and as 'Cho-Pu' by Chinese chroniclers. Beruas the capital, was sited beside the river Perak, which then flowed into the Dinding river. A trading centre with a good harbour was sited in the area which is now covered by rice fields and is now known as Kampong Dandang. Gold and Tin were shipped from this centre to the Middle East. The great wealth of the Kingdom of Beruas was described by travellers who reported that the roof of the Raja's palace was tiled with gold, the kitchen was decorated with silver and the walls of the palace were studded with precious stones. There were also two wells which were lined with gold.

At the height of its prosperity the town of Beruas was so large that according to legend, if a cat were to walk across all the roof tops, it would be three months before it completed the journey. Arab travellers also recorded that the Raja of the country threw nuggets of gold into a small bay, close to his palace, remarking as he did so, "This is where we keep our Wealth". The action was believed to demonstrate the raja's sense of indebtedness to the sea and the bay to which much of his power and wealth were due.

In about 850 A.D. Beruas was so powerful that it could even oppose the Empire of Sri Vijaya. At about that date an Arab Saifyied from the Middle East introduced the Muslim religion into the country and married a Malay princess.

In about 890 A.D. a descendant of the Sailendra dynasty of Java, named Bola­putra, who ruled a region called Gelang­gayu (Klang Kio) in the area which is now the State of Johore, attacked and defeated the Raja of Beruas, but after marrying a Beruas princess he withdrew. The Raja of Beruas continued to enjoy peace and great prosperity for another century, but during the reign of Gangga Shah Johan (1025-1028), Rajendra Chola Deva I — referred to in Malay literature as Raja Suran, King of the Coromandel region on the East Coast of India, invaded the kingdom. The attack is described in some detail in the Malay Annals. The city stood on high ground and the fortified portion was enclosed by a moat outside a strong wall. When Raja Suran's invasion was reported, the Raja of Beruas ordered the moat to be filled with water and his warriors to man the walls. Raja Suran and his army advanced to within a short distance of the fortress but could not force an entry.

Raja Suran then mounted his War Elephant and drove it straight at the main
location map of the kingdom of Brantas; drawn by His Royal Highness Sultan Idris Shah, when Raja Muda.
Unharmcd by the showers of arrows and spears which were aimed at him, he smashed the gate with his heavy club and entered the fort, followed by his chiefs and warriors. Raja Gangga Shah Johan aimed his bow at Raja Suran but his arrow struck the War Elephant just above the base of the trunk and it fell on its face. Raja Suran jumped clear and drawing his sword attacked the Malay King and killed him.

After marrying the Raja's niece, Puteri Zaris Gangga, the Chola King passed on to ravage other areas, leaving Beruas in ruins. Nothing more is known of Beruas or Gangga Negara until the 15th Century, and it is probable that the Chola attack, whose main purpose was to gain a monopoly of seaborne trade, destroyed the Malay trading kingdom so effectively that it never recovered its former wealth.

We can assume that a Raja continued to reside at or near Beruas, but his authority and activities were probably confined to a much smaller area. A Beruas raja is mentioned in the Malay annals as coming to Malacca during the reign of Sultan Mahmud Shah (1488–1511 AD) to thank the Sultan for his assistance in defeating Manjong, a neighbour and enemy of Beruas. Sultan Mahmud had sent the Bendahara Paduka Tuan to lead a small body of warriors to reinforce the Beruas forces and they had subdued Manjong. The Raja of Beruas accompanied the Bendahara when he returned to Malacca, and was granted the title of Tun Aria Bija Di-Raja, to the accompaniment of the Nobat drums. Manjong was then placed under the Raja of Beruas and the Beruas Raja went to Manjong and was installed as ruler of Manjong to the sound of the Malacca Nobat.

After the capture of Malacca by the Portuguese in 1511 AD, Sultan Mahmud withdrew to Bentan. From there he sent Tun Isap Berakah to visit Tun Aria Bija Di-Raja at Beruas, and Tun Aria Bija Di-Raja travelled to Bentan to visit Sultan Mahmud. While he was in Bentan, Tun Aria Bija Di-Raja requested Sultan Mahmud to send his son, Raja Muzaffar Shah to rule over Beruas but he was informed that Raja Muzaffar was the Sultan's heir and it was intended that he should succeed the Sultan. Tun Aria Bija Di-Raja returned to Beruas and was not heard of again, and when Raja Muzaffar was exiled from Kampar, after the death of Sultan Mahmud in 1528, he did not go to Beruas, but founded a new state further inland with his headquarters on the Perak river, probably in the vicinity of his tomb at Telok Bakong — Tanah Abang, near Parit.