Preface

The Bugis and Makasar historiography from South Sulawesi in Indonesia is a remarkable and highly distinctive tradition. Its major works from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries allow us to understand how people of that time viewed the previous three centuries or so of their own past. These are not accounts by outsiders, such as we have from fragmentary Chinese records or travel narratives of European traders, but considered histories drawing on sources produced by the society itself.

The Bugis Chronicle of Bone is a major work within this tradition. It was written in the late seventeenth century—perhaps, as suggested later, in or soon after 1672—and has been widely known in South Sulawesi since then. There are many manuscript copies of the work. Some of the information in the chronicle has found its way into the scholarly literature on South Sulawesi and the text has been published several times in either Bugis script or transcription. There are also some whole or partial translations into Indonesian and Dutch. This is, however, the first edition to provide a reliable transcription of the Bugis text, a complete English translation and a discussion of various philological and historical issues.

Two general matters deserve comment.

The Bone chronicle fits clearly into the genre of works described as ‘genealogical narrative texts’ by Teeuw (1984) in his attempt to discern Indonesia as a ‘field of literary study’. Within this genre, he discusses the Balinese Babad Buleleng, the Javanese Babad Tanah Jawi and Pararaton, the Malay Sejarah Melayu, Hikayat Patani, Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai, Hikayat Aceh and Hikayat Banjar dan Kotawaringin; his only Bugis example is an eighteenth-century chronicle from Wajo. Most of the features of these texts that Teeuw sees as common across the genre can be found in the chronicle of Bone, such as the important role of genealogy and the determination of status, especially in the succession of rulers; the linkage
between narrative and particular rulers; the supernatural elements in the origin of rule; and the ‘open ending’ of the work. Undoubtedly, he would have included both the Bone chronicle and the Makasar chronicles of Gowa and Tallo had satisfactory editions been available to him. As works of history and sources about the past, the South Sulawesi examples can certainly stand with these products of other Southeast Asian traditions.

Yet within the genre, the Bugis and Makasar works have a distinct tone. They display a directness that makes it easy to assume they are giving a ‘realistic’ view of the past, though, as will be shown later, there is rather more to be said about this in relation to the Bone chronicle. While there are certainly some supernatural events in the early stages of this narrative, as is common with other South Sulawesi historical traditions, such material serves a clear purpose in justifying the rule of those who can show appropriate descent. There is next to no interest in any religious ideas as such. Even in the account of the forced reception of Islam by Bone, which is highly unusual in the history of the expansion of Islam, the argument is cast in purely practical and political, rather than religious, terms.

The second matter for comment is the role the Bone chronicle and other Bugis and Makasar written sources from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, if not earlier, have already played in the dramatic new understanding of South Sulawesi history from about 1000 CE to about 1600 CE that has developed in the past few decades. The continuity of placenames, in particular, has allowed the integration of written sources and the results of extensive archaeological survey and excavation. South Sulawesi in the first half of the second millennium provides by far the best example of the evolution of an Austronesian-speaking society towards higher levels of political development in the almost complete absence of external influences. It throws comparative light on many parallel contexts across the Pacific, as well as in island Southeast Asia. The Bone chronicle with its emphasis on the selection and role of successive rulers is particularly useful in this regard. It is, in the end, a story about power.

The early history of South Sulawesi and even a critical history of Bone itself are not to be attempted here, but for any such undertaking, this chronicle provides abundant and essential material. It can also be read as a remarkably sophisticated account of the past, produced by Bugis society in the seventeenth century. As such, it takes its place among other major examples of Southeast Asian historiography.