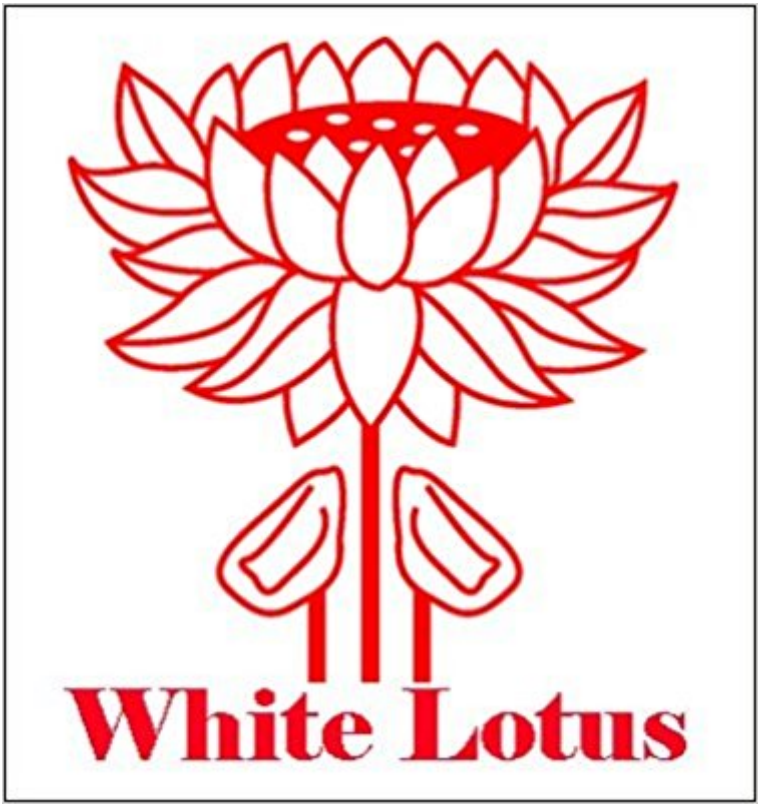
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Witnesses To Sumatra: A Travellers' Anthology (Oxford In Asia Paperbacks)



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Synopsis

Sumatra was a great island of mystery to travellers. The first South-East Asian landfall of sailors from the West since Roman times, it was known as 'Gold Land' before Java and the other Indonesian islands had become known at all outside eastern Asia. Even if nobody in Europe believed Marco Polo's account of people-eaters he encountered there, he made thee island known before any other part of the region. Yet, while Sumatra's coasts exported pepper, gold, and camphor to the world, its heart remained unknown, peopled by savage cannibals or by glittering empires, depending on the point of view. Each time an interpid European travelled over the mountains to the highland plateaus of the Batak and Minangkabau, from the Portuguese Mendes Pinto to the Englishmen Raffles, Burton, and Ward, they believed they were discovering a Shangri-la of unknown civilization. This volume presents the most dramatic accounts of these adventures of many lands. They range from Marco Polo and an even earlier Arab merchant, Sulayman, to an Italian who helped start a Batak messianic movement by announcing himself as an emissary of 'the king of Rome' (Raja Rum), and the Japanese and British observers of Sumatra's paroxysm of war and revolution in 1945. Taken together they represent an unprecedented journey through Sumatran history through the eyes of outsiders who were often the sold recorders of the island's upheavals. Many of the accounts have been translated into English here for the first time. Professor Anthony Reid has set each of these accounts in its context, and written an introduction to the history of this fascinating and beautiful island.

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