

*Tales of the
Malay World*

MANUSCRIPTS AND EARLY BOOKS

EXHIBITION GUIDE

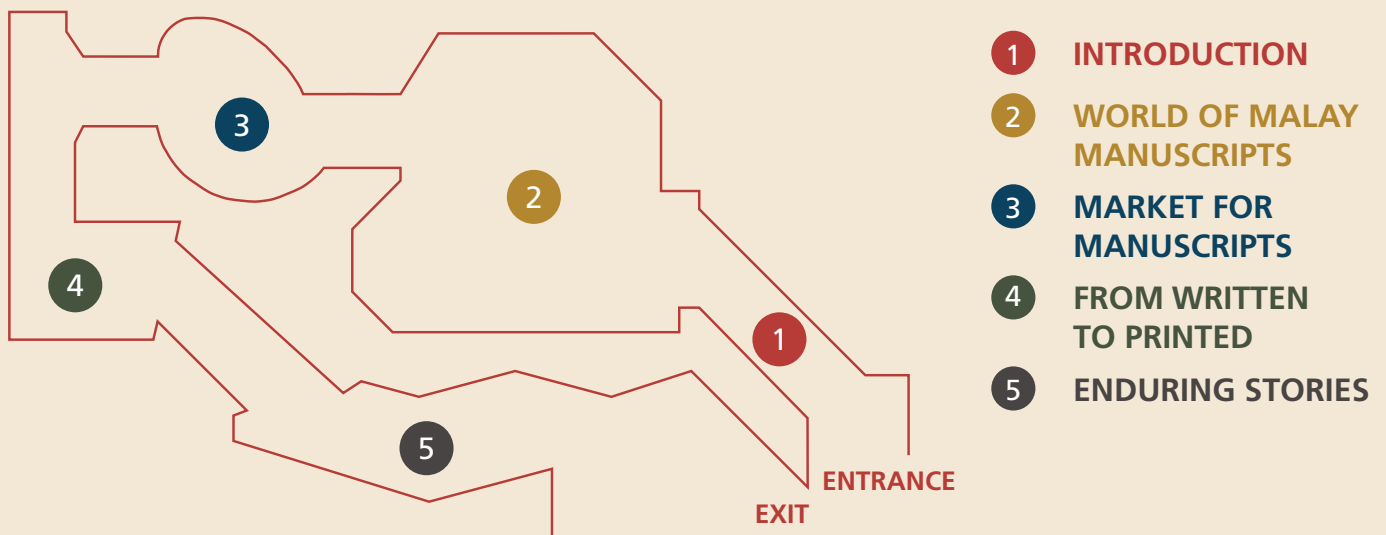
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INTRODUCTION

The Malay language played a special role in maritime Southeast Asia. For centuries, it was the language of trade and diplomacy, connecting people who spoke different languages at home with each other and the world outside the region. The widespread use of Malay has been attributed partly to the qualities of the language – its easy pronunciation, simple grammar rules and adaptability to new words. Malay is also a literary language and a language of Islamic discourse in the region.

In **Tales of the Malay World: Manuscripts and Early Books**, explore traditional Malay literary works that have survived in the form of manuscripts, in order to understand the societies that produced and read them. These manuscripts were nearly all written in Jawi (modified Arabic script). Discover also the impact of printing on the manuscript tradition and the growth of the Malay/Muslim printing industry in late-19th-century Singapore. While printing eventually led to the demise of the Malay manuscript tradition, some stories continue to resonate to this day.



Map from Thomas Bowrey's 1701 Malay–English dictionary



Our understanding of Malay manuscripts is largely dependent on what has survived. Except for a few written in southern Sumatran scripts, almost all extant Malay manuscripts are written in Jawi. Islam played a prominent role in the development of the Malay written literary tradition. This is reflected in the use of Arabic loanwords for writing implements, such as *kertas* (paper), *dakwat* (ink) and *kalam* (pen).

Malay manuscripts encompass a diverse range – for example, court chronicles that trace the genealogy of ruling families, romantic poetry, fantastical adventure stories, religious treatises, codes of laws, and manuals on medicine and divination. More often than not, manuscripts are anonymous and undated, which make it difficult to piece together the historical development of written texts.

Hikayat

The word *hikayat* comes from the Arabic term for ‘stories’. It is traditionally used to describe a wide variety of narrative prose. Sometimes, narrative prose is also called *ceritera* or *kitab*. Scholars have pointed out that the word *hikayat*, as used in some traditional literary works, means ‘narrative’ and does not necessarily indicate the presence of a manuscript. This highlights how written texts were traditionally meant to be read out loud. The listeners generally expect stories to be beneficial (*berfaedah*) and/or soothing (*menghiburkan* or *menglipurkan lara*). The former are stories that uphold religious or societal values, while the latter are beautiful tales that soothe the listeners’ worries as they are transported to a different world.



Hikayat Raja Iskandar Zulkarnain

Copied by Yahya bin Abdulwahid

AH 1232 (1816/7), Melaka

On loan from Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, Farquhar 2

The *Hikayat Iskandar Zulkarnain* is one of the earliest known Malay literary works. It is the Malay translation of a Persian text likely composed in the early 15th century. There are numerous romanticised stories of the conqueror,

Alexander the Great, in Europe and the Islamic world. In the Islamic versions, he is known as Iskandar Zulkarnain, who is tasked with conquering the world with the aim of propagating the faith of Ibrahim (Abraham), the forerunner of Islam.



Hikayat Isma Yatim

Probably late 18th to early 19th century

On loan from British Library, Add MS 12379

The *Hikayat Isma Yatim* tells the story of Isma Yatim, who since childhood has been writing *hikayat*. Because of the quality of his work, he is accepted into the king's service as an adviser. This *hikayat* also features the love story between the king and a princess hidden in a magical sapphire, and how Isma Yatim rescues the pregnant princess from the wrongful accusations of the king's elder wife. The work is replete with

the imagery of beautiful objects, people and places. These rich descriptions of splendour were meant to soothe the soul of the listener.



Hikayat Cekel Waneng Pati

Copied by Muhammad Bakir

On loan from Leiden University Library, Or 3245

This is one of the most popular Panji tales. The Panji tales are based on the love story between the prince of Kuripan, Raden Panji Inu Kertapati, and the princess of Daha, Galuh Candra Kirana. In this story, Raden Inu appears in the guise of a lowly person, Cekel Waneng Pati, a forest dweller who rescues Candra Kirana.

This manuscript was copied by Muhammad Bakir (active 1884–1898), a member of the Fadli family who ran a lending library in the Pecenongan district, Batavia (Jakarta). He was a very productive writer, with 26 surviving manuscripts attributed to him. In the 19th century, lending 'libraries' began forming in some urban centres like Batavia, Semarang, Palembang and Melaka.



Hikayat Badrul Muin

Raja Aisyah binte Raja Haji Sulaiman

30 Syaaban 1308 (9 April 1891)

Collection of National Library of Singapore, B16331037B

Majority of the surviving traditional Malay manuscripts do not state the name of the copyist or author. For those that do, most names are male. However, there are rare occasions when names of women authors are mentioned, like in this

manuscript. The colophon states that the work was composed by Raja Aisyah (c.1870–c.1925) of Pulau Penyengat, Riau. She was the granddaughter of Raja Ali Haji, a Bugis-Malay prince who was also a well-known historian and author. This *hikayat*, also known as the *Hikayat Syamsul Anuar*, was Raja Aisyah's first work.

Syair

A *syair* is a narrative poem made up of quatrains, each with an end rhyme. Although the origin of this poetic form is still debated today, it is generally attributed to Hamzah Fansuri, a 16th-century Sufi from Sumatra. While it may have been used initially for religious purposes, by the 18th century the *syair* had become a vehicle for topics as diverse as romantic stories, historical events, advice and so on. This literary form continued to be very popular even with the advent of printing in the region in the late 19th century. One reason for the popularity of *syair* could be because verse was closer to everyday speech, and thus easier to compose, read or recite, and listen.



Syair Perang Mengkasar

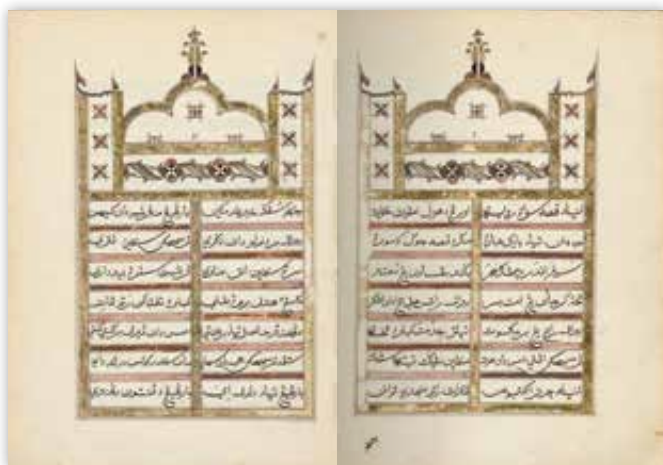
Copied by Cornelia Valentijn

1710, Ambon

On loan from Leiden University Library,
d Or1626

The *Syair Perang Mengkasar* (Poem of the Makassar War) is an example of a historical *syair*. It relates the conflict (1666–69) between the Dutch East India Company and the state of

Makassar (south Sulawesi) over the spice trade. This *syair* was composed around 1669/70 by Enci' Amin, a secretary in the court of Sultan Hasanuddin of Makassar.



Syair Ken Tambuhan

Probably 19th century

On loan from Leiden University Library,
Cod.Or 1965

This romantic *syair* relates the love story of Ken Tambuhan and Prince Inu Kertapati, based on the popular Panji tales from Java. Prince Inu's mother does not approve of their love, and plots to separate the couple. She eventually has Ken Tambuhan killed. When the latter's body is

discovered by Prince Inu, he faints and finally commits suicide. Through divine intervention, the two lovers are revived and eventually married.

The romantic *syair*, with their dramatic tension and melodramatic treatment of love and family, had mass appeal. However, such works were dismissed by Malay men of letters as trivial and a distraction from religious studies.



Syair Dendang Siti Fatimah

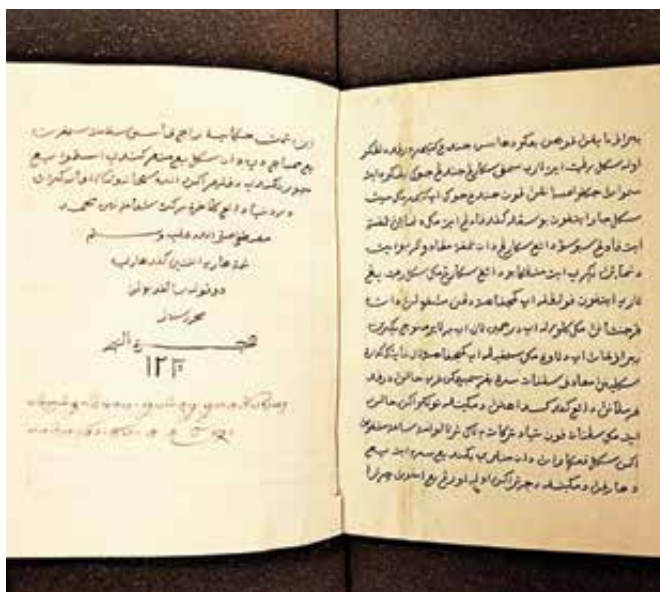
15 Ramadan 1250 (15 January 1835), Pattani, South Thailand

On loan from Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore, 1999-02644

This is an unusual Malay manuscript: It takes the form of a folding book, and is written in white ink on a black background. This style of manuscript is typical of those from Thailand and Myanmar. The colophon states that the text was written in Pattani (southern Thailand). The manuscript contains the poem, *Syair Dendang Siti Fatimah*, which is about Fatimah, daughter of the Prophet Muhammad. The poem is still sung in some parts of Indonesia and northern Malaysia during ceremonies related to childbirth.

Chronicles

Dynastic histories were often recorded in written form, as they served to legitimise the present ruling power. These court narratives typically focus on the mythical origins of the dynasty and its links to legendary founding heroes. As the authors of court narratives wrote to glorify and serve the interests of a particular dynasty, these texts are not too useful if one is looking for historical dates and accurate accounts of events. As political myths, however, these court narratives illustrate the concerns of the ruling houses through their versions of history.



Hikayat Raja Pasai

20 Muharram 1235 (8 November 1819)

On loan from Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, Raffles 67

The *Hikayat Raja Pasai* is believed to have been composed in the 15th century. It is considered the earliest of the Malay court chronicles.

Established in the 13th century in northern Sumatra, Samudera-Pasai was the first Islamic kingdom in Southeast Asia. The *Hikayat Raja Pasai* traces the origin of the dynasty and captures Pasai's relationships with its neighbouring

communities and the region at large – especially pertaining to the Javanese empire of Majapahit.

One of only two known existing copies of the *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, this particular manuscript was copied for Stamford Raffles (1781–1826) in 1819. It was based on a manuscript loaned to Raffles by the regent of Demak, Java.



Daftar Sejarah Cirebon

AH 1230 (1814/5)

On loan from Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, Raffles Malay 30

The sultanate of Cirebon, located on the northern coast of Java, was founded in the 15th century by Sunan Gunung Jati. This manuscript contains the genealogical account of the sultans of Cirebon, who trace their ancestry to Sunan Gunung Jati and, through him, back to the Prophet Muhammad. Sunan Gunung Jati (also known as Syarif Syekh Nuruddin) is the most venerated of the *wali songo*, or nine saints, who were responsible for the Islamisation of Java.

MARKET FOR MANUSCRIPTS

There are only around 10,000 known existing Malay manuscripts. The scarcity of manuscripts was noted during the early 19th century, when Abdul Kadir and his son, Munshi Abdullah (c.1797–1854), faced difficulty obtaining manuscripts. The dearth could be partly due to the limited access to such texts, which were often held at the courts, by feudal chiefs or storytellers. Access to the manuscripts depended on social relationships.

Scholars have generally credited Stamford Raffles for creating a public market for such written texts. Raffles started buying manuscripts and even hired a team of scribes to copy texts that he had borrowed. The Dutch also began collecting in earnest. European administrators and scholars of the late 18th and early 19th centuries collected Malay manuscripts in a bid to learn the language and understand the culture, so as to better administer the region or to fulfil missionary purposes. Such collecting activities not only resulted in a commercial market for manuscripts, but also brought many manuscripts to European libraries.



Hikayat Parang Puting

Copied by Ibrahim Kandu

29 Syawal 1220 (20 January 1806), Penang

On loan from British Library, MSS Malay D 3

The colophon of this *hikayat* mentions that the owner of this manuscript was Tuan Mister Raffles – Stamford Raffles – and that it was written by Ibrahim. Ibrahim Kandu (b.1780) was employed as one of Raffles's scribes to copy Malay manuscripts. Ibrahim was a Malay-Tamil Chulia who lived on the Prince

of Wales Island (Penang). His name is found on several manuscripts belonging to Raffles. Raffles had learnt Malay during his voyage from England to the Prince of Wales Island in 1805.



Illuminated Letter from Sultan Syarif Kasim to Raffles

February 1811

On loan from British Library, Mss Eur.D.742/1, f 33a

Based in Melaka at the time, Stamford Raffles received this letter from Sultan Syarif Kasim (1766–1819), ruler of Pontianak in western Kalimantan, in February 1811. As the agent of the governor-general to the Malay States, Raffles had written letters to various indigenous rulers to rally support for the British invasion of Java. In this letter, Sultan Syarif requests for British support against their 'common' enemy, the sultan of Sambas (western Kalimantan). The letter ends with Sultan Syarif informing Raffles that he would be sending him two Malay manuscripts: a legal text (*undang-undang*) and the *Hikayat Raja Iskandar*.



FROM WRITTEN TO PRINTED



The earliest known book published by a Malay/Muslim printer in Southeast Asia is a Qur'an printed in Palembang in 1854. The printer had purchased the lithographic press from Singapore. Based on dated materials, Malay/Muslim printing had existed in Singapore from 1860. Singapore grew to become an important printing hub for Malay/Islamic books that were distributed throughout the Malay world.

The early Malay/Muslim printers developed as an alternative to the manuscript culture. The lithograph basically reproduced the manuscript format, but enabled multiple copies to be produced economically. Like their manuscript counterparts, these early mass-produced printed *hikayat* and *syair* were also recited or sung for an audience. However, one important difference was that manuscripts were hard to come by, but printed texts could be made widely available for sale and readily accessible. Over time, the proliferation of printing and modern education affected how readers interacted with written texts, and spelt the demise of the manuscript tradition.



Hikayat Abdullah

Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir

1849, Singapore

Donated by George Frederick Hose

Collection of National Library of Singapore,
B03014389F

Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, better known as Munsyi Abdullah, was a scholar and translator. He is considered a pioneer of Malay printing. Abdullah

had learnt printing from the English missionary Walter Medhurst (1796–1857) while in Melaka.

Numerous books printed by mission presses in Melaka and Singapore involved Abdullah as either translator or editor. Abdullah also composed new works to be published, becoming the first non-European to have his work printed in Malay. His best-known work is his autobiography, *Hikayat Abdullah*, published in 1849. Abdullah wrote it by hand before reproducing it by lithography.

Kitab, Hikayat, Syair

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the early Malay/Muslim printers doubled as booksellers. At the time, there was no general term for 'books' so the printers often used the phrase '*kitab, hikayat, syair*' (treatises, narratives, poetry) to advertise their products. The word *kitab* not only encompassed religious treatises but also reference books like dictionaries. When needed, the printers sometimes also used the word *kitab* to refer to books in general. The neutral term *buku* only became widely used in Singapore in the 20th century. As the Malay/Muslim presses operated as commercial enterprises, their output reflected the reading trends of the people. In the early phase of Malay/Muslim printing, most of the books produced were religious works. From the 1870s onwards, in terms of the number of editions printed, *syair* and *hikayat* formed the majority. *Syair* was unquestionably the most popular form of literary work in the 19th century. It was so popular that *hikayat* and even religious works were versified to appeal to the general public.



Inilah Kitab Sullam al-Muhtadi fi Ma'rifah Tariqah al-Muhtadi

Printed by Haji Muhammad Taib

20 Muharram 1313 (12 July 1895), Singapore

Collection of National Library of Singapore,
B29362089F

This book contains the work of Sheikh Daud bin 'Abd Allah al-Fatani (c.1769–1847) on the fundamentals of Islam and the obligatory religious

duties. Sheikh Daud was an important Islamic scholar from Patani who spent many years in Mecca. His writings cover a wide range including Islamic law, Sufism and guides to prayers. Sheikh Daud had a strong network of students and scholars who used his works to teach in the *pondok* (traditional Islamic schools) throughout the Malay world.



Hikayat Bakhtiar

Printed by Haji Muhammad Siraj

25 Rabiulakhir 1305 (9 January 1888)

Collection of National Library of Singapore, B03013464J

The *Hikayat Bakhtiar* was a popular frame story found in both manuscripts and printed books. As the cover of the book states, it contains 10 'beautiful' (*indah*) and 'amazing' (*ghaib*) stories.

The story begins with a king who retires into the jungle with his wife to avoid bloodshed, as his brother wants to rebel against him. The ill-fated royal couple leave their baby boy Bakhtiar in the jungle. He grows up to become a courtier, and tells stories to save his life after being wrongly accused of having an affair with the king's concubine. This *hikayat* is a Malay retelling of the Persian *Bakhtiar-nama*.



Syair Panji Semirang

Printed by Haji Muhammad Siraj

Safar 1306 (February/March 1888)

Collection of National Library of Singapore, B18153077J

The *Syair Panji Semirang* is based on the Panji tales. A typical Panji tale includes numerous adventures, with both hero (Raden Inu) and heroine (Candra Kirana) adopting various disguises and new names. In this story, Candra Kirana disguises herself as a man named Panji Semirang.

The story of Panji Semirang was very popular – there are many surviving manuscripts and several printed editions. In the early 20th century, the tale was frequently performed in *bangsawan* (Malay opera). Later in 1961, the story was also retold in film.

Early Printers

Early Malay/Muslim book printing in Singapore was dominated by entrepreneurs of Javanese ancestry. Many printing shops were clustered near the Sultan Mosque in Kampong Gelam, as that was where potential customers – the faithful performing Friday prayers, or pilgrims going to Mecca – gathered. Based on the work of scholar Ian Proudfoot, who compiled an inventory of early printed Malay books up to 1920, the three most prolific early Malay/Muslim printers were Haji Muhammad Said, Haji Muhammad Siraj and Haji Muhammad Taib.



Hambalah yang Bernama Shaer Pantun Seloka Adanya

1900, Singapore

Printed by Haji Muhammad Said

Collection of National Library of Singapore, B18153100H

Haji Muhammad Said bin Haji Muhammad Arsyad and his sons operated the most successful Malay printing press in early Singapore. His ancestry can be traced to Semarang, a town on the northern coast of Java.

As mentioned in this book, Muhammad Said's shop was located in front of the Sultan Mosque. He started printing books in the 1870s and had published around 200 titles by the 1910s. He mostly printed popular *syair* and *hikayat*. His business in Singapore flourished and he set up a store in Penang in 1892, operated by his son Majtahid.

Marketing and Copyright

Early Malay book printers were also booksellers. They often advertised their current or forthcoming titles at the beginning or end of a book, inviting readers to visit their shop. Some printers such as Haji Muhammad Siraj also advertised in the newspapers, which he did regularly in the weekly *Jawi Peranakan* from 1897 to 1898. In addition, Muhammad Siraj printed complimentary book catalogues that list not only the titles and their prices, but also instructions on how to order by mail. The printers-cum-publishers had a network of agents in various urban centres to take book orders.

In 1886, the Straits Settlements government promulgated the Book Registration Ordinance. This law required printers within the Straits Settlements to register their publications with the colonial secretary's office and to deposit three copies of every publication. Of the three copies, one was sent to the British Museum, the other left with the colonial secretary, and the third deposited with the Raffles Library and Museum in Singapore.



Perang Yarmuk

Printed by Haji Muhammad Taib

3 Rabiulakhir 1311 (13 October 1893)

Collection of National Library of Singapore, B29362094B

The colophon at the bottom of the page shown here informs readers that this work was registered with the government. It also states that this work was the continuation of the *Futuh al-Syam*, a story about the conquests of Syria by the early Muslim army.

The Book Registration Ordinance required book registrations to be reported in the government gazette every quarter. The *Perang Yarmuk* (*Prang Yar Mook*) was reported in the Straits Settlements Government Gazette of 19 January 1894.



Syair Abdul Muluk Isterinya Siti Rafi'ah

Printed by Haji Muhammad Amin

5 Zulkaedah 1311 (9 May 1894), Singapore

Collection of National Library of Singapore,
B29362100A

According to the inventory compiled by scholar Ian Proudfoot, the most popular books of the late 19th century were romantic adventures in verse. *Syair Abdul Muluk* was one of the bestselling early Malay books. There were over 20 editions

printed by various publishers. The poem tells the story of heroine Siti Rafi'ah, who disguises herself as a man and takes up arms in order to rescue her husband and his first wife from captivity. The strong Islamic flavour in this *syair* and other popular stories indicates that such values appealed to the audience then.

Decline

Singapore dominated the Malay/Muslim book printing industry in the 19th century. Over time, however, other urban centres in peninsular Malaya, such as Penang, emerged as secondary printing hubs. By the turn of the 20th century, the Singapore printing trade was deteriorating due to the large number of lithographed and typographic books imported from Mecca, Cairo, Istanbul and Bombay. These books were not only superior in quality but, because they came from the Islamic heartlands, also more highly regarded than local works.

In addition, this period saw a shift in readers' preferences – towards typographic books, as they were deemed more legible visually. Previously only newspapers and books printed for schools were typeset in Jawi. Unlike lithography, typography required a higher capital investment, which most local printers could not afford.



Kitab yang Bernama Masalah Seribu

Printed by Matba'ah Al-Turki Al-Majid

AH 1330 (1911/2), Mecca

Donated by Richard Olaf Winstedt

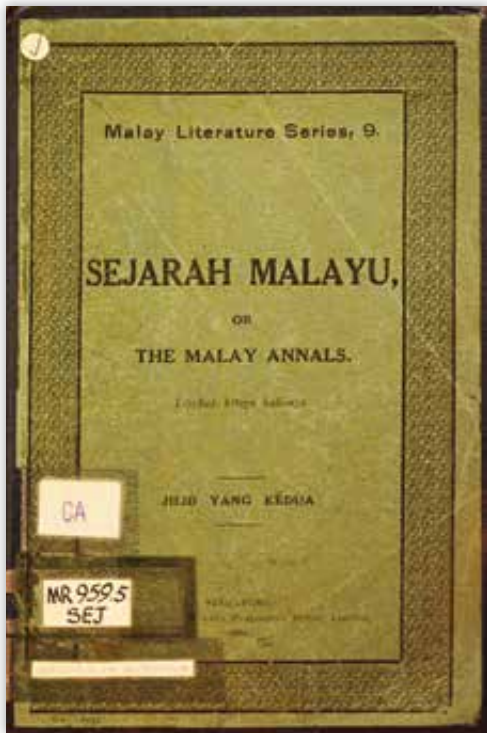
Collection of National Library of Singapore,
B32407992C

This is an example of a typeset Malay book from Mecca. From as early as the 1870s, books in Malay were printed in places like Bombay and Cairo. By

the mid-1880s, Mecca was also printing Malay books, and these began to be distributed in Singapore in 1887. Such foreign imprints flooded the local markets of Southeast Asia from 1920 onwards. The large quantities of typeset religious books from Mecca arriving in Southeast Asia helped to change the local Malay readers' perception of typeset Malay books. Until then, they had often associated typeset Malay books with those produced by Christian presses.

Malay Literature in Schools

From the 1890s, the British government promoted European-style education to the local populace. Richard James Wilkinson (1867–1941), who was appointed the federal inspector of schools in 1903, lamented the lack of quality Malay reading materials for educational purposes. He initiated the production of the Malay Literature Series (1906) to solve this problem and to promote the use of romanised Malay. By 1920, there were 20 titles in the series. The selection of the works reflected the tastes of the editors and was a mixed bag of literary works – ranging from court literature like the *Sulalat al-Salatin* to rural oral folktales. In fact, none of the bestselling titles printed by the local Malay/Muslim publishers were represented in the series. Generations of students in Singapore and Malaysia were introduced to traditional Malay literature through this series.



Sejarah Melayu

Edited by William Shellabear

1930, Singapore

Collection of National Library of Singapore, B02901108J

Most colonial administrators and missionaries saw the *Sejarah Melayu* as an important reliable account of the Melaka sultanate. So it is unsurprising that it was among the first books to be produced as textbooks.

The use of the *Sejarah Melayu* as a textbook had a profound effect. This royal dynastic historical text, which contains the genealogy of the Melaka kings, was traditionally meant to be read at court. Now that it was available to all students of Malay to be read in the classroom, the symbolic and sacred nature of the text depreciated.



ENDURING STORIES



While most of us in Singapore may not be familiar with traditional Malay literature, there are some stories that have endured through the centuries. This section explores three such literary works: *Sulalat al-Salatin* (Genealogy of Kings), *Hikayat Hang Tuah* (Tale of Hang Tuah) and *Hikayat Pelanduk Jenaka* (Tale of the Wily Mousedeer).

Sulalat al-Salatin

The *Sulalat al-Salatin* contains stories about the rise and fall of the Melaka sultanate (c.1400–1511). More commonly known as the *Sejarah Melayu*, it is considered to be one of the most important works of traditional Malay literature. The work is believed to have been initially derived from a list of kings and their reigns, and then elaborated with stories. While the date of the original composition is still debated, the oldest surviving manuscript dates to the Islamic year 1021 (1612). Some scholars believe that this text

was composed to bolster support for the Melaka-Johor sultans' (and later Riau's) claim to greatness, as they had been forced out of Melaka by the Portuguese in 1511.

Not just a royal genealogy, the *Sulalat al-Salatin* is a complex and multifaceted text that contains details about Malay statecraft and the cosmopolitan nature of early Melaka society. Significantly for Singapore, the *Sulalat al-Salatin* also contains stories about the city-state's early history – such as Sri Tri Buana (Sang Nila Utama) founding Singapura, and the attack of the garfish. In the *Sulalat al-Salatin*, Singapore is one of the capital cities of the Malay sultans, a great port and naval base.



Sulalat al-Salatin

Probably 17th century

On loan from Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, Raffles M18

This particular copy – known as Raffles 18 – once belonged to Stamford Raffles, and is believed to be one of the earliest recensions of the original text. The introduction mentions the date of the composition as the Islamic year 1021 (1612) and states that the patron was Sultan Ala'uddih Ri'ayat Shah of Johor.

Hikayat Hang Tuah

The story of the ancient Melaka hero Hang Tuah is among the best known in Malay history and literature. Set during the era of the Melaka sultanate, the *hikayat* tells the story of a boy from a poor family rising to become a loyal *laksamana* (admiral) of the Melaka ruler. Hang Tuah is not just a brilliant military commander, but also a wise counsellor and a sophisticated diplomat who travels to many faraway places, and eventually becomes a mystic. Some believe Hang Tuah to be a real historical figure, and debates about his identity still abound.

The *Hikayat Hang Tuah* is rich with details about the court as well as everyday life in ancient Melaka. It is believed to have been composed in the 17th century. Scholar Boris Borisovitch Parnickel suggests that the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* reflects events that took place in 17th-century Johor: The rivalry between Melaka and Majapahit as depicted in the *hikayat* is an allegory of the actual conflict between Johor and Jambi. Other scholars have explored the links between Hang Tuah and the ruler – how their lives personify the destiny of Melaka – and the *hikayat* as a didactic work or geographical text.



Hikayat Hang Tuah

Copied by Mir Abdul Latif

Rabiulawal 1172 (November 1758)

On loan from Leiden University Library, Cod. Or 1762

This manuscript is the oldest extant copy of the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. The story ends with the capture of Portuguese Melaka by the Dutch and Johor Malays. This concluding historical event (1641) is found in most surviving manuscripts of the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*.

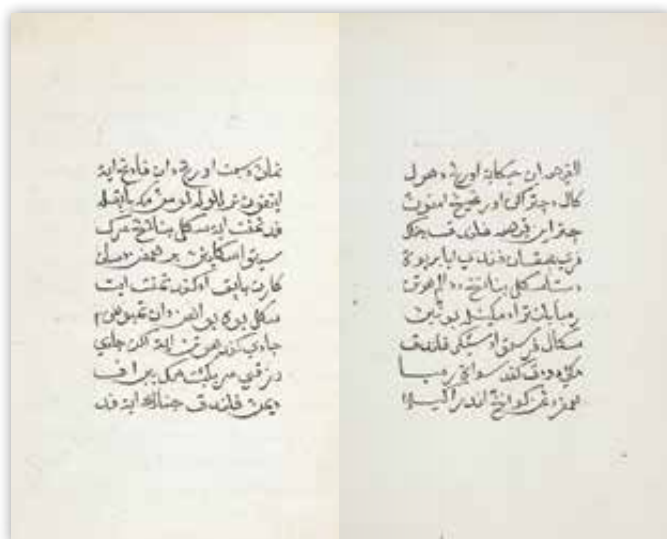
Besides providing the date and name of the copyist, the colophon also states that Hang Tuah was famous; his bravery was unrivalled in the Malay lands and Java; he was very intelligent and loyal to his master; and should one feel sad, read the *hikayat* to dispel such emotion.

Mousedeer Stories

The stories of Sang Kancil the mousedeer (*pelanduk*) outwitting all other animals despite its diminutive size are well known in Southeast Asia. Such stories were part of the oral tradition of the Malay world, and also developed as written literature. The earliest existing Malay written work on the mousedeer, the *Hikayat Pelanduk Jenaka*, comes from the mid-17th century and is held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (National Library of France).

In the *Hikayat Pelanduk Jenaka*, the mousedeer tricks all the other animals into believing that he has special mystical powers and gives himself the title, Syekh Alam di Rimba (Lord of the Jungle Realm). The scholar Ian Proudfoot has provided a very interesting analysis of the earliest version of this *hikayat*: how it is a challenge on authority, and that the public can be led to think that they need an authority figure. To him, the tale is political satire.

In the early 20th century, orally transmitted mousedeer stories were also written down, simplified and packaged as school textbooks. The oral versions were trickster stories, unlike the epic versions found in the *hikayat*. Today, the tales of the wily mousedeer have been mainly recast as children's literature.



Hikayat Pelanduk

AH 1219 (1804/5), Penang or Kedah

On loan from British Library, MSS Malay B2

This *hikayat* begins by describing where the mousedeer lives – in a jungle near a mountain called Inderakila. The jungle has an abundance of fruits and is therefore full of animals. The mousedeer engineers a truce between two archenemies: the tigers and the goats. Thus begins the mousedeer's adventures in tricking other animals such as the crocodile, elephant and monkey.

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