7

The Voyage to India in Malay Literature

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The Malay world is an immense archipelago comprising thousands of islands. Its maritime space is nearly three times larger than its land space. The seas are an essential part of its geography, they have forged its history, they mark its identity. In Indonesian and Malay, the homeland is called *tanah air*: 'land and water'.

The coastal populations of the archipelago have always been sailors, the best known being the Malays, the Javanese and the Bugis. From prehistoric times until today, the seas have played a fundamental role in settlement, migration, trade and exchange. The Malays developed specific nautical techniques very early on. The first foreigners to visit the archipelago, in the 16th century, were surprised to see very large boats (up to a hundred meters long, capable of carrying a thousand barrels).

These groups (say, 'the Malays' to designate them in general) also sailed the oceans to the West and to the East. Contacts with India started even before the Current Era. The Kingdom of Srivijaya (7th–13th c.) was in close contact with India as well as with China (Hoogervorst 2017, Manguin 2023). During the same period, a Malay colony was emigrating beyond India, to Madagascar (Adelaar 1989). The coastal Malay states of the following centuries (Pasai, Malacca, Aceh, Banten, Makassar and many others) were major emporiums in the trade network that joined the Red Sea to the China Sea. The Malays were familiar with the Indian Ocean until the arrival of the Europeans, who soon imposed their superiority and monopoly (Reid 1990).

The sea is omnipresent in Malay reality, it also has a privileged place in their imagination. It is the source of myths, tales and metaphors. In the secular field, the boat and its crew bear, in various societies of the Malay world, the same name as households or small communities, and are used as metaphors for the social

order (Manguin 2001). The symbolism of the sea and the boat is even richer in the religious domain: first in primitive religions, in which the boat appears as a motif in textiles and in shamanic rites (*Ibidem*), and later in a complex Sufi symbolism: the Malay poet Hamzah Fansuri, around 1500, and his followers in the 16th century, developed a mystical Muslim system around the sea representing the divine essence as well as individual existence, the boat symbolizing the human body, the universe and the creation, and the sea voyage symbolizing the journey of human life and the mystical union with the divinity (Drewes & Brakel 1986 ; Braginsky 2004, 2007).

In this context of the omnipresence of the sea in geographical reality, in history and in imagination, what representation of the Indian Ocean does Malay literature give us? Surprisingly, voyages by sea are numerous and even constant in the texts, but the sea is absent. The journeys are not described, they are reduced to a few summary notations: the characters reach their destination in one sentence: they leave and they arrive; nothing happened; the ocean is not dangerous, it is not an obstacle or an ordeal; it is absent, erased, the transparent space of communication between the Malay world and the high centers of civilization.

A large part of the two major texts that I will discuss below, the *Sulalat al-Salatin* and the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, concern Malacca's relations with foreign states, both inside the Malay world and far away to the East and the West.

The *Sulalat al-Salatin* mentions dozens and dozens of sea trips to countries neighboring the Strait of Malacca, either on the Peninsula (Lingga, Bintan, Singapura, Pahang, Kampar, Perak, Kelantan, Patani), or on the coasts of Sumatra (Fansur, Perlak, Lamuri, Aru, Pasai, Siak, Indragiri); in Java (Tuban, Surabaya); in countries located further east (Brunei, Campa, China); in Siam (Syahrun-Nuwi), and in India (Goa, Keling, Ma'abri, Bija Negara). The *Hikayat Hang Tuah* mentions trips to some of the same countries, as well as Mecca and Istanbul. These very numerous trips are mentioned in one sentence: the shortest are: *datanglah* ('they arrived') and *setelah sampai* ('after they arrived'); and in a slightly more elaborate way: *Setelah berapa lamanya di jalan maka sampailah* ('after some time on the way they arrived'). When a duration is mentioned, it is a literary cliché with no relation to reality: Hang Tuah for example travels from

India to China in two months (*Hikayat Hang Tuah* 2008: 409).

Exceptionally, a boat is shipwrecked between India and Ceylon (not because of a storm, but following a curse; see Brown 1970: 134-5), a boat experiences a storm (Manusama 1977: 194-5), or the hero is attacked at sea by the Portuguese, whom he easily defeats, partly thanks to a magic formula (*Hikayat Hang Tuah* 2008: 417) – still, the journeys are not described.

This absence of travel stories is not unique to Malay literature: it seems that ancient Javanese literature also contains none (see Kuntara 1992, Worsley 2012, Jákl 2020).

The texts relate events occurring in the visited countries, as they do about Malacca, but the cities are almost never described either. Malay historians do not describe, they tell stories. They do not describe the environment which is the setting of their story: the city, the forests, the buildings or the objects, any more than they describe the sea voyages. The reason for this absence of descriptions is probably the fact that a description presupposes a concept – concept of city, of society, of environment, of geography – but Malay literature does not deal with concepts, only with stories and anecdotes. The indifference to the reality of cities is spectacularly illustrated by the description, in the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, of the city of Istanbul – which the author believes to be located at a 40 days walk inland – in three parts, one of which is copied from the description of Vijayanagar in the same text (see below), the second is copied from the description of Vijayanagar in the *Sulalat al-Salatin* (*idem*), and the third is copied from the description of Bandar Aceh in another Malay text: the *Bustan al-Salatin*.

This latter text is a notable exception, because it contains a long description of a garden created in Bandar Aceh around 1640 by Sultan Iskandar Thani (see Nuruddin ar-Raniri 1966: 48-52). This exception is due to the fact that this description is included in a very short chapter of an historical nature, within a voluminous work of a religious nature. And discourse, including descriptions, does exist in the domain of religious works.

The only cities described, or rather sketched, in literary texts are located outside the Malay world, and still in an extremely small number, id est the capital of China, Istanbul, a few cities in India and a few in the Red Sea. Yet these descriptions are mostly made up of literary clichés rather than factual observations. The only country in fact that is mentioned several times and in any

detail, is the Indian subcontinent.

I will give a brief overview of the representation of India in nine Malay texts dating from the 15th to the 19th centuries. These evocations tell us nothing about India that we do not yet know from other sources, but they illustrate the way in which the various authors perceived the country, their literary strategy and their historiographic stance. India in these texts is referred to as 'Keling', a name derived from that of the ancient kingdom of Kalinga. I will present the texts in a more or less chronological order.

The first text is the History of the Kings of Pasai (*Hikayat Raja Pasai*, see Hikayat Raja Pasai 1960, 1987), at the northern tip of Sumatra. It covers a long period of Pasai's history from its mythical origins to the fall of the kingdom following an attack by Majapahit, which from other sources we know to date from the 14th century. The beginning of the text, which probably dates from ca. 1400, reports that a ship was sent from Mecca to Sumatra in order to convert Pasai, following an instruction given by the Prophet himself. On the way, the boat stops in Ma'abri, on the Coromanel coast. The local Sultan then abdicates, dresses like a dervish, boards the boat and takes part in the Islamization of Pasai. This episode illustrates in an anecdotal way the role of India in the Islamization of the Malay world; a historical reminiscence embellished by literature. In a second, undatable, part of the text, a yogi comes to Pasai to demonstrate his talents, but the sultan proves to have superior magical powers. Later on, Indian warriors come to Pasai in search of worthy adversaries, but they soon retreat, humbled by the superiority of the Sultan's son.

Here already appears the concern of Malay authors to show the equality or even the superiority of the Malay world in relation to India.

The second text is the 'Malay Annals' (*Sulalat al-Salatin* aka *Sejarah Melayu*, see Sulalat al-Salatin 1998, Brown 1952), the most famous of all Malay historical texts. It probably developed in several stages; the final version was written in Johor (south of the Malay Peninsula) in 1612, but the versions we have today have all been truncated at some point and have been more or less subsequently rewritten. The text is the history of the Malay royal dynasty, mainly during the life of the Malacca Sultanate in the 15th century.

The first chapter reports the origin of the Malay dynasty. The second relates

the history of the country of Nagapatnam: king Raja Shulan conquers all the countries up to the west coast of the Malay peninsula, where a Malay king resists him, but is finally slain. Raja Shulan then defeats the king of Lenggui and later marries his daughter. He then returns to India and founds the city of Bija Negara (Vijayanagar). His descendants rule this kingdom 'to this day', says the text. This story seems to be a vague reminiscence of the coming to the Straits of Malacca of a Chola armada which attacked the capital of Srivijaya at the beginning of the 11th century. But at the same time it tells of an alliance by marriage between the king of Vijayanagar and a Malay royal family.

The city of Bija Negara is described in the text in unrealistic terms, which are probably borrowed from a literary text:

> Its fort was of black stone with walls seven fathoms thick and nine fathoms high, and so skilled were the masons that not an interstice was to be seen; it was as though the masonry had been poured into place. The gate was of hammered gold, with studs of gold bejewelled. As for the extent of the fort, there were seven mountains within its compass, and in the midst of the city was a lake, so large that it looked like a sea and if an elephant stood on the far shore it could not be seen from the near shore. Into this lake the king released fish of every sort, and in the middle of it stood an island of great height, over which vapour constantly hovered as though the summit was wrapped in dewy mist. And on this island he planted trees of all kinds, and every sort of flower and fruit-tree that exists in this world was to be found there. It was to this island that the king resorted for pleasure. And by the side of this island he made a great forest into which he released wild beasts of every kind; and when he wished to go hunting or to capture elephants, it was to this forest that he went. When the city was completed, Raja Shulan gave it the name of Bija-nagara. The city exists to this day in the country of Kalinga. (Brown 1970: 9.)

Later on, as the Malay dynasty has settled in Singapore, the daughter of the king of Keling is married to the son of the king of Singapore; they have children who will rule over the country. Later still, when the Malay dynasty has settled in

Malacca and converted to Islam, a Muslim prince from the kingdom of Pahili in the country of Keling goes into exile in the Malay world; he marries the daughter of the king of Pasai, then he settles in Malacca, where he marries the daughter of a high dignitary.

Much later, the Sultan of Malacca sends a courtier to India to buy fabrics decorated with thousands of floral motifs. Indian craftsmen are unable to produce them, and it is finally the Malay envoy who designs them. On the way back the envoy's boat sinks; he himself reaches Ceylon, whose king wants to retain him for his artistic talents, but he manages to escape and return to Malacca.
We therefore see again in this text the affirmation of multiple alliances through marriages between the Malay world and India, as well as, in a trivial anecdote, an example of the superiority of the Malays.

The Novel of Hang Tuah (*Hikayat Hang Tuah*),[1] also written in Johor at the end of the 17th century, is a historical narrative centered on the person of a great officer of Malacca in the second half of the 15th century: he is the Laksamana, the chief admiral, who is one of the main characters of the *Sulalat al-Salatin* quoted above. The hero's adventures are mostly legendary, but the story of his journey to India preserves reminiscences of the past.

The beginning of the text relates the origin of the Malay dynasty: a child of divine origin, Sang Purba, is made king in Palembang. From a princess also of divine origin, he has four sons, whom diviners predict are destined to become kings of Malacca, Keling, Java and Minangkabau. One of them becomes king of the city he founded himself: Malacca. He summons one of his brothers and designates him as his successor, but soon, following a slander, he expels him from the palace. The brother becomes a fisherman and lives miserably. Then a rich merchant arrives from the country of Bijaya Nagaram (Vijayanagar), looking for a son of Sang Purba to reign over Keling; he meets the destitute brother by chance and obtains the king's permission to take him to Keling. This is how the second son of Sang Purba becomes king of Bijaya Nagaram, which becomes prosperous.

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[1] The standard edition of the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* is that of Kassim Ahmad, first published in 1964. The page numbers below refer to the edition in the Karya Agung series, 2008.

Later still, the king of Malacca sends Hang Tuah on an embassy to Bijaya Nagaram. On the way Hang Tuah makes a stop at an island, where he meets the prophet Khidr. Then after a while at sea he reaches Nagapatam and from there goes to Bijaya Nagaram on horseback to meet King Kisna Rayan (id est Krishna Deva Raya, r. 1509-1529). The text reminds us that the royal house of Malacca is older than that of Vijayanagar ('Malacca's Sultan is the elder brother of His Highness Kisna Rayan' p. 388). And when the missive from the Sultan of Malacca that Hang Tuah has brought with him is taken to the king's palace with great ceremony, the fascinated crowd observes that indeed 'the king of Malacca is our king's elder', p. 392).

The city and the court are described according to literary stereotypes, as in the following example:

> Getting close, the Admiral [Hang Tuah] could see that all the gates of the fort were carved with images of the most beautiful animals. One layer was made of sapphire, another one of black stone like shiny beetle wings, another one, as the Admiral could see, was illustrated with the story of Seri Rama, another one with the story of the victorious Pandawa, another one with various kinds of animals in the jungle, while the gate was made of copper. (p. 391)

Hang Tuah commands admiration because he speaks the local language:

> then Kisna Rayan and the prime minister and all the kings and ministers attending were amazed at seeing that the Admiral knew the Nagaram language, because among all those kings and ministers only selected ones were conversant in it. Kisna Rayan was pleased to see how fluently the Admiral was speaking in the Keling language, with a fair countenance, a melodious voice, and with perfectly tactful words. (pp. 392-3)

Hang Tuah is treated with the greatest respect. The king is dazzled by Hang Tuah's elegance, politeness, bravery and wisdom, and he showers him with gifts. Hang Tuah demonstrates his multiple talents: he manages to ride an untameable

horse that no warrior has been able to master; he makes a magical remedy thanks to which the wife of the governor of Nagapatam, Nala Sang Guna, who until then had not been able to have children, becomes pregnant. He saves Nala Sang Guna from humiliation when the king sets a trap for him (the king invites himself to dinner with thousands of courtiers, but forbids all his subjects from selling him wood to cook this dinner; Hang Tuah advises him to use thousands of cloths soaked in oil as fuel); Hang Tuah offers the king a seed which, once planted, produces in an instant a growing tree, bearing delicious fruits, and which disappears as soon as the fruits are eaten (a magic seed given to him by the prophet Al-Khidr himself on the way to India); Hang Tuah kills a supposedly invincible Indian warrior who attacked him. Hang Tuah causes such admiration that the king appoints him to lead an embassy to China, which he accomplishes perfectly.

The court of Kisna Rayan displays unparalleled wealth and magnificence. The city also displays incomparable prosperity. Hang Tuah is fascinated by the abundance, the wealth and the luxury. He observes that 'ten Malay merchants are not as rich as one Indian merchant' (p. 390). And further 'The king of Keling is indeed a great king, and every merchant is immensely rich. Ten Malay kings cannot compare with one Indian merchant.' (p. 395)

Hang Tuah visits the city together with Nala Sang Guna. They see a large number of charitable foundations (*balai derma*), and they spend two nights in a temple of great beauty designated as *sitam berama*, a probable corruption of Chidambaram, the name of the famous temple in Tamil Nadu.[2] Nobles go there to worship the deity during festivals, and captains and merchants in need of funds borrow money at a rate of five percent: 'for each twenty catty he borrowed, he presented one catty to the deity, and so it is that the gold of the temple multiplied' (p. 407). This is a truly interesting observation, as we know that Indian temples at that time acted as money lenders (see Spencer 1968, who gave a much higher interest rate in the early 11th century). Inside the temple they also see a pond filled with oil, a fact which again fits with historical evidence (many devotees made donations in the form of ghee, clarified butter, see Spencer 1968). They then visit a charity foundation: all donations, clothing and food, are distributed

[2] I thank Arlo Griffiths for suggesting this identification.

to the needy.

Still further in the text, the king of Malacca sends an embassy to Ceylon to purchase precious stones. This very long chapter of the novel of Hang Tuah reveals a real fascination for the wealth and splendor of India, but it is based on the postulate that the Malay royal house is the elder of the Indian one, and it exposes through a series of anecdotes how a Malay hero can prove himself superior to all the high officers of the Indian court.

My fourth text, entitled 'History of Hitu' (*Hikayat Tanah Hitu*, see Manusama 1977; Straver et al. 2004) was written in Makassar, around 1650, by a dignitary from the principality of Hitu, in the Moluccas, named Rijali. It is an exceptional text in the history of Malay literature because it is dedicated to a factual and truthful account of the history of this tiny state. Rijali was a man of some importance, and in 1621 he accompanied his cousin on an embassy to the Governor General of the Dutch VOC (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie) in Batavia. The cousin in question made a six-month trip to the Coromandel coast on a Dutch ship on this occasion, and it seems that Rijali also accompanied him. Leaving in July 1622, they landed at Tevanapatam and followed the coast towards the north. In Pondicherry, they observed a slave market, where slaves were sold four times cheaper than in Batavia. They stopped at Nagapatinam, São Tomé, where they visited the Portuguese church, Pulicat, where they resided in a Dutch fort (Fort Geldria), and Masulipatnam, where they stayed for a while. Rijali echoes his cousin's amazement at the wonders and horrors he discovers in this city:

> Next they sailed to the trading port of Masulipatam, where he stayed at the house of a merchant named Haji Baba. There Mihirjiguna became famous under the name of Sultan Karanful ['Clove'] Kipati Syah. There he saw all the jewels of the world; things our ancestors had never seen. Moreover, many creations cannot be described, such as luxurious objects dedicated to beauty and to man's desire, but just as indescribable were the evil and hateful ones, joy and sorrow, like wealthy and poor people, and people who lived under the ground, and people who did not have a place to live, and people who cleaned up human filth in that country. There was a public bath with both warm and cold water. In the

> morning people bathed in hot water, and at mid-day they bathed in cold water. All these refined worldly deeds he saw, for Masulipatam was the trading port of Kutb Syah, the king of Golconda, during the reign of Sultan Muhammad Quli.

Rijali's text is extremely short and contains little information, but it is the rare testimony, especially at such a (relatively) remote time, of a 'Malay' traveler simply recording what he has seen. It is significant that Rijali cites Golconda and not Vijayanagar, which is the reference of the *Sulalat al-Salatin* and the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*.

The following text, the 'History of the Kingdom of Banjarmasin' (*Hikayat Banjar*, see Ras 1968), is very close chronologically, as it is generally dated 1663. The beginning of the text reports the founding of the Kingdom of Banjar by a Keling merchant. The story is the following: before dying, an immensely rich merchant of Keling advises his son to leave the country, where he has no future, and to look for a foreign land in which to settle. The son follows this advice and settles in southern Borneo, where he founds the kingdom of Nagara Dipa. He subdues the surrounding countries and becomes rich. He names king and queen a pair of wooden statues that he has had carved and which he later replaces with bronze statues, but after his death, his sons discover a young girl born from the foam in a river and a boy coming from the sun, whom they take for king and queen.

This story is borrowed from Javanese traditions, in which Keling designates a kingdom in East Java, but the name was certainly interpreted by Malay readers and listeners of the Malay *hikayat* as designating Southern India. Here we have again the intervention of an Indian merchant in the history of the Malay world, as well as an interesting negotiation of the status of the royalty: initially the king and queen are a couple of statues elected to royal status, but subsequently they are replaced by two divine beings in conformity with the Malay myth of origin.

A jump of about a century leads to the next text, the *Syair Hemop* (see Syair Hemop 1935, Kern 1948), so named after the name of the main character, the Dutchman Gustaaf Willem Baron van Imhoff, who was to become Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies. This text is an extremely long poem dating from the end of the 18th century, perhaps around 1760, and very poorly known. The first

part of the poem relates in great detail (it is more than a thousand four-line stanzas long) events concerning the Dutch presence in Ceylon in the 1730s. In short, the VOC (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie) attempted to impose a system of commercial monopoly, particularly on cinnamon, through acts of intimidation and the blockade of ports, finally causing conflicts and battles with the population and with the royal administration. The poem muddles up some facts and considerably amplifies the clashes, transforming skirmishes into disproportionate fights involving thousands of men.

Beyond a literary strategy and a few errors, the poem nevertheless reveals a real knowledge of history and even a familiarity with the high echelons of power in Batavia. Also apparent is the desire to present van Imhoff as a hero and the previous Governor-General, Adriaan Valckenier, as a manipulative and corrupt character. Van Imhoff was governor of Ceylon in 1736-1740; he restored peace and was able to maintain good relations with the king of Kandi. The poem claims that he was sent to Ceylon by Valckenier, when in reality, the latter was only appointed Governor-General a year later, in 1737, but this is probably a literary device rather than a lack of knowledge of the facts.

The rest of the *syair* deals with the massacre of the Chinese in Batavia, in October 1740, and the ensuing war across Java. We therefore have, in this poem, a historical narrative relating to Ceylon which is not an exact and reliable historical account, but which is based on a realistic stance and – this is the most important - on a political vision, the opposite of the fabrications of the *Sulalat al-Salatin* and the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*.

The following text provides the account of a trip actually made to India. This is the 'Narrative of the Condition of Bengal' (*Hikayat Perintah Negeri Benggala*, see Ahmad Rijaluddin 1982, Skinner 1976, 1978) written by Ahmad Rijaluddin ibn Hakim Long Fakir Kandu, a clerk from the Chulia community of Pulau Penang in Malaya after a trip to Bengal in 1810. Ahmad Rijaluddin accompanied, perhaps as a translator, an English trader by the name of Robert Scott, who was close to Lord Minto. Ahmad Rijaluddin has most probably written this text at the instigation of one of the English gentlemen with whom he was in contact (including Raffles and John Leyden), but his postulated readers may in fact have been his fellow Chulias in Penang, who are known in Malay as 'Melayu Keling'

and who were at the time, in Penang, more numerous than the Malays.[3] The story, long and detailed, is very strongly marked by the weight of the Malay literary tradition: Skinner (Ahmad Rijaluddin 1982, p. 160, n. 51) points out for example a parallel between the description of Lord Minto's residence and a passage from the *Hikayat Sri Rama*, the succinct Malay adaptation of the *Ramayana*. Some descriptions even seem to owe more to literary clichés from Malay epics than to the reality of the places and monuments he observed – for example this evocation of the ponds in the park of the English residences of Barrackpore:

> The water in the tank is as clear as tear-drops and it is here that the English girls come to bathe in their hundreds. In warm weather, all the girls go to bathe in the tanks, a beautiful sight, it is as though the nymph Sekerba had come down from paradise; the girls splash about in great numbers, like ducks swimming in a pond. (p. 85)

Despite this weight of the literary tradition Ahmad Rijaluddin's story is still striking for the amount of information it contains. Ahmad describes several dozen places: villages, markets, monuments, gardens, places of prostitution, with an obvious effort at completeness, a wealth of details and an abundance of vernacular (Urdus) terms, which supposes either a careful observation carried out personally on the spot, or more likely a host of questions asked to local informants and duly recorded. His description of the Government House in Calcutta would deserve to be compared with two descriptions made in the same year, under the same circumstances: that of Ibrahim Kandu (below) and that of Maria Graham (1812, p. 137, see Figure 1). Ahmad took his task very seriously; he describes each town according to an identical plan (he successively evokes, and sometimes in identical terms, the head of government (the *raja*), the fort, the palace, the market, the prostitutes' district, the places of worship, the residences

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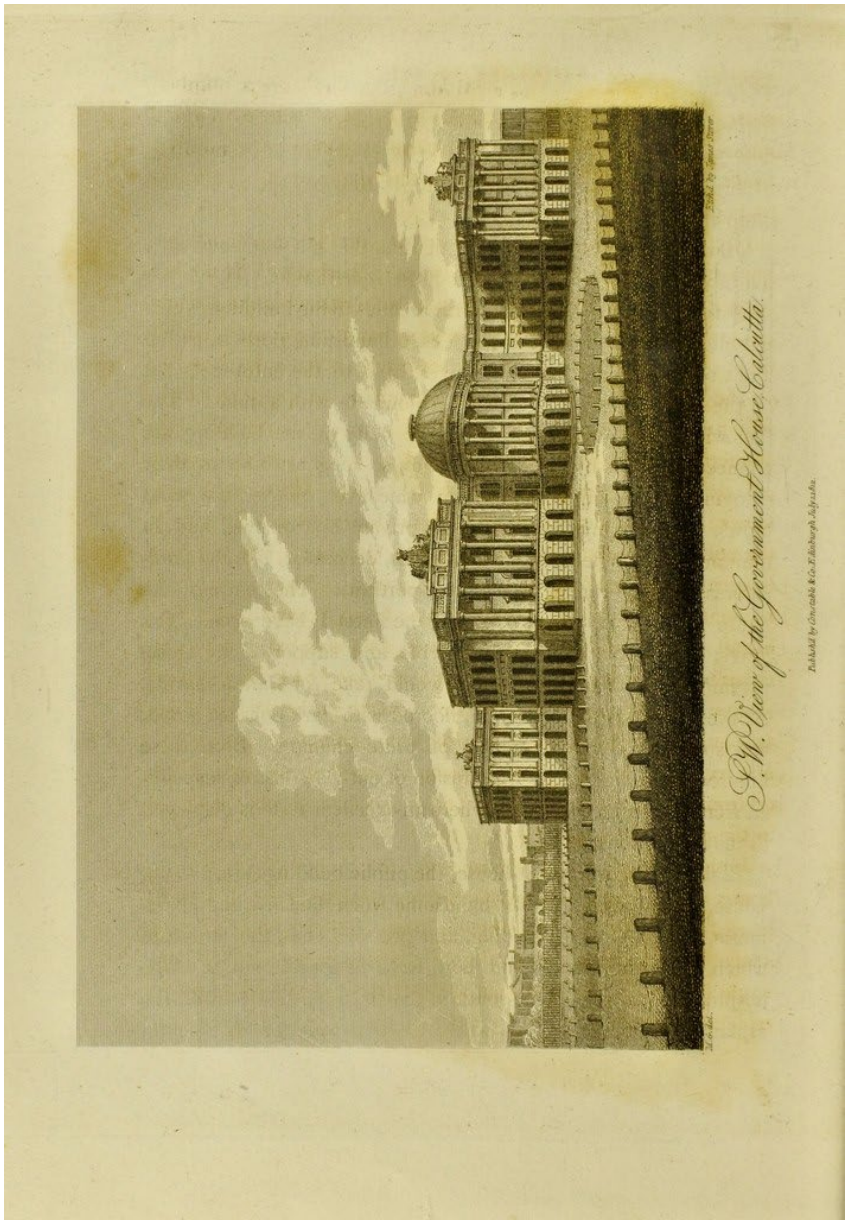
[3] Observing that Ahmad borrows his tropes from classical Malay literature, B.W. Andaya (2017: 22) concludes that "these 'Keling Malays' identified with Malay society and that they were writing for Malay audiences", but in fact those 'Keling Malays' had long appropriated classical Malay literature: writing in 'classical Malay style' did not imply any kind of audience, whether Malay or Chulia (or Chinese).



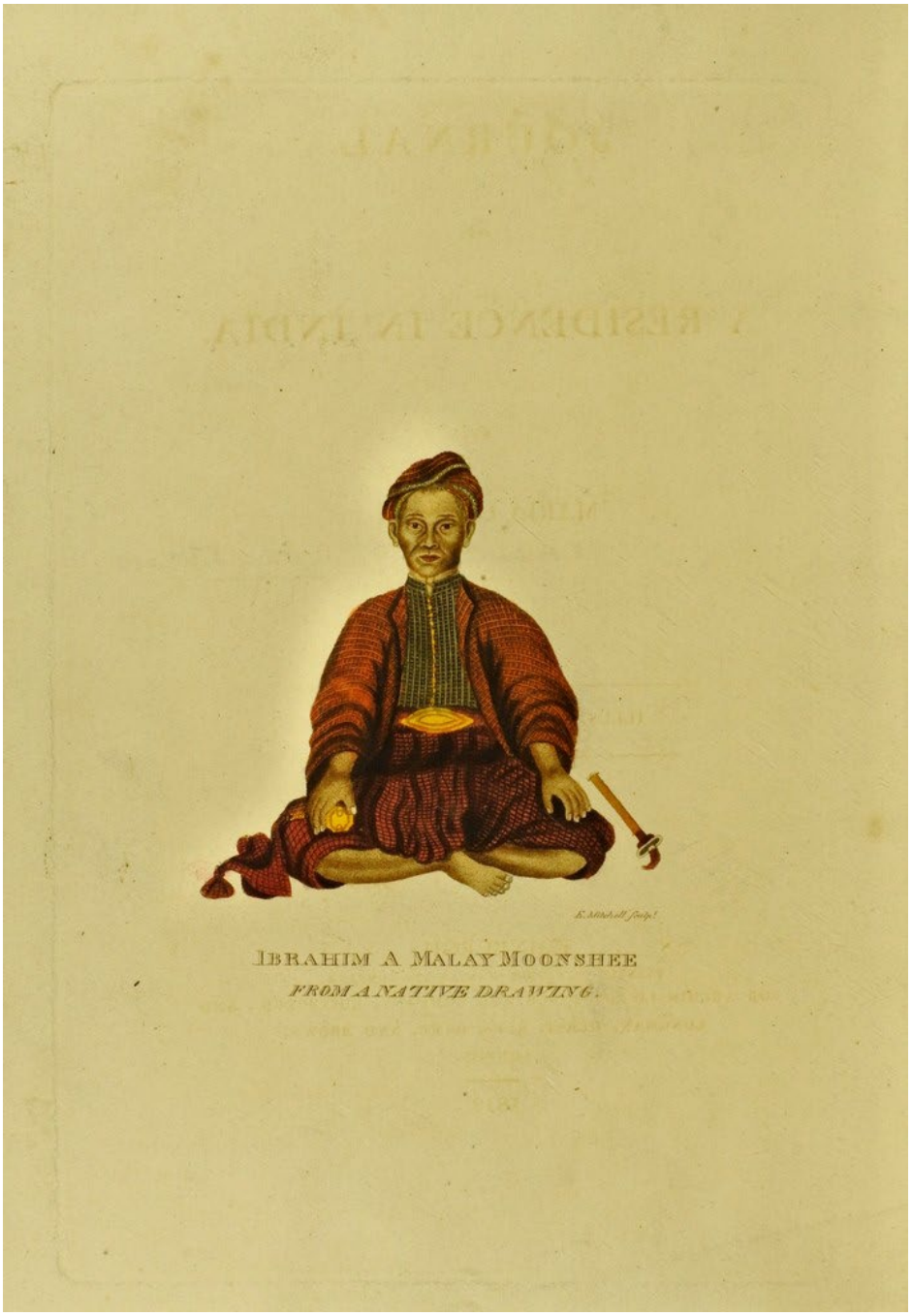
The Government House in Calcutta in 1811.
Source : Maria Graham, Journal of a Residence in India (1812), p. 137.

of the wealthy and the countryside. The omnipresent prostitutes' neighborhoods (one would never have guessed there were so many prostitutes in British India!) are also described following an identical plan and using formulas repeated from one to the other.

Ahmad is of Chulia origin, but he describes Calcutta and its environs without ever suggesting any sense of familiarity. He makes no general remarks, he records no personal impression – apart from a fascination with grandeur, wealth and luxury, which were already a trope of 'classic' Malay authors – he strives to an objectivity which is totally foreign to some of the classic texts we saw above. His account, however, betrays a personal fascination with brothels, which he describes several times in picturesque and romantic terms, as if they were places solely devoted to music and dancing (e.g. p. 89, 95, 113), and which give rise to a unique episode of this text: evoking a prostitution district, he recounts how bar owners lure sailors, get them drunk, then hand them over to prostitutes, who strip them of all their money, and this unspecific anecdote leads to a personalized story, in which a prostitute who kept a sailor for a week in her place, claims to be desperate to see him leave and, following an exchange of romantic pantuns, ends up extorting his last pennies (pp. 59-60). This curious comedy (which however ends in court) is followed by the description of the Tabut festival which celebrates, in the month of Muharram, the martyrdom of Husayn at Karbala. Then follows the description of six other settlements upstream of Calcutta: Barrackpore, Dumdum, Serampore, Chandernagore, Chinsura and Hooghly.

Finally, Lord Minto, with the consent of the 'ruler of Europe', sends an armada to attack Mauritius and take it from the French, which is promptly done. Then Lord Minto decides to also attack Batavia. A fleet sets out, but Ahmad Rijaluddin's story ends here abruptly.

Another Chulia from Penang, Ibrahim bin Kandu, who was perhaps Ahmad's younger brother, visited Calcutta the same year, in the company of another Englishman, the famous linguist John Leyden. He wrote a very short text, a few pages only, on his impressions of the trip, in which he essentially describes the Government House in Calcutta and the 'Public Disputation' which took place there in September 1810, to which he was very proud to have been invited. Ibrahim is much more personal in his notes than Ahmad. Admiring the superlatively pretty ladies seated in the room, he singles out the most beautiful



Ibrahim Munshi, author of a Malay 'Account of Bengal' in 1811.
Source : Maria Graham, Journal of a Residence in India (1812), frontispice.

of them – and eight months pregnant – and remarks: 'She resembled Fatima, the wife of I, Ibrahim, the son of Candu the merchant, but she was more beautiful.' And to those heavenly creatures he dedicates a poem.

Ibrahim's text, 'An Account of Bengal, and of a Visit to the Government House, by Ibrahim, the son of Candu the poor merchant of Keddah', was published, in the English translation by John Leyden, in the Maria Graham' book,

Journal of a Residence in India (1812), who was present at this event.[4] She had noticed Ibrahim in the crowd and gives his portrait as the frontispiece of her book (see Illustration 2). Ibrahim's story naively expresses his boundless admiration for everything he observes, but it is a remarkably realistic and factual description, which is the fruit of personal observation. Ibrahim insists on the fact that he is welcomed with kindness and respect by all the English lords ('*tuan-tuan*') present; it is probably the first Malay text to express this cultural shock (that we will find again, in Indonesia, in Mas Marco Kartodikromo's novel *Student Hijo*, one century later).

Our last text is also written by a man of mixed ascendency, in this case Arab, Indian and Malay. This is the most famous Malay author of the 19th century, Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munshi (see Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munsyi 2005; Ché-Ross 2000). Although an extremely devout Muslim, he worked for years in the service of American missionaries, who taught him English and printing techniques, and introduced him to Western modernity. Abdullah's discourse, resolutely modern and realistic, is totally different from that of the texts we have seen so far. At the age of 58, in 1854, Abdullah undertook the pilgrimage to Mecca. He made the journey, reaching Jeddah and then Mecca, but died a few days later of illness, probably cholera. The text that we possess, the 'Narrative of Abdullah's journey to Mecca' (*Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah ke Mekah*) therefore only includes the account of his journey to the Holy Land. The boat leaves Singapore and makes two stopovers of a few days in India, i.e. in Allepey (Alappuzha) and Calicut. In these two cities, as he would later do in three cities on the Red Sea, Abdullah, as a curious and observant man eager to know and

[4] The text is edited in Skinner's edition of the *Hikayat Perintah Negeri Benggala*, 1982.

understand, questions the people he meets, makes sketches, draws maps. He inquires about everything: history, government, law, economy, clothing, habitat, architecture, wildlife, livestock, vegetation, currency, mosques, other places of worship, ethnic diversity, climate, condition of the streets, markets, agriculture, food, tombs of renowned people, and the use of *qat*. Having seen in Calicut a very large impressive three-storey mosque with a large pool, he thought that 'whosoever would read this book later would surely like to know who had created it', so that he asked a great number of people until an old man, 'about eighty years of age', told him the story, but only after asking himself: 'Now this is a surprise! No one has ever bothered to ask about how it was built before. Where are you from? And why do you wish to know this?' (Ché-Ross 2000: 191). We too as readers may be surprised by Abdullah's insatiable curiosity and perseverance. Here is an example of the information he collected in Allepey:

> There are no other races to be seen in this country except for Chettys, Indian Muslims, and *Mamans*, who are merchants. There is an extremely wealthy *Maman* who had built four to five three-masted ships and eight to nine *Petamari*, which are ships whose mast leans towards the front, and his name is Haji Yaacob. He has built a congregational mosque but the person who began building it originally was his father, (whose) name was Yusuf Sabur. His son then completed it and people have estimated its cost to be around twenty thousand *Ringgit*. (Ché-Ross 2000: 188)

Abdullah masters Tamil, Urdu and English, but he is not 'Keling' in the least: he observes India as a foreign country, without prejudice, without expectations, and he makes judgments like a man of his time; he deplores for instance the fact that in Allepey as in Calicut, he is constantly harassed by beggars. With Abdullah ends the fantastic, irrational and impersonal mode which characterized ancient literature. The world is now described with objectivity in mind. Abdullah was a learned man who had a very good knowledge of ancient Malay literature, but he had no regard for the view of history it offered. He describes the India he saw (two towns in Kerala), which has completely lost the splendor and glory of the kingdoms that fascinated the Malays of the past.

The nine texts that I have summarized are called *hikayat* (except for one *syair*), but they do not belong to the same genre. The texts which report the history of a kingdom (*Hikayat Raja Pasai*, *Sulalat al-Salatin* and *Hikayat Banjar*), as well as the historical novel *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, are written for a royal court, with the aim of celebrating the glory of the ruling dynasty. The description of India is entirely stereotypical; India is represented as a country of immense wealth and splendor unlike any other in the world, whose merchants are incomparably rich, and which is epitomized in the empire of Vijayanagar.
Three stories in the course of two centuries: that of Rijali around 1650 (*Hikayat Tanah Hitu*), that of Ibrahim Kandu in 1811, and that of Abdullah Munshi in 1854 (*Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah*) contrast with this literary tradition through their realism: they report an individual experience and give an evocation of India in relation to the circumstances of their respective journeys. The text by Ahmad Rijaluddin, in 1810, is halfway between these two genres: the author describes India (or rather Bengal) as he saw it, but through the filter of the stereotypes of ancient literature. It is no coincidence that the four mythical and legendary texts of the first genre are anonymous, while the other four are signed. Despite their disparity from a literary and historiographical point of view, those Malay texts reflect the evolution of India between the period of kingdoms and empires and that of colonization.

Aside from those prose texts, one poem from about 1760 does not record a personal memory of a voyage to India, but a historical account with an intention of authenticity.

These Malay historical texts do not teach us anything about India that we do not already know from other sources, but they teach us, or remind us, something about Malay literature: it is commonly accepted that realism is the mark of modernity introduced by the influence of European culture in the 19th century. Barbara W. Andaya (2017) has commented with utmost erudition five of the nine texts analysed here, viz. *Sulalat al-Salatin*, *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, *Hikayat Tanah Hitu*, *Hikayat Perintah Negeri Benggala*, and Ibrahim Kandu's 'Account of Bengal', to conclude that all of them reflected 'the dictates of the Malay hikayat tradition' (p. 24). That is the way the 'imagined India' of classical hikayats, that legendary image of an immensely powerful and prosperous India, dominated

Malay accounts of India all the way from the fifteenth to the early nineteenth centuries: 'these imaginings persisted in communal memory, even when they contrasted with lived experience and even when the historical environment itself had changed significantly' (p. 8). We can see here that, in reality, two tendencies coexisted within Malay literature, at least as early as the mid-17th century, namely a tendency to favor legend and myth (e.g. *Sulalat al-Salatin*, *Hikayat Hang Tuah*) and a tendency towards realism (*Hikayat Tanah Hitu*, *Syair Hemop*). As we can see, the Indian Ocean, like other seas, has played an important role in the history of the Malay world, but it is absent from literature. India, on the other hand, is present, more present than any other country with which the Malay world was in contact. India has had a deeper impact on Malay imagination than any other country. A category of ancient texts, inspired by confused reminiscences of past events, has created a fictional collective memory, a sort of folklorization of history. The other texts do not take this heritage into account; they recount a personal experience, but we can see that they have not contributed to collective memory: whether in Indonesia or Malaysia, their texts are today totally ignored, while the previous ones have long been forgotten. India today is known through the international media.

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