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1st MBRAS Lecture 2016

“The *Krusenstern* Manuscript of the Malay Annals (*Sejarah Melayu*)”

by Ahmat Adam

Badan Warisan Malaysia (BWM),
2 Jalan Stonor,
Kuala Lumpur

Saturday, 26 March 2016, 5 p.m.

Abstract

Other than the *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai*, and *Hikayat Seri Rama* and some other less well-known manuscripts, the *Sulalat u's-Salatin* or better known in English as the “Malay Annals”, is considered by many to be the oldest Malay manuscript extant. Because of its status as a work of court literature, the Malay Annals have been known for centuries among the elite within the Malay court circles in the Malay world of Nusantara. The manuscripts of the Annals in existence today are nevertheless only latter-day copies of the original. It appears that over the past three centuries or so there have emerged no less than 44 versions — some of them being complete texts while others only incomplete narratives. They have been labelled “versions” due to the fact that several of the copies have undergone interpolations and revisions under different hands, be they copyists or editors. The numerous variant versions of the Annals have led to unending debates among scholars of Malay studies in the determining the original text that the current existing versions are based on or which existing manuscripts are closest to the original. Sir Richard Winstedt (1938) had claimed that the Raffles MS. No. 18 is the oldest version of the *Sejarah Melayu* since the last narrative in the text ends with the Portuguese attack on Johor Lama in 1535. But is it so?

Unfamiliar to many scholars though, there is another version of the Malay Annals, known as the *Krusenstern Sulalat u's-Salatin*. This Jawi manuscript — copied in Melaka in mid-1798 by three known copyists, namely Haji Muhammad Tahir al-Jawi, Muhammad Zakat Long and Ibrahim Jamrut — is now kept at the Archival library of Oriental Manuscripts in St Petersburg, Russia. Until recently, no study has been undertaken by scholars outside Russia (since the manuscript is inaccessible to non-Russians, it has only critically examined by Russian scholars writing in Russian) except for the Malaysian academic, Emeritus Professor Dr. Ahmat Adam, who has completed an exhaustive study of the *Krusenstern* manuscript. The fruits of this study will be delivered in the talk.

Emeritus Professor Dr. **Ahmat Adam** (born in Melaka, on 24th March 1941) was a graduate of the University of Malaya (1970) and the School of Oriental & African Studies, London University (1975). A former professor of History at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, and the Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Prof. Ahmat is particularly known for his work on the early press in Indonesia, the Straits Settlements of Penang, Malacca and Singapore, and the Malay States. He has written several books and articles, published internationally and locally. Among his recent major publications are *Between History and Myth: the Sejarah Melayu and Hang Tuah in Malaysian historiography* (2016) (published by Gerakbudaya in Malay), *Sulalat u's-Salatin yakni pertuturan segala raja-raja* (a study of the Krusenstern manuscript) (Yayasan Karyawan, 2016), *Melayu: Nasionalisme Radikal dan Pembinaan Bangsa* (University of Malaya Publishers, 2013), *Suara Minangkabau* (University of Malaya Publishers, 2012), and *Letters of Sincerity: the Raffles Collection of Malay Letters (1780–1824)* published by the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society in 2009.

Prof. Ahmat is currently transliterating and editing William Cooke's manuscript 23, "Hikayat Hang Tuah".

The Lecture

Prof. Ahmat Adam began with a brief introduction to the *Sejarah Melayu*, informing the audience what the text was about and what it stood for. Prof. Ahmat was of the opinion that though many historians considered the *Sejarah Melayu* to be a reliable historical source, this was not really the case. Though useful as a literary or historical work, it is nonetheless replete with inaccuracies and questionable anecdotes that are inconsistent with established narratives and documentary evidence.

In the talk, Prof. Ahmat highlighted certain problematic issues regarding the *Sejarah Melayu* such as transliteration and rendition of words found in the original Jawi manuscripts. Prof. Ahmat points out, with the aid of a few examples such as the names Hang Tuah and Hang Lekiu, instances where erroneous transliteration of these words has led to unwarranted conjecture and misinterpretation. Along the way, the audience benefited greatly from Prof. Ahmat's erudition when he expounded on terms found in the *Sejarah Melayu* such as 'derhaka'.

Another aspect of mediaeval Malay culture described by Prof. Ahmat was the linguistic taboo against mentioning one's own name, with the result that individuals were instead identified through their titles, as in the case of Tun Sri Lanang whose real name according to various versions of *Sejarah Melayu* was Tun Mahmud, Muhammad or even Hamid. Prof. Ahmat concluded his fascinating lecture with the hope that the Krusenstern recension of the *Sejarah Melayu* would reveal more information hitherto overlooked by previous versions.



