Kedah’s Islamic conversion stories or gateways to its pre-Islamic past*

Mr Mozaffari-Falarti, Maziar
Queensland University of Technology, Queensland / Australia
mm.mozaffari-falarti@qut.edu.au
+61-411033175

*Draft not for citation without previous written permission from the author.

Essentially the traditional indigenous political system in pre nineteenth century ‘Malay world’ can be divided into two equally significant and interrelated periods an Islamic and a pre-Islamic period. Little is known however about the early history, symbolism and indigenous political systems that existed prior to the arrival of Islam and Islamic influences in Southeast Asia (Wolters 1979: 15). What is known however about the early history and formation of states or settlements political units in the ‘Malay world’ is that they were predominantly based on the coast and river basins, and that from about the 6th to the 15th century AD many of these settlements were at least for short periods of time loosely unified to form the greater Srivijaya and/or Majapahit confederacies. Furthermore, the majority of the native population of these coastal settlements consisted chiefly of fishermen, mariners and seafarers. Conversely another aspect unique to virtually all corners of Southeast Asia was the semi-divine or near-divine attributes associated with the local kings or Rajas (Osborne 1997: 39-45). In any case, the subsequent religious transformation of the Malay peoples, rulers as well as their modes of conversion to Islam act as gateways, into the region’s past and sets the scene for future Malay social and political systems.
The conversion stories of the Malay populations of island and mainland Southeast Asia into Islam, virtually all agree that it was the ruler or Raja that was first converted, and subsequently became the catalyst for the other segments of the population to follow suit (e.g. *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai, Sejarah Melayu/ Sulalat al-Salatin* or the Malay Annals, *Hikayat Patani, Detik-detik Sejarah Kelantan, Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa, Misbana Mengkaji Sejarah Trengganu, Hikayat Aceh*, and traditions in the Southern Philippines). Equally, a similar tradition can also be found in many of the non-Malay Muslim populations in Southeast Asia (e.g. *Arakanese Chronicle*).¹ Many archaeological findings and records in Southeast Asia, such as the wordings of the early fourteenth century Trengganu inscription, are also believed by Southeast Asian scholars to be further documentation of the early conversion of the local rulers into Islam (Winstedt 1972: 34; Slametmuljana 1976: 210-213). Thus, the indigenous and scholarly sources both agree that traditionally the Malay rulers in Southeast Asia were viewed by their subjects, as the only symbolic source of religion and were instrumental in any form of religious transformation. Furthermore, in such a system it is argued that the Raja other than having religious authority held real political, economic and social ‘power’. In the words of the Southeast Asian scholar, Anthony Milner (1982: 113):

“The Raja is not only the ‘key institution’ but the only institution, and the role he plays in the lives of his subjects is as much moral and religious as political.”

This symbolic association of the Malay Raja with religion therefore complemented his control of the economy, trade routes and the political

¹ Moshe Yegar (1972: 18-25) in his study of Arakan, citing travel accounts and early European reports, asserts that the King never converted to Islam.
infrastructure of the maritime and riverine systems within the negri, or territorial unit.

Nevertheless, the conversion hierarchy, with the ruler on top, is contested by more recent Southeast Asian scholars. Pierre-Yves Manguin (1985: 6-7), in his study of European accounts of Southeast Asia asserts that in the case of the Malay territories of Patani, Macassar, Brunei and Champa, the reverse process of conversion had taken place.\(^2\) With the native “merchant population”, rather than the sovereign, of a “maritime town” being the first convert to Islam. Hence, he argues that it was these newly converted Muslim merchant classes that ultimately impelled the conversion of their non-Islamic ruler.

There is no doubt that historically the newly-converted native merchants of Southeast Asia and foreign merchant visitors, were instrumental in the religious shift of native Malays into Islam (Hill 1963: 17; al-Attas 1969; Winstedt 1972: 27; Alatas 1985: 162-175; Sharifa 1985: 29; Reid 1990; Kings, Kadis and Charisma in the Seventeenth Century Archipelago 1993). Yet, the above mode of conversion, outlined by Manguin, does not explain fully the conversion process as it moved outside of the maritime centres and into the remote riverine systems and ulu settlements of the negri. Furthermore, at least in the case of Champa (as well as neighbouring Burma, Siam and Arakan) there is no evidence that their rulers ever deviated from their traditional Hindu/Buddhist beliefs, or if they were ever converted to Islam by their large and influential Muslim populations or merchant classes (Yegar 1972: 1-17, 19, 26-28; Mabbett 1986: 304-307; Qanungo 1988: 288-293; Setudeh-Nejad 2002: 452; Kersten 2006: 10n, 21). Similarly, the 1940 and 1970 discoveries of Muslim coins, dating to the Abbasi d period (234 AH or about 848 AD),

---

\(^2\) In the case of the pre-dominantly Muslim state of Champa the ruler is said to have continued to remain a Hindu.
and two Muslim graves belonging to people of Middle Eastern origin, dated 214 AH (826-829 AD) and 291 AH (903/904 AD), at Kedah suggests the early presence of Muslim influence in the Malay Peninsula and mainland Southeast Asia, only two centuries after the death of Prophet Muhammad in the Arabian Peninsula (Quaritch-Wales 1940: 1-85; Wan Hussein 1980: 135-137; Yatim 1985: 143; Sharifa 1985: 30, 34; Bruce 1996: 73; Sheikh Niamat & Haji Wan Shamsudin 1995/1998: 4; Kesan-Kesan Awal Islam Wujud Di Kedah 2005). But there is no evidence to suggest that Kedah’s ruler or population had by then become Muslim.

At any rate, the process of conversion of a nation, tribe or territory to a new religion, with the ruler as the first and on the top of the conversion hierarchy, is not unusual and can be documented in instances within nearly all monotheistic religions, particularly in Zoroastrianism, Christianity as well as Islam. In the case of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad upon establishing himself in the Arabian Peninsula send a letter to the Persian King, the ruler of Byzantium, and others inviting them to the new religion. In the same way, many traditions on the expansion of Islam outside the Middle East, following the death of Prophet Muhammad in about 622 AD, draw attention to a similar conversion hierarchy with the ruler being the first to convert (e.g. the fourteenth century conversion of the Mongol territory of Chaghadai in Central Asia and Islamic conversions in Africa, see Conversion to Islam 1979; Bone 1982: 128; Biran 2002: 742-752).

In the case of Kedah, the account of the conversion to Islam in both indigenous and scholarly sources follows a similar pattern to the rest of Malay-speaking Southeast Asia. With both sources accepting Kedah’s Hindu-Buddhist and Siamese styled Raja, titled Phra Ong Mahawangsa
or Raja Ong Maha Podisat or Praong Maha Podisat or alternatively Seri Peduka Maharaja Darbar, adopting Islam as the official religion for himself and for his people. Thus, he changed his name to Muzlaf Shah, Mazulfulshah or Mulzultulshah, according to Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa (Low 1849: 476; Fatimi 1963: 74). There are, however, significant discrepancies in the stories about the mode of conversion of Kedah’s Raja between the indigenous and more recent scholarly sources on Kedah. The indigenous sources portray Kedah’s religious transformation with a combination of popular stories and unconventional means. On the other hand, the scholarly sources attribute Kedah’s conversion to be simply the result of charismatic Muslim missionaries visiting the region, or alternatively Islam to have been introduced with the political ascendancy of Melaka in the fifteenth century AD.

In any case, Kedah’s indigenous conversion stories and their variant modes of transformation can give a better picture of the political, religious and social systems prior to the advent of Islam in the region. Moreover, this significant event in Kedah’s history enables us to better comprehend and deconstruct the forces involved in its political survival, as well as its ability to function as a regional economic powerhouse. Being part of a larger project this paper will focus on Kedah’s main indigenous literary source and a historic oral report of the conversion at Kedah.

3 The name Muzlaf Shah is according to S. Q. Fatimi (1963: 73-75) wrongly Romanised by later scholars, namely Muhammad Hassan Bin To’Kerani Mohd Arshad (1927, 1968) and R. O. Winstedt (1938), as Muzaffar Shah. Nevertheless, following this note by Fatimi later scholars, e.g. Adil Buyong (1980) and Khoo Kay Kim (1991: 47n), have continued to wrongly Romanise the name as Muzaffar Shah. G. M. Khan (1939: 14) however refers to the pre-Islamic ruler of Kedah to change his name to Mulzuful Shah upon conversion and Wan Yahya (1911: 3) refers to him as Sultan Mahamud Shah.
Traditional conversion story

The main indigenous source, the *Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa*, reports that Kedah’s pre-Islamic ruler, *Phra Ong Mahawangsa*, noted for his great thirst for ‘arak’ or spirits, and wine was the first to convert and did so under miraculous circumstances.4 His conversion occurred through the magical appearance of a saintly Sufi disciple and mystic, Sheikh Abdullah, in the royal palace of Kedah. The mystic was then accompanying Iblis/Eblis or Satan as part of a spiritual journey. Thus, the story according to an English translation of *Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa* unfolds as follows, cited and translated in length by the Southeast Asian scholar S. Q. Fatimi:

“Here they entered the palace of the Raja and, before he was wide awake, stood beside the bed curtains. Presently the Raja awoke and called for his usual glass of spirits.5 The page went to fill it from one of the jars, when the wretch Iblis stepping up defiled the beverage, he being invisible. The Rajah drank it off, when Shaykh Abdullah losing his temper said to Iblis, ‘God bless me! Why did you defile the Raja’s draught?’ Iblis replied, ‘Did I not caution and direct you not to question or find fault with what I might do towards any of your race?’ ‘True’, said the other, ‘and I should not have found fault with you elsewhere, but here you have the hardihood to behave thus towards a great prince, who is about to be one of God’s Viceregents’. The Raja was astonished to hear people squabbling so close to him, without his being able to see them. But just at this moment Iblis got angry with his pupil and said to him, ‘Since you have become so

---

4 *Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa* is a Malay text that only came to light outside of Kedah in the first half of the 19th century. Nevertheless, several scholars have speculated that the book may have been compiled between the 17th to the 18th century by using earlier Malay sources (see the 1842 Report by James Low in *Burney Papers* 1971: 3; Winstedt 1940b: 110-111; Sarkar 1985: 296; Sharifa 1985: 32, Andaya 2002:33-34).

5 In the *Hikayat* versions consulted in this study, Kedah’s ruler consumed ‘arak tadi’ or ‘coconut wine’ rather than ‘spirits’ since it was not distilled.
clever, it is time that we should part’. Hereupon he suddenly snatched his staff out of Abdhullah’s hand leaving him visible to the Raja, he himself departing.” [Sic] (1963: 74)

Here, it should be noted that an aspects of Fatimi’s (1963) translation differ significantly from similar original Malay passages from Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa consulted in this study- R. J. Wilkinson’s (1898) Jawi and A. J. Sturrocks (1916) Romanised version. In particular is the reference in Fatimi’s version that refers to Kedah’s pre-Islamic ruler as he “who is about to be one of God’s Viceregents” [Sic] which differs radically from the passage from Wilkinson’s (1898: 98) Jawi and Sturrock’s (1916: 112) Romanised version of the Hikayat that only refer to him as “ini ia sa-orang raja besar memegang suatu negeri.” [Sic]

This variation may reflect Fatimi’s use of James Low’s (1849: 474) succinct English version of an unknown copy of the Hikayat, different to the later and more popular translations. Assuming that Low was correct in translating the Malay, or Jawi, word then this remark raises some important questions on how did the Sheikh know he was about to be one of ‘God’s Viceregents’? Was it predestined? And did the Raja know it? If so, even if the devil had not defiled the wine would this prevent the conversion taking place? Whatever the case may be, sadly Low and Fatimi give few details of their original Jawi source or version of the Hikayat they had consulted.

With the miraculous appearance of Sheikh Abdullah, the Raja was soon induced to pronounce his ‘shahadat’ or testimony, thus, becoming a Muslim (Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa yakni Silsila Negri Kedah Darulaman1898: 99-100; Hikayat Marong Maha Wangsa or Kedah Annals 1916: 112-113). The ruler’s interest in adopting Islam and studying about the true religion, “ajarkan ugama islam yang sa-benar
“itu” [Sic], was so immediate and intense that just after the two words of the confession he went so far as to dump out his jar of ‘arak’ out to the ground and destroyed idols of wood, earth, gold and silver (Low 1849; 474-476; Hikayat Mahawangsa yakni Silsila Negri Kedah Darulaman 1898: 99-102; Hikayat Marong Maha Wangsa or Kedah Annals 1916: 113; Winstedt 1938: 35; Fatimi 1963: 74; Sherifa Zaleha Syed Hasan 1985: 49).

The consumption of wine by the Raja is significant as it was originally prescribed to him by doctors as a cure in order to stop a sickness and help with his weak body (Hikayat Marong Maha Wangsa or Kedah Annals 1916: 94-95). The emptying of this jar of wine was therefore the last time that Kedah’s Raja was associated with ‘arak’ in any form and he quit the habit. Consequently, the story portrays the conversion to have been a genuine and an immediate act on the part of Kedah’s non-Muslim ruler. Moreover, by emptying the jar the Raja indicated his intention for others to know that he was now cured of his illness.

Furthermore, the author of the *Hikayat* makes it clear that the conversion of Phra Ong Mahawangsa into Islam was not the first such incident in the region. Earlier in the book, prior to Sheikh Abdullah’s understanding with Iblis, the author refers to Tuan Sheikh Nur Al-Din Turan, a saintly ascetic and religious scholar, or “aulia dan keramat dengan shariat” that five years after the death of Prophet Muhammad left Mecca and Medina, in the Arabian Peninsula, for the country of “Jawi”, otherwise “Aceh”, “datang ke-negri Jawi ia itu negri Aceh”, taking with him books on religious tenets, “membawa kitab shariat agamah Islam” (Low 1849: 471; Hikayat Mahawangsa yakni Silsila Negri Kedah Darulaman 1898: 78).

---

6 At a later episode in the text, when having dinner with the Sheikh, Kedah’s ruler only drank coffee and tea (Low 1849: 475).
The author of the *Hikayat* remains silent after this short mention of Aceh’s affiliation with Islam until the arrival of the news, “*khabar*”, of the conversion of Kedah’s ruler and its population (Low 1849: 471; *Hikayat Mahawangsa yakni Silsila Negri Kedah Darulaman* 1898: 103; Winstedt 1938: 35). With the arrival of this piece of news, the Sultan of Aceh and Tuan Sheikh Nur Al-Din together send to Kedah two popular religious Islamic texts, that of ‘*Sirat al-Mustaghim*’ and the ‘*Bab al-Nekah*’. Hence, with the association of Aceh with Tuan Sheikh Nur Al-Din, prior to the arrival of Sheikh Abdullah, and the presence of a Muslim Sultan in Aceh at the time of Kedah’s conversion there is a clear indication that it became Muslim earlier than Kedah. Moreover, the *Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa* with its reference to the subsequent arrival of the “*khabar*” at Aceh, further indicates that Kedah’s ruler’s mode of conversion to Islam was not only as a result of a spiritual experience but also prestigious event and independent from Aceh, and with direct links to the Middle East.

In contrast, the naming of neighbouring Aceh, rather than another regional kingdom, and the supposed arrival of two Islamic religious texts sent from there are proof of its compelling influence in Kedah (*Hikayat Mahawangsa yakni Silsila Negri Kedah Darulaman* 1898: 103-104). Similarly it may point towards aspects or parts of the book compiled at Kedah during the seventeenth century, when Aceh’s power and influence in the region was at its peak. Assuming this to be the case, then this is further proof of Aceh’s historic relevance to Kedah in contrast to areas further south (there is only reference to Aceh’s predecessor of Pasai in the older ‘Malay Annals or *Sejarah Melayu*’, see Brown 1952 and Andaya 2001: 327). This is however not to say that the authors of *Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa* were not familiar with aspects of other Malay
stories popular in other parts of the Malay world. The conversion of Aceh according to the *Hikayat* took place several years after the death of the Prophet and certainly aspects of this story are in line with the older, likely 14th century, *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai* (Low 1849: 471; *Hikayat Mahawangsa yakni Silsila Negri Kedah Darulaman* 1898: 78; Winstedt 1940a; *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai* 1960: 32-33, 36, 116-119). In any case, the Raja’s conversion to Islam was soon followed by the subsequent conversion of the king’s wives, concubines and people in the palace, as well as officials, ministers and people in his dominion (Low 1849; 474-476; *Hikayat Mahawangsa yakni Silsila Negri Kedah Darulaman* 1898: 99-102; *Hikayat Marong Maha Wangsa or Kedah Annals* 1916: 113-114). Moreover, under advice from Sheikh Abdullah, and in a daring move shortly after the initial conversion of his wives and concubines, the Raja asked his court servants to join in, and symbolically eat together (Hikayat Marong Maha Wangsa or Kedah Annals 1916: 113):

“Maka titah raja Ong Mahawangsa, ‘Mari juga kita makan;’ lalu makan-lah sa-hidang dengan baginda. Sa-telah itu lalu makan sireh, sambil berkata kata.”

This symbolic act of the Raja eating with the Sheikh and his servants rendered in *Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa* is not simply a sign of newly found humility as a result of discovering Islam; but, rather one gets the impression that Islam had given the kingdom a social message of brotherhood and broke the social barriers. In particular, the eating together of “sireh” or ‘betel nut’, by Kedah’s ruler and his court servants is a highly significant act, uncommon in most Malay *Hikayats* or literary

---

7 In both cases Muslim missionaries were dispatched to Southeast Asia after the death of Prophet Muhammad for the propagation of Islam.
works (e.g. on the symbolic eating of *sireh* by native rulers only in the company of each other or with relations or court ministers see: *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai* 1960: 109, 121). Moreover, by bestowing on the servants the honour of eating together with the ruler, for their services and company, Sheikh Abdullah was likely trying to introduce new aspects and systems of government or kingship to the ruler of Kedah.

In addition, it is Sheikh Abdullah that always takes the preliminary initiatives in motivating or requesting the newly converted Raja to gather the people at the palace, “*Hendak-lah tuanku himpukan sakalian kecil besar di-dalam istani ini*” [Sic], or visit the royal audience hall, “*balai rong*” [Sic], and spread the message of Islam (*Hikayat Marong Maha Wangsa* or Kedah Annals 1916: 113). The process of religious conversion of the royal family and others in Kedah was not however entirely a result of the Sheikh’s actions. Rather it was a combination of royal commands, and speeches by his majesty, or the Raja, as well as the supervision of the confession, or “*kalimah shahadat*”, and the teachings, “*ajarkan-nya*”, of its religious principles by Sheikh Abdullah. Hence working together and complementing each other was a situation of mutual benefit to the two of them.

Indeed, from the *Hikayat* it is apparent that the toughest audience to convince about the recent events at Kedah for Sheikh Abdullah and the Raja were the ministers, “*menteri hulubalang*” and in particular the four “*menteri keempat*” (*Hikayat Marong Maha Wangsa* or Kedah Annals 1916: 113-115). The meeting with them was crucial since earlier in the story it was the four ministers “*menteri keempat*”, together with elements in the court, that had revolted and overthrown the Raja’s grandfather, Raja Bersiong, who was said to have developed vampire-like taste for human blood (*Hikayat Marong Maha Wangsa* or Kedah Annals 1916: 74-
Furthermore, the ministers were the ones that became the caretakers of Kedah government until the time they allowed Raja Bersiong’s illegitimate son and the Raja’s own father, Phra Ong Mahapodisat, to return to Kedah and rule (Winstedt 1938: 34). Thus, in contrast to the earlier relatively easy introduction of Islam to Kedah’s royal household (who were only required to come into the presence of the Raja and the Sheikh), this time the situation was the reverse. With both the Raja and the Sheikh therefore required to go to the “balai rong”.8 There the Raja introduced Sheikh Abdullah, sitting to his right, and then gave a long lecture on the credibility of Sheikh Abdullah, the new religion and the recent incredible, events he had experienced that day. The significance of this event may give rise to the possibility that behind the Raja’s honest motive for conversion to Islam and his immediate desire to forfeit his taste for ‘arak’ there may have been, at least partially, other more significant political reasons. The Raja was well-aware of the fate of his grandfather and likely knew that ultimately the common perception of his ‘arak’ handicap would sooner or later cause tensions and conflict with the menteri and other court elements. Moreover, he may have also been aware of the menteri’s knowledge of Islam from Acehnese sources. Thus, by adapting Islam he thought it would enable him to convince his sceptics that he was a changed man. Conversely, assuming that the wine and the blood-drinking issues were both part of Tantric rites practiced by Kedah’s Rajas then it may well have been seen as an attempt by them to increase their spiritual and temporal powers. Possession of these Tantric powers by the Rajas, as we shall see further below, would have been possibly seen as a direct threat to the position of the politically powerful ‘menteri’.  

---

8 In contrast, Low’s (1949: 475) translation has Kedah’s ruler sending for the ministers to come to the hall.
After all, converting to Islam meant perhaps a higher level of discipline and controlling desires or ‘nafs’ especially refraining from drinking intoxicants, or other forbidden liquids (particularly urine or blood). Equally by controlling his desires the Raja was more likely to be seen by the ministers and the people to be just, ‘adil or adel’, and become fairer, ‘insaf or ensaf’, in his kingly duties. This is of course not to say that the Raja by accepting Islam had other ulterior, or sinister, motives in his mind. Consequently, he may well have thought that the conversion to Islam was an opportunity for him to guide, or further, his personal quest for temporal and spiritual power.

Alternatively, the Raja by openly accepting Islam may well have had the political ambition to put an end to speculations and uncertainties surrounding his physical, or spiritual, condition. In consequence, the Raja may well have thought that the conversion could boost his public image, at home and abroad, and result in furthering of Kedah’s political stability as well as economic prosperity and commercial ties, particularly to the Muslims and visitors from Baghdad whom he earlier recalled (see: Hikayat Marong Maha Wangsa or Kedah Annals 1916: 112). Furthermore, by publicly converting to Islam and visiting the balai rong, in the company of Sheikh Abdullah the Raja was likely to portray himself to the powerful menteri to be no longer in pursuit of more power and hence a political threat, thus, seeking to reaffirm their support and allegiance.

In any case, no matter if the Raja’s motivation to convert was a political or a genuine act in a short time stability and prosperity, particularly in the sense of food and population increases, soon returned to Kedah. These signs of prosperity were certainly deemed to be key elements in the success or failure of a Malay ruler and the negri, or territorial unit (Trocki
For one thing, Kedah had become prosperous during the time of his father, Phra Ong Mahapodisat (placed on the throne of Kedah in an earlier incident), who proved to be both “sangat adil dan insaf” (Hikayat Marong Maha Wangsa or Kedah Annals 1916: 93).

Thus, the Hikayat clearly indicates that having a just and a fair ruler is central to the prosperity of the dominion. In addition, the success or failure of a ruler had necessarily nothing to do with his religion, as was the case of Raja Ong Mahapodisat, but more to do with kingly qualities of being just and the state of his mind (akal in Malay or aql in Persian and Arabic). These aspects of Malay kingship, on the success or failure of the ruler, in the Hikayat are clearly inspired and are in line with traditional Persian kingship, in both pre-Islamic and post-Islamic periods, that are thought to have influenced much of the traditional political system in the region (Lambton 1962: 91-119; Milner 1981: 46-70; Scupin 1980: 55-66;). Hence, indicating further familiarity and influences of the Kedah chronicler with non-indigenous sources and political systems.

The commendable qualities of Phra Ong Mahapodisat may explain the title of Mahapodisat, the Thai pronunciation of Maha-Bodhisattva, in his name. This proclaims the king’s status as a Bodhisattva and his concern for all beings. Emphasising the importance of the ruler and his realm as a centre was a form of Tantric Buddhism (Milner 1981: 50-58; Andaya 2001: 320). Being part of esoteric Buddhism and related to Mahayana sect of Buddhism, this meant that the Raja had overcome in his lifetime the four obstacles, or “poisons” [Sic] (of lust, hatred, delusion and pride), in life in order to acquire a blessed, holy and enlightened status on earth (Wayman 1961: 82). This status of a divine character was of course
acquired and not inherited as was the case of the rulers of Kotei in Borneo, that claimed their origin from a God that had supposedly come down to earth (Scott 1913: 325). Thus, the portrayal of Kedah rulers in the *Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa* is not that of a godly descendant living on earth, rather of individuals that could achieve higher status and were also subject to downfall. But this did not mean that God did not love and look after the rulers of Kedah even if they had not attained the status of Bodhisattva (Maier 1988: 79). Thus in the *Hikayat* Kedah’s rulers are the royal line which often falls from grace but is soon able to rise and acquire its former glory, as was the case of Phra Ong Mahawangsa.

Anyway, aspects of the above story, appearing in *Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa*, are not unusual and may be familiar to Asian or Islamic scholars. In particular a parallel can be drawn with the story of Iblis or Satan in the undated Jawi text of *Hikayat Iblis*, which is composed largely of a discussion between Iblis and the Prophet Muhammad, and a symbolic dialogue between Iblis with Moaviyya, an early Muslim ruler and personality, in the 13th century popular Persian work of *Mathnawi* by Rumi or Sheikh Jalaludin Mawlana Rumi (1207-1273 A.D.).

Alternatively, the story of Phra Ong Mahawangsa’s thirst for ‘arak’ can certainly be connected to a continuance of an earlier story from the same *Hikayat* regarding his “vampire-style” grandfather, Ong Maha Perita Deria or Raja Bersiong, who was said to be unable to control his thirst for human blood (Hikayat Marong Maha Wangsa or Kedah Annals 1916: 71-82; Winstedt 1938: 34). Likewise, similar stories of kings that had turned cruel, due to their inability to control their desire and lust for human blood, meat or brains, can also be found in other parts of Southeast Asia,

---

9 The undated *Hikayat Iblis*, found –likely- in island Southeast Asia and now kept in Berlin, Germany. Interestingly, *Hikayat Iblis* too follows a mystical aspect formulated in a similar manner as the early Persian, and probably Indian, Sufi perspective.
South Asia (story from Maha-Sutasoma-Jataka No. 537), and Persia (the popular story of Zahak and Iblis from 10-11th century AD from A. G. Ferdowsi’s, died 1020 AD, Shah-Nameh or ‘Book of Kings’) (Blagden 1917: 47-48; Winstedt 1938: 31; Winstedt 1940b: 110; Quaritch-Wales 1940: 82, 85; Sullivan 1957: 289-295; Ferdowsi 1988; The Epic of Kings or Shahnameh by Ferdowsi 2000: 8-21).

Conversely, the Raja’s initial introduction to wine as a prescription and gradual addiction reminds one of the story and parable of the ‘original sin’ in the Old Testament and a similar story in Shah-Nameh. According to the Shah-Nameh (The Epic of Kings or Shahnameh by Ferdowsi 2000: 8-21) the devil (disguised as a cook) first got the vegetarian king to turn carnivore and then using treachery -before disappearing- kissed the king’s shoulders implanting and attaching two live snakes there. Shortly the devil turned up again, in the story, this time disguised as a ‘learned man’ prescribing Zahak (as a trap) to feed the snakes with human brains in order to get rid of them. This was of course the downfall of Zahak in which not only his name was tarnished as cruel ruler but also misery followed the land with people rebelling against him, and others killed simply to feed the snakes. Similarly, the not so accidental dropping of blood on Raja Bersiong’s vegetables by a servant (that initiated his cycle of destruction and downfall) and the prescription of wine to a sick Phra Ong Mahawangsa as a cure for his sickness are both instances in which Iblis had orchestrated a master plan designed for the gradual and painful destruction of the Rajas and Kedah.

Furthermore, there is the possibility of the drunkenness and blood drinking on the part of Raja Bersiong and his great-grandson Phra Ong Mahawangsa should be considered as part of pre-Islamic Tantric practices on the part of Kedah rulers. Indeed drinking of wine, soma
drink (or ‘nectar of the Gods’, made from a plant), urine, faeces and cannibalism were part of mystical rituals in Tantric Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, Bauls of Bengal (influenced by Buddhism and Sufism) and esoteric Hinduism (e.g. Vaisnavism and Aghori Fakirs). Such practices were not unusual and continued to be documented well into the 20th century (Balfour 1897; Wayman 1961; Capwell 1974; Kripal 1994; Lang 1996; Crowley 1996; Mackenzie 1998). Likewise, historic Zoroastrian, Manichaeans, Mitra and Christian religions each involve the use of either urine, wine and the drink of soma as part of religious rituals (Wasson 1971: 178; Crowley 1996; Mackenzie 1998: 5, 35, 77). Each of these religious dogmas, particularly Tantric Buddhism or Hindu esoteric sects, may have had been practiced in the coastal and maritime centres of pre-Islam Kedah (Earl 1863: 122-123; Quaritch-Wales 1940: 1-85; Hindu-Buddhist Civilisation in South Kedah 1958: 34; Lamb 1959, 1961; Colless 1969; Peacock 1959, 1970; Treloar & Fabris 1975). Consequently, it is likely that the method and quantity used for drinking, either blood or wine, by Kedah’s rulers went either against any of these beliefs or more importantly the Raja’s attempt to seek more power was seen as a threat to their own, i.e. the people and the menteris, power.

Moreover, it is possible that the two rulers at Kedah, Raja Bersiong and Phra Ong Mahawangsa, attempted to go beyond the Bodhisattva or Sadhyana status and achieve a further Godlike status (Wayman 1961: 85; Capwel 1974: 261). In Hindu, Jain and Buddhist historic texts and plays (e.g. Rig Veda, Yasastilaka and Mahabharata) drinking of ritual drinks, such as blood and wine, is said to result in achieving immortality, pleasing Hindu gods, in particular Shiva/Siva, or go as far as becoming a God like, Krishna, figure (Wasson 1971: 179, 181; Capwel 1974: 262n;
Lang 1996: 173-174; Mackenzie 1998: 41; Woodward 2004: 333). But these sources clearly stress that to achieve this status the consumption of the ritual drinks needs to be in moderation and with strict guidelines. Consequently, Hindu gods (such as Agni\textsuperscript{11}, Krishna, Indra and Rama) are said to have loved drinking wine and soma in moderation to achieve courage and divine ecstasy, or *Samadhi* (Wasson 1971: 181; Capwell 1974: 262n; Kripal 1994:165-166; Lang 1996: 165, 169; Mackenzie 1998: 5, 15, 19-23). Likewise, according to legends the Hindu God Ramakrishna was himself a great lover of *karana*, or wine, but only drunk it by licking it with just ‘a touch of a tongue’ (in order to achieve divine ecstasy) and despised those that drank too much (Kripal 1994: 165-166). It is therefore possible to assume that the excessive use of blood or wine and the methods, as well as the sources used to obtain them by the Kedah rulers was considered as unjust and immoral by the people, courtiers and priests. This objection to the excessive and irresponsible use of wine and blood, for simply attaining power and turning into a God, is likely the objective of the earliest non-Muslim, or Hindu-Buddhist, transmitters and compilers of the story in the *Hikayat*.

On the other hand, the *Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa’s* later Muslim chroniclers, or copyists, attempt to forbid Kedah’s rulers from going beyond the Bodhisattva’s status and turning into a God like figure falls in line with aspects of Persian kingship and Islam (particularly Sufism), at the time of writing the book. Hence, Hindu and Buddhist ideas of drinking forbidden intoxicants, or other liquids, either in moderation or under strict guidelines, got little sympathy from the *Hikayat*’s authors.

\textsuperscript{10} However, once achieving this higher status one was no longer required to give food and drink tainted with urine, blood and excrements to others as part of a mystic ritual in order to become enlightened (Wayman 1961: 85). This is somewhat different to Hinduism that often Gods, such as Krishna, are believed would appear often disguised and offer their own urine to people (Wasson 1971: 179; Crowley 1996).

\textsuperscript{11} He had many attributes amongst which he was the Fire God and the divine messenger of the Hindu Gods.
Furthermore, the 10-11th century AD Persian book *Shah-Nameh*, or ‘Book of Kings’, clearly indicates that earthly men and Kings could never become Gods. For this reason, God literally “withdrew his hand” [*Sic*] from the celebrated mythical Persian King Jamshid shortly after he was overwhelmed with pride and proclaimed himself a God and ordered images of him to be built (*The Epic of Kings or Shahnameh by Ferdowsi* 2000: 7). With the end of God’s blessings, King Jamshid’s political and social power soon started to wane and he became destitute. This popular story of *Shah-Nameh* was likely known at Kedah, by the authors of the *Hikayat* (certainly aspects of *Shah-Nameh* are drawn or cited in sixteenth century to eighteenth century Malay works of *Bustan al-Salatin* and *Sejarah Melayu*, as well as, the Siamese royal book of *Iran Rajadhamma* or *Nithan Sibsawng Liam* see: Wilkinson 1901: Introduction, ii; Marrison 1955: 60; Muhammad Ibn Ibrahim 1972: 80-85; Scupin 1980: 66).

Additionally, the Sufi practice of viewing oneself as ‘God’, ‘pole’ (or *qutb* in Persian) or the ‘truth’ (or *haq* in Persian and Arabic) is more to do with being one with God rather than trying to rise above it or challenging it (John 1957, 1965; al-Attas 1963; Arberry 1969; Milner 1981; Saiyid Rizvi 1986). Thus, Raja Bersiong’s and Phra Ong Mahawangsa’s attempt to become immortal or godlike was a direct challenge to God. Moreover unity with God as a Sufi and the idea of becoming a “Perfect Man or *Ensani/Insani Kamil*”, was very much like becoming enlightened as a Bodhisattva, and required a combination of rituals, meditation and guidelines that requires effort and purity of heart, and freedom from injustice (John 1957; Milner 1981: 55-59; Nurbakhsh 1986: 73-75).

But, the most intriguing aspect of the above story, is the fact that Sheikh Abdullah became agitated and broke his earlier promise to Iblis or Satan. He had agreed not to question his actions and judgements, and he did so
until the time when Iblis became disrespectful to Kedah’s ruler by defiling his drink. From the time he left Baghdad with Iblis, Sheikh Abdullah remained silent and acted simply as a mere observer while Ibis constantly brought havoc and bickering amongst nations, peoples and families (*Hikayat Mahawangsa yakni Silsila Negri Kedah Darulaman* 1898: 78-97; *Hikayat Marong Maha Wangsa* or Kedah Annals 1916: 100-110; Winstedt 1938: 34). Equally, Sheikh Abdullah in an earlier episode of the *Hikayat*, during the times of Raja Peranggi Dewa, remained silent when as a result the evil-doings of Iblis many were killed following an ‘amok’, and others became possessed by carnal and lustful desires and temptations, “*Demikian itu-lah orang yang menurut hawa nafsu shaitan*” (*Hikayat Mahawangsa yakni Silsila Negri Kedah Darulaman* 1898: 98; *Hikayat Marong Maha Wangsa* or Kedah Annals 1916: 111).

Furthermore, throughout the stories and events in the *Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa*, Sheikh Abdullah’s orthodox views of Islamic practices, such as the breaking of idols, and his religious zeal is evident. Thus we might expect that Sheikh Abdullah would follow his earlier routine of simply observing Satan at work and remaining cool and indifferent to what was unfolding.

So, the question arises why did Sheikh Abdullah take the dangerous road of defying Iblis by defending Kedah’s non-Muslim ruler and jeopardising his original spiritual mission? In particular Kedah’s ruler was not yet a Muslim, or had not yet heard about Islam.

It is possible that Sheikh Abdullah felt his spiritual mission, in the company of Iblis, was by then complete and his destiny now lay in conversion and missionary work. This new possibility would therefore allow Sheikh Abdullah the opportunity to stay in a non-Muslim dominion
which was a fertile ground for missionary work. Similarly, the Sheikh having earlier witnessed the destruction of great nations as well as the destruction of the moral fabric of society through Iblis’s evil-doings and ‘hawa nafsu’ (or pronounced ‘hawa-yeh nafs’ in Persian) decided that there was still time for Kedah’s salvation. In the introductory words of Sheikh Abdullah to Kedah’s Raja on Islam there is an explicit link between the presence of Iblis and his descendants that “come and sow chaos” together with earlier pre-Islamic religions that are untrue, “segala ugama yang dahulu itu sesat jua tiada dengan sa-benar-nya, jangan tuan-ku tiada ketahui sebab ugama yang tiada sa-benar itu-lah dating(datang?) iblis shaitan membuat haru-biru” [Sic] (Hikayat Mahawangsa yakni Silsila Negri Kedah Darulaman 1898: 98; Hikayat Marong Maha Wangsa or Kedah Annals 1916: 112-113; Maier 1988: 181-183). Hence, by introducing Islam, Sheikh Abdullah was in reality giving Kedah’s pre-Islamic ruler a new window of opportunity to start afresh and prevent his government from being destroyed by Satan.

In consequence, the episode of Sheikh Abdullah’s timely intervention in preventing Kedah’s ruler from sipping the tainted wine, results in saving Kedah from an impending chain of catastrophic events. The author of the Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa makes no direct reference to what type of destruction would have transpired in Kedah, should the unwary Raja have given way to his desire and drunk from the tainted wine. Nevertheless, from a description of earlier calamities outlined in the Hikayat, during the time of Raja Bersiong in Kedah or those orchestrated elsewhere by Iblis, it is clear that a sip by the unsuspecting Raja would have ignited a cycle of destructive addiction, death and misery for himself and his dominion. The great number of deaths would have certainly pleased Iblis, and his
children and grandchildren that preyed upon their blood (Hikayat Marong Maha Wangsa or Kedah Annals 1916: 111; Maier 1988: 182).

Alternatively it is apparent that Sheikh Abdullah was well-aware of, or at least through esoteric knowledge acknowledged, Kedah’s pre-Islamic ruler’s greatness, his legitimate status, his bright future and his noteworthy ancestry going back to the land of Rum (according to Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa). This can be further confirmed through the comments made by Sheikh Abdullah to Iblis in response to the latter having defiled the Raja’s ‘arak tadi’ or ‘coconut spirit’ drink in the cup (Hikayat Marong Maha Wangsa or Kedah Annals 1916: 112). In both the Jawi version of this event by Wilkinson (1898: 98) and the Romanised version of Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa by Sturrock (1916: 112), Sheikh Abdullah expresses his protest at the defiling of the ruler’s drink by exclaiming to Iblis:

“Astaghufur Allah al-adzim, betapa juga tuan hamba beri minum ayer kenching ka-pada raja itu?

Likewise, the astonished Satan responded by a question:

“Bukan-kah hamba kata dan pesan jangan tuan hamba tegur sa-barang perbuat hamba di-atas segala manusia?”

In answer to which Sheikh Abdullah made his true feelings of respect for the Raja known:

“Pada tempat yang lain tiada hamba tegur, ini ia sa-orang raja besar memegang suatu negeri. Maka sampai hemat tuan hamba beri ia minum ayer kenching.” [Sic]

Subsequently, Sheikh Abdullah protests to Iblis because of his derogatory remarks and actions against Kedah’s ruler. After all to the Sheikh,
Kedah’s Raja represented a grand ruler, governing a territory, and that demanded the utmost respect (Maier 1988: 182).

Furthermore there was the controversial question of Iblis, his association with the Sheikh as part of a spiritual journey, and the conversion of Kedah’s pre-Islamic ruler. This scenario of a respected Muslim Sheikh accompanying Satan as part of a spiritual journey as outlined in the Hikayat would have undoubtedly to be refuted and because of the danger of drawing the wrath of orthodox Muslims, including many of the more institutionalised Sufi chains or ‘silsila/selseleh’. Equally, it brings into some doubt the prestige of Kedah’s ruler’s conversion who is viewed by scholars like S. Q. Fatimi (1963: 73):

“The manner of the Rajah of Kedah’s, Pra Ong Mahawangsa’s, conversion is even more fantastic. He was led to the Right Path by the Devil himself.”

No doubt then, that in later accounts of the Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa and more recent scholarly works on the conversion of Kedah’s ruler to Islam this aspect of the story and the connection to Iblis is omitted (e.g. Wan Yahya bin Wan Muhammad Taib 1911; Khan 1939; Muhammad Hassan Bin To’Kerani Mohd. Arshad 1968; Adil 1980: 1-28; Sharifa Zaleha Syed Hasan 1985; Maier 1988: 122-123, 129-159, 174-176; Sheikh Niamat & Haji Wan Shamsudin 1995-98: 1-15). However, there is more to this aspect of the Hikayat story and the connection of the Sheikh to Iblis. It is shown to be part of the early Persian or Khorasan Sufi school, as well as its offspring the wujudiya school of Ibn Arabi, and his literary doctrine. This indicates a strong fusion of Islamic devotionalism and Persian imagery at its roots; whereby the allegorical student-master relationship with Satan is acceptable (see a similar discussion for

---

12 More fantastic than the conversion story from Sejarah Melayu.

Hence Persian Sufis such as Mansour Hallaj (d. 922), Shahab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi (died 1191 AD), Sana’i (died in the 12th century), Ahmad Ghazzali (d. 1126), Sheikh Sa’di (in his book Boostan or Orchard), Sa’id Sarmad (executed 1661, who was a Persian Jew or Armenian merchant turned Sufi in Mogul India)\(^\text{13}\), Sheikh Jalaludin Mawlana Rumi (1207-1273 A.D.) and Sheikh Farid al-Din Attar Neishaburi (d. 1219) in their writings view Satan as an individual from whom much can be learned. He was a fallen angel and the greatest monotheist or lover of God (or Allah in Arabic or Khoda in Persian) who refused to worship anything or prostrate himself in front of anyone, including Adam, but God (Dehkhoda 1947; Schimmel 1975: 193-199; Sheikh Farid al-Din Attar Neyshaburi 1980; Nurbakhsh 1986; Mawlana Rumi 1987; Safa 1992/1994). Ghazali went as far as declaring “Who does not learn tauhid from Satan is an infidel”; while, Sarmad too advised “Go, learn the method of servant-ship from Satan” (cited by Schimmel 1975: 195). ‘Iblis and Pharaoh’ were likewise recounted by the tenth century Persian Sufi, Hallaj to be the ultimate mystic masters and teachers (cited in length by Nurbakhsh 1986: 44).\(^\text{14}\) Sheikh Abdullah’s mission with Satan and their arrival at Kedah can therefore be viewed as the highest form of a spiritual journey. This mystical journey of Sheikh Abdullah would undoubtedly have given further prestige to the conversion story of Kedah’s ruler.

Indeed another unusual aspect of the *Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa*, is the reference to the two books sent from Aceh to Kedah shortly after its

\(^{13}\) For more on Sarmad see a recent article by by Nathan Katz (2000: 142-160).

\(^{14}\) Hallaj in the same account continues that ‘Iblis was threatened with fire; yet he did not retract his position. Pharaoh was drowned in the sea; yet he did not disavow his claim. Neither of them accepted any intermediaries.’
conversion to Islam. The books, particularly ‘Sirat al-Mustaghim’, are believed to have been written by the seventeenth century Sheikh Nur al-Din Ibn Ali al-Raniry (died 1658), an orthodox Sufi and self professed anti-wujudiya scholar (Winstedt 1920: 39; Winstedt 1936: 157; Johns 1957: 30-35; Johns 1965:9; Omar bin Awang 1981: 82). Thus, it would be expected that the author/authors or copyists of Hikayat would have been familiar with al-Raniri’s anti-wujudiya stance and followed suit in omitting aspects thought to be heretical (see also A. J. Arberry’s discussion of 17th century orthodoxy towards allegorical imagery in Persia: Arberry 1969: 113). This would have therefore meant an absence of, or alteration, of Sheikh Abdullah’s association with Iblis and the subsequent conversion story of Kedah’s ruler.

Beyond these stories, there are also other distinct accounts of the conversion of Kedah’s ruler. These included both textual and oral reports, circulating outside Kedah’s court and in the main maritime centres.

**Early oral conversion stories**

Sherard Osborne, an English midshipman, while participating in the 1838 naval blockade of Kedah’s coastline (against the rebels seeking the return of Kedah’s self-exiled ruler at Penang) was given an oratory account of the Raja’s conversion to Islam by his native companion, ‘boatswain Jadee’ or ‘serang Jadee’, that is vastly different from Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa. Incredibly, serang Jadee was not a native of Kedah but rather a Batta (Batak) by birth, from Sumatra, who was brought up by the Sulu people, continued to dress as an Illanun, and later spent most of his life in Johore, Singapore and at sea, in the Melaka Straits (Osborne 1987: 37, 40-44). Nevertheless, in Osborne’s book he appears to be well-acquainted with various aspects of Kedah’s geography and traditions. Thus it is likely that Jadee had earlier visited or stayed in Kedah.
According to Jadee’s account, told to Osborne on the Island of Langkawi, there were Muslim ‘haggis’ [Sic], (hajjis) or pilgrims, that first arrived during the time of Prophet Muhammad at Kedah:

“When Mahomet, - may his tomb exhale unceasingly the odour of holiness! -sent holy men to show the poor Malays the road to Paradise,” [Sic] (Osborne 1987: 353)

Subsequently, Jadee continues that it was these ‘hajjis’ that converted Kedah’s Raja and advised him to stop the pre-Islamic tradition of sacrificing a virgin daughter of the royal family, “whenever a new king ascended the throne, or when war was declared with another state” [Sic], to an enormous boa (python?), or “Oular-besar”, dwelling on the Island of Langkawi (Ibid: 352-354).

This advice by the hajjis at Kedah, however, soon backfired and instead brought the catastrophic wrath of the ular–besar. Thus:

“The creature became very annoyed, and the consequence was, he almost cleared the Island of Lankawi of its population and cattle. All schemes failed to check its wrath, prayers were offered up in all the mosques, but for our previous sins the Oular-besar still lived, and still kept swallowing up Malays, until the fields were left untilled, and the country was fast becoming one great forest.” [Sic] (Ibid: 353)

Following the devastation of property and people by the ular-besar “Allah’s”, or God’s, salvation came once again to Kedah with the arrival of a holy man, an Arab Sheikh, that:

“exhorted all the people to remain firm in their new faith, for some of them were backsliders. He pointed out to them, that the wrath of the Oular-besar was only a means to test their faith; but that now Allah was
satisfied, and had sent him to put a stop to their sorrow.” [Sic] (Osborne 1987: 353-354)

The Arab Sheikh then, in the company of the people from Kedah, proceeded on boats to challenge the enormous python at its residence on the Island of Langkawi. Upon arriving on the Island:

“The holy man performed his ablutions, said his prayers, put on his green turban, and balancing the Koran on his head, landed at once either to drive the Oular-besar away or to die.” [Sic] (Osborne 1987: 354)

The unsuspecting ular-besar at the sight of the Sheikh attacked him and swallowed the ‘hajji’ whole. Consequently, when the ular-besar was digesting the…:

“…Haggi a violent fury seemed to seize it; its whole body writhed in a perfect frenzy, it raised its head high above the loftiest trees, its eyes flashed lighting and for a few minutes the creature seemed upon the point of dashing into the sea”. [Sic] (Ibid: 354)

With these signs of agitation and discomfort the snake proceeded towards the nearby mountains and disappeared, never to be heard or seen again. Equally, with the disappearance of the ular-besar from Kedah the fate of the Sheikh continued to remain a mystery and he too was never seen or heard from. Consequently, with the end of the monstrous python of Langkawi, and the reconfirmation of the Islamic faith in Kedah, by the deeds of the visiting Sheikh, the territory continued to prosper. Moreover, other snakes on the island were no longer eating humans, or Kedah folks, but rather animals. With this concluding remark Jadee ends his narration of the story to Osborne.

There are, however, variances between Jadee’s oral report of the conversion of Kedah’s ruler, with that of the previously mentioned
Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa. Foremost, the transformation to Islam is according to the Hikayat largely a result of a sudden and unannounced visit to Kedah of a single mystic Sheikh in the company of Iblis several years after the death of Prophet Muhammad. In contrast, in Jadee’s version the Prophet Muhammad had during his lifetime designated a number of ‘hajjis’, rather than a single one, to specifically spread Islam to the Malays and Kedah. Furthermore, in the adaptation story of Islam at Kedah from the Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa there is no direct reference to the Island of Langkawi, the ular-besar or a the arrival of a second Arab Muslim Sheikh.

On the other hand, there are some similarities between Jadee’s account and that of the Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa’s. In both accounts of the story Muslim missionaries from the Middle East are paramount in the religious conversion of the ruler and his people. Moreover, the destructive wrath of the snake at Langkawi reminds one of a similar parable in Biblical and Muslim literature of the destructive nature of the devil and Satanic lust in the form of snakes or serpents (e.g. The Epic of Kings or Shahnameh by Ferdowsi 2000: 9, 11, 16, 20; Masnavi i Manavi 2001: 179, 247). Thus perhaps indicates a similar origin of the two stories.

his/her destructive powers and temperament could only be controlled by the ruler, as well as -in accordance with Buddhist traditions- by Buddha, a monk or through the presence of his ‘shadow’ i.e. stupas and relics (see Rajatarangini, Dipawamsa, Vinaya, Mahabharata, Jataka, Mahavamsa and Si-yu-ki). Hence, it is more than likely that the pre-Islamic traditions of Naga were by Jadee’s time intertwined with that of Islam. Consequently, the story of a powerful and perpetual giant snake acting as the custodian of Langkawi Island, as well as living at land and sea corresponds well to that of a Naga. Furthermore, the ular-besar’s attempts to seek inducements directly from the ruler, particularly asking for the virgin princess, and its ability to bring havoc to the island’s peoples, animals and environment are further proof of its position as a powerful Naga. Indeed the custom of sacrificing a royal virgin girl may reflect an unspecific deal or favour between the Naga and the ruler’s ancestors that supposedly continued. Certainly asking for inducements and tribute from the ruler in return for political power and wealth by a Naga is not unusual and is a popular theme amongst South Asian, as well as Khmer, Cham, Burman and Mon traditions. Additionally, the sudden arrival of a green turbaned clergy, the colour indicating that the priest came from Prophet Muhammad’s tribe or that he was one of his descendants, just in time when the snake was causing continuous havoc and destruction to the land, as well as the priest’s challenging the snake and his subsequent swallowing and defeat –not annihilation of the snake-run parallel to Buddhist stories (e.g. Jataka, Dipawamsa, Vinaya and Mahawamsa) discussing the appearance of Buddha, or Buddhist monks, to inhibit the destructive forces of a Naga. This obviously demonstrated the power of Islam over the earlier religious tradition.
On the other hand, this aspect of the story of the ular besar at Langkawi was likely created in response to the popular local belief, as well as in Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa, that the island was home of the mystical bird Garuda. Indeed, Garuda according to South Asian and Angkor traditions is the cousin and main enemy of Nagas, or snakes (Bastian 1865: 82; Reck 1983: 84-87). Hence to the orators of the story it would have been strange to acknowledge that Langkawi held a powerful Naga while the island was considered the home of Garuda.

**Conclusion**

In consequence, from the above reports of Kedah’s conversion to Islam it appears that many aspects of both sources are distantly related. This indicates a plausible historic origin of the two stories; popular in the court, as well as among the common peoples living in and on the fringes of Kedah’s dominion. Certainly, in the Hikayat, or the court version of the conversion, the entire focus is on the ruler. He is central to the theme of the conversion story and the authors of the text ensure that no matter how cruel, fallible or unjust the rulers become yet they cannot get blamed for their actions. Hence, the ruler is the only source of power in the land that are favoured by God, that can temporarily fall from grace but can easily rise and reclaim their true position and status. Furthermore, the ministers are portrayed as a powerful entity that complement the ruler in the sense that they monitor his conduct and ensure that the monarchy can continue to be maintained in the land and to the peoples.

Conversely, in the oral report there is little emphasis on conversion or powers of the ruler and the ministers. Rather the emphasis is on the religious conversion and belief of all the peoples, including the ruler. The destructive power of the snake or the advice by the religious missionaries
to stay steadfast in their beliefs are all addressed to the people and do not
distinguish the ruler as a separate entity. Nor the snake destructive
punishment is solely directed towards the ruler for refusing to sacrifice a
member of his household. Instead, the snake brings havoc to all the land,
peoples and animals. The ruler meanwhile appears powerless to stop the
snake and if it was not for the sudden appearance of the sheikh then the
destruction would have certainly continued.

On the other hand, it is conceivable that the 19th century court, or textual,
version of Kedah’s conversion to Islam is a compilation of numerous
foreign, as well as native sources and stories. In particular, the use of
complex and often contradictory sets of Islamic and pre-Islamic imagery
and events may in reality suggest the eclectic nature of the various
*Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa* authors and copyists over the years.
Nonetheless, the authors of the text attempt to distinguish between the
pre-Islamic and Islamic period of Kedah’s history. In both cases the
symbols or practices associated with the former religious traditions are
demonized and defeated by representatives of Islam.

Prior to converting to Islam the rulers easily fall prey to the devil’s
mischiefs and temptations. Thus, resulting in a chain reaction that ended
in destruction of the land, peoples and food resources. Yet, with the
conversion of the ruler to Islam prosperity, wealth and tranquillity returns
to Kedah and from that period there is no mention of the devil attempts to
return.

Similarly, the text attempts to suggest that prior to Islam there was no
pragmatic belief system at Kedah. Hence there is no reference to
Buddhism, Naga or God. In the meantime, the smashing of statues by
Kedah’s ruler could represent a popular theme of breaking statues
amongst Abrahamic religions, particularly Islam, as well as an
explanation for the large number of pre-Islamic Hindu and Buddhist statutes and temples at Kedah.

Indeed aspects of the *Hikayat* closely follow and resemble those of Persian, South Asian and Southeast Asian sources. Hence, indicating an attempt by its authors to construct a text and a theme from several sources that would appeal to the court bureaucracy, natives and foreign visitors without compromising Kedah’s unique position and prestige in its regional and international sphere of influence. The text was therefore meant to preserve aspects of Kedah history, royalty, society and life that were deemed by its authors as essential and relevant but in a methodology that was better suited to the time and accepted amongst native and regional courts and scholars. In the case of the oral tradition from Langkawi however the power of Hinduism and Buddhism in the folk tradition proved tenuous, and was easily transformed when the orthodox supporters were withdrawn. Thus, Islamic ideas and stories gradually replaced or were intertwined to that of the earlier times.
Bibliography


*Hikayat Iblis*. [http://www.geocities.com/Athens/6795/iblis.html](http://www.geocities.com/Athens/6795/iblis.html). (a Romanised version of an original copy kept at Berlin. The details of this copy at Berlin according to the site is: Mss. Catalogue Number Cap. Schoemann V. 24, Prussiche Staatsbibiotheek zu Berlin Preussischer-Kultur Besitz)


*Kings, Kadis and Charisma in the Seventeenth Century Archipelago: The Making of an Islamic Political Discourse in Southeast Asia*, edited by
Anthony Reid. (1993). Melbourne, Monash Papers on Southeast Asia, No. 27.


Maier, M. J. Hendrik. (1988). In the Centre of Authority. Cornell University, Studies on Southeast Asia.


*The Epic of Kings or Shahnameh by Ferdowsi*, translated by Helen Zimmern. (2000). Iowa, Omphaloskepsis.


