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HIKAYAT HANG TUAH: MALAY EPIC AND MUSLIM MIRROR

SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON ITS DATE,
MEANING AND STRUCTURE

Hikayat Hang Tuah (the epic of Hang Tuah), one of the pinnacles of Malay classical literature, described as early as the eighteenth century by F. Valentijn as a 'very rare gem', still remains a largely mysterious work which allows of opposed interpretations.¹ The study of Hikayat Hang Tuah as a work of literature and, hence, as a research object of the science of literature, was launched by A. Teeuw in articles which described the system of its characters in their quite complex interrelationships. More importantly, perhaps, Teeuw has indicated ways of studying this *hikayat* as a work which, though heterogeneous in terms of its components, possesses a single structure and meaning based on a fundamental conception in medieval Malay culture of the relationship between the ruler and his subjects that is favourable for the state (see Teeuw 1960; 1961; 1964). While supporting Teeuw's main ideas, the present author hopes to develop these somewhat further and, perhaps, to add to them some ideas of his own.

So far the problem of dating Hikayat Hang Tuah remains unsolved. In a series of interesting articles on this *hikayat*, B.B. Parnickel asserts that the romance acquired its present shape in the sultanate of Johor, during the 'golden thirty years' of its history (1640-1670s), so that its account of the valour displayed by Laksamana Hang Tuah might have redounded to the glory of his very distant successor in that function, Laksamana Abd al-Jamil, the most powerful courtier in Johor at that time (Parnickel 1962:148-9). Parnickel correctly observes that the tale reflects some of the events which took place in Johor during the 17th century, and that in some of its episodes the author is apparently striving 'to project the present into the past' (Parnickel 1962:150). The study on the history of Johor by the

¹ See, for example: Ahmad 1964; de Josselin de Jong 1965; Parnickel 1976; Salleh 1983; Kratz 1989.

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American Malay scholar L. Andaya (Andaya 1978) helps to confirm these conclusions and enables a more complete characterization of the objectives pursued by the author of the *hikayat* – all of which contributes to a more reliable dating of the work.

The contents of the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* suggest obvious connections with events in Johor history between the late 1650s and 1680s, above all, the conflict between Johor and the South Sumatran principality of Jambi. In the description of the confrontation between Malacca and Majapahit, which runs through most of the *hikayat* (Ahmad 1968), Malacca features, in our view, as a natural symbol for Johor, while Majapahit stands for Jambi, since the rulers and aristocrats of this principality bore Javanese names and titles² and the principality itself was a vassal of the Javanese state of Mataram (Andaya 1978:86).

The history of the Johor-Jambi conflict had its beginning in the year 1659, when the heir to the throne of Johor, Raja Muda, arrived in Jambi, accompanied by a splendid retinue, and was married there to the daughter of the ruler, Pangeran Ratu, an event which at first glance seemed to hold out a promise of a mutually beneficial relation between both states (Andaya 1978:84). Corresponding to this historical event is the account of Hang Tuah's and the Malaccan ruler's first trip to Majapahit and the latter's marriage to the Majapahit princess in the *hikayat* (Ahmad 1968:114-67).

Raja Muda's marriage for him opened the way to power, which could not fail to alarm the Sultan of Johor, Abd al-Jalil, and the above-mentioned Laksamana Abd al-Jamil, who had vigorously supported the sultan's accession to the throne. Consequently both men made every effort to prevent the prince's wife from coming to Johor and, moreover, to put the blame for this on Jambi. In 1660, using the national navy, they forcibly removed the Raja Muda from the court of Jambi's ruler. But Raja Muda, upon his return to Johor, promised his father-in-law that he would send for his wife as soon as he could 'build a house for her'. Yet, shortly thereafter the Raja Muda became engaged to the *laksamana's* daughter. The delays in the princess' removal to Johor and Raja Muda's new marriage angered Pangeran Ratu and pushed the two states on the brink of war (Andaya 1978:85,87).

The first naval encounter between Johor and Jambi occurred in 1666, when Raja Muda brought his fleet to the island of Lingga. As interpreted in Johor, the incident boiled down to the following: the Raja Muda set out from Johor motivated by his love for his father-in-law and his wife, and, upon his meeting near Lingga with an armada led by none other than Pangeran Ratu himself, sailed together with it to Jambi to pick up his wife. As they proceeded on their journey, the Jambians committed several acts of provocation as a result of which the Raja Muda, who remained steadfast

² For example: Pangeran Ratu, Pangeran Purba, Pangeran Adipati Anom, Pangeran Dipa Negara, Raden Mas Kulup, etc. (see Andaya 1978:88, 122).

throughout the journey, was forced to change his initial plan. Meanwhile, using a Dutch mediator, the Sultan of Johor sought to assure Pangeran Ratu, concerned about his daughter's fate, that Raja Muda was sending his *laksamana* to Jambi with instructions to convey his wife to Lingga, where the Raja Muda would be waiting for her (Andaya 1978:87-9).

These events and their interpretation in Johor are apparently reflected in the episodes of the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* which describe the marriage between the Malaccan sovereign and the Pahang princess Tun Teja, who was escorted to him by Laksamana Hang Tuah; the anger of the Majapahit *batara* on this account; Hang Tuah's diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis by peaceful means; and the extremely dangerous second visit to Majapahit by the Malaccan sovereign and Hang Tuah (Ahmad 1968:185-208, 234-280) - an episode that is not found in the *Sejarah Melayu*, the chief source for the *hikayat*.

The hostilities between Johor and Jambi which flared up after the 1666 events consisted in sporadic attacks by the fleets of the two states on each other's territory. In one such raid in 1673 the Jambi forces looted and burned down Johor's capital and took countless prisoners of war, as well as seizing the sultan's entire treasury (some four tons of gold) (Andaya 1978:97-99). In 1679, however, Laksamana Abd al-Jamil had his revenge when he captured Jambi's capital and forced the son of Pangeran Ratu, Pangeran Dipati Anom, who deserted his army at the height of the battle, to return all the gold looted from Johor and to make considerable reparations in addition. Following this victory, Johor established so close a relationship with the new ruler of Jambi that the two states actually concluded an agreement on joint military actions against Palembang (Andaya 1978:120-2, 134).

It is highly probable that the historical events described above prompted the inclusion in the *hikayat* of an episode in which the *batara* of Majapahit is shown to be not at all satisfied with the Malaccan sovereign's second visit, for which reason his Patih Gajah Mada sends the warrior Marga Paksi and his brother to conquer Malacca. Having penetrated into the city, these men stole all the belongings of its wealthy merchants and looted the Malaccan sovereign's treasury as well. However, Hang Tuah ultimately got the better of them and retrieved the treasures of both the sovereign and the merchants (Ahmad 1968:278-285). Though the episode of the plundering of the city does occur in the *Sejarah Melayu* (Winstedt 1938b:139-40; Situmorang and Teeuw 1958:188-9), its interpretation and significance as given in the *hikayat* and in the chronicle are completely different. The 'Javanese part' of the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* ends with a mention of the death of the *batara* of Majapahit and the accession to the throne of Java of Raden Bahar, who then establishes friendly relations with Malacca and, in fact, recognizes its ruler as his suzerain (Ahmad 1968:375-7).

It is only natural that the war enabled Laksamana Abd al-Jamil to strongly consolidate his position in the state, firm enough though it had

already been. In all likelihood he received around the year 1680 the title of Paduka Raja, an honour that had previously been reserved strictly for *bendaharas*. Subsequently, he appointed his sons to key administrative posts and, having definitely restricted the access to the sultan of other courtiers, became in essence the sole actual ruler of Johor (Andaya 1978:130-5, 140-1). All this could not fail to arouse the opposition of the Johor aristocracy and, above all, the *bendahara*, whose prestige had been greatly undermined. It was not until the death of Sultan Ibrahim and the removal of his juvenile heir to the *bendahara*'s household, however, that this opposition openly challenged the *laksamana*. As a result, the *bendahara* in 1688 caused Abd al-Jamil to flee the capital, and later defeated his forces in a heavy naval battle, in which the *laksamana* was killed. The following is the description of Abd al-Jamil's end from one of the sources:

'A heavy fight took place which lasted from the evening till the next morning. The Paduka Raja fought so fiercely and desperately that, if it had not been for the flight of his brother Akhir and his two sons the Laksamana and the Temenggong to Pahang, the Dato Bendahara's forces would have been defeated. He continued, nevertheless, to ward off his attackers, and when he ran out of shot, he used the Spanish rials he had on board his grab as missiles for his cannons. In this way he was able to hold off the attackers for quite some time before he was finally forced to go ashore to seek safety in the jungle. It took the Bendahara's men ten days before they captured the Paduka Raja [. . .] When the Paduka Raja was captured, the Dato Bendahara ordered a slave to kris him.' (Andaya 1978:155-6.)

That same slave stabbed one of Abd al-Jamil's sons with a kris; the second son was executed and his body thrown overboard as the ship in which he was sailing passed Pahang. The two remaining sons escaped death by fleeing to Pahang (Andaya 1978:155-6).

Though in a modified form, most of these facts are to be found also in the Hikayat Hang Tuah, while it describes the treason of Hang Jebat and the battle between him and Hang Tuah which followed, as was to be expected, after the account of the latter's victory over Marga Paksi (Ahmad 1968:290-329). One finds in the *hikayat* the mistreatment of the courtiers and *bendahara* by Hang Jebat, appointed to the post of *laksamana*, in particular the fact that they were not allowed to see the sovereign; the granting of the title of Paduka Raja to Hang Jebat despite the warnings of Hang Tuah and Tun Teja; the flight of the sovereign from the palace to the house of the *bendahara* after Hang Jebat had in effect usurped the power in the state; the prolonged and fierce fight between the heroes in which Hang Tuah stabbed Hang Jebat with a kris; and even the passage of several days between the defeat and the death of Hang Jebat. Furthermore, the romance tells us how Hang Tuah dispatches Hang Jebat's son to Indrapura (i.e., Pahang) after the Malaccan sovereign has ordered the child to be drowned at sea. Most of these details, however, are not to be found in the episode of the Malay Annals which served as source for this

particular section of the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* (Winstedt 1938b:112-4; Situmorang and Teeuw 1958:145).

For all its limitations, the above comparative analysis suggests that the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* reflects, in the allegorical form of a *pasemon*³ of the rivalry between Malacca and Majapahit, the real conflict between Johor and Jambi and the subsequent power struggle between the Johor *laksamana* and *bendahara*. It seems probable that Hang Tuah, said to have died after the victory over Marga Paksi, symbolizes Abd al-Jamil prior to the 'usurpation', while Hang Jebat is his double after the 'usurpation'.⁴ In as much as this supposition is correct, the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* could not have come into being before the 1679 victory over Jambi, and, most likely, was composed soon after the final triumph of the *bendahara* in his struggle against Abd al-Jamil, i.e., in 1688. Pointing to this dating is a tendency, observed throughout the *hikayat*, to describe the relationship between Hang Tuah and the *bendahara* of Malacca as one of uninterrupted closeness and friendliness. Added to the allegorical character of the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* and the absence of variant versions of the *hikayat* (Parnickel 1962:147), this tendency supports the view that the *hikayat* was created all at once, and not gradually. Finally, the fact that the *hikayat* is mentioned by F. Valentijn in 1726 (probably some ten years after he actually saw it, Skinner 1963:50) sets an upper limit to its dating. To summarize, the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* was probably composed in Johor on a single occasion some time between 1688 and the 1710s.

One tends to believe that the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* has won its exceptional place in Malay literature not because it made skilful use of a literary device to attain a local political object, i.e., to honour the memory of Abd al-Jamil, a prominent statesman and conqueror of Jambi, subsequently to condemn him as a 'traitor' and a 'usurper' and to pay tribute to the wisdom and great virtue of the Johor *bendahara*, most probably Abd al-Majid (who died in 1697) (Andaya 1978:180), but because of the *hikayat's* undeniable literary merit and profound ethical message. Though the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* is, generally speaking, a national heroic epic, it is hard to define the genre to which it belongs with greater precision. On account of its extremely varied and diverse sources, it may justly be considered an example of literary synthesis, alongside many other works from the classical period of Malay literature.

The backbone of the *hikayat* is made up, as was already noted, of

³ About the Javanese genre of *pasemon* - a systematic allusion to some event - see Ras 1976:65; about Javanese 'political allegories', which provided an important link between medieval literature and reality, see Berg 1938a, 1938b:62-64; van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1956. The same phenomenon in classical Malay literature has been treated by Winstedt 1938a; Hooykaas 1947:72-5; Braginsky 1983:124-5, 329, 404-6, 409.

⁴ The idea that Hang Tuah and Hang Jebat form 'two parts of a single "I"' has been expressed also by Parnickel, who, however, interpreted it differently (see Parnickel 1974:281).

accounts of the heroic deeds of Hang Tuah or such deeds of other personages in Malay history subsequently ascribed to him, accounts which are found also in the Malay Annals and which then sometimes appear in a strongly modified form in the *hikayat*. The *hikayat* includes no less than twenty such accounts with prototypes in the Malay Annals. Moreover, in the principal part of the *hikayat* (starting with Hang Tuah's fight with a man who runs amok and ending with his mission to China), nearly each scene (except for the countless descriptions of fights or repetitions with insignificant variations of earlier episodes) has parallels in the Annals. As regards the motifs which are not to be found in the Malay Annals or which were so radically changed by the author of the *hikayat* that they are no longer identifiable with their counterparts in the Annals (both of which are rare occurrences in this part of the *hikayat*), their origin is very hard to trace. They may go back to an erstwhile cycle of oral legends about Hang Tuah⁵; they may be borrowings by the author of the present version of the *hikayat* from works which had nothing to do with Hang Tuah; or they may be this author's own creations. The wayang plays, Panji romances and some historical works, such as the Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa (see Braginsky 1983:329-33), testify that Malay writers enjoyed considerable freedom in the treatment of their sources and that the creative approach played a prominent part in the composition of works which dealt with topical issues in traditional contexts.

The author of the version of the *hikayat* that has survived to the present day also used, in addition to the Malay Annals, Panji romances (cf. Winstedt 1961:53-62), most likely some work that was similar to the Hikayat Cekel Waneng Pati. This does not, however, detract in any way from the national character of this work, since the narrative style and motifs characteristic of Panji romances had since long become the 'standard' language of tales about Java in the Malay literary tradition. Likewise, the author was evidently familiar with such works as the Hikayat Seri Rama and the Hikayat Pandawa Lima, both of which are traceable to Indian literature, and, at the same time, with Muslim Malay treatises, in particular the Bustan as-Salatin [The Garden of Kings] by Nuruddin ar-Raniri, and, finally, with hagiographic literature and legends (see Parnickel 1962:151-4).⁶ Thanks to specific compositional techniques and an integral conception, the various narrative motifs borrowed from all of these sources are joined into a fairly coherent whole in the Hikayat Hang Tuah.

Compositionally the Hikayat Hang Tuah strongly resembles traditional Malay historical treatises, particularly the Malay Annals. It similarly con-

⁵ That such legends, or even an oral epic of Hang Tuah existed seemed probable enough to Overbeck (1922), Winstedt (1961) and Parnickel (1960). However, Teeuw expressed serious doubts on this score (see Teeuw 1961; 1964:346-7).

⁶ Motifs such as the abdication of the Malaccan ruler and his becoming a hermit, as well as the episode in which he eats the 'forbidden' cucumber, indicate, perhaps, that the author of the *hikayat* was also familiar with the Hikayat Ibrahim ibn Adham.

sists of two parts, the first of which presents the myth of the origin of the Malay ruling dynasty – the descent of its founder on Mount Seguntang – and the second the history, or rather the pseudo-history, of Malacca from the rise to the fall of this kingdom (this historical overview contains many anachronisms – another common feature of Malay historiography, which in the *hikayat* is connected with its *pasemon* character). Both the *hikayat* and the Malay Annals possess breadth and scope – a quality that is lacking in some of the locally oriented later chronicles. The *hikayat*'s place of action encompasses the entire Malay world, perceived as a single 'Malay land' (see Parnickel 1959), as well as 'far-off' lands – Majapahit, Vijayanagar, China, Turkey and Siam. The *hikayat* is, moreover, rich in details that reflect specific aspects of the government and social structure of the Malay sultanates, of their court and urban everyday life, their marriage rituals and enthronement ceremony, receptions given by monarchs, and diplomatic etiquette (see Parnickel 1978), various amusements such as ball games, cockfights and chess, and even popular beliefs and superstitions – in a word, it presents a comprehensive, varied, lively and unique picture of medieval Malaya. All this on the one hand accentuates the kinship between the *hikayat* and the Malay Annals, while on the other hand it shows up the sharp distinction between the specific atmosphere of the *hikayat* and the conventional, mostly extranational background of the fantastic adventure romances, or the foreign colouring of Malay interpretations of Javanese and Persian literary works.

But for all the affinity between the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* and the Malay Annals, the two also have differences. Of these the most important is the absence in the *hikayat* of the genealogical element – a must in the Annals which, moreover, immediately changes the entire character of the narrative. In the *hikayat* we find only one monarch, one *bendahara* and one *laksamana* throughout the entire Malaccan history. Only one enemy – the Javanese – threatens the country at the time of its early development, and again only one – the Portuguese – in its 'old age'. It is hardly conceivable that the erudite author of the *hikayat* (or the compiler of its final version) did not know that Malacca was ruled by a series of sultans, assisted by several *bendaharas* and *laksamanas*, or that the situation Malacca had to face in its earlier period was so unambiguous.⁷ Thus, the diachronic

⁷ Though the description of the conflict between Malacca and Majapahit in the *hikayat* is, in fact, a *pasemon*, it does contain certain real historical elements: the destruction by the Javanese of Palembang and their banishment of its ruler, Parameswara, the rebellious vassal of Majapahit who attempted to revive the former glory of Sriwijaya and proclaimed himself an avatara of Avalokitesvara. He enjoyed the backing of the chiefs of the 'seafaring' Malays, who constituted the main armed force in Sriwijaya and had long cherished dreams of a strong authority that would guarantee their status and enable them to gain wealth, titles and privileges, as in the past. Of decisive importance for Parameswara was the assistance of the most powerful of the Malay chiefs, the ruler of the island of Bintan (see Wolters 1970:124-7, 138-40). Two centuries later this island became the home of the Sultan of Johor. It is possible that these events suggested to the author of the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* that Bintan should be given so prominent a part in his work.

succession of statesmen that is common in historical writing is purposely replaced in the Hikayat Hang Tuah with a synchronical grouping of pseudo-historical characters/symbols. At the superficial semantic level these symbols appear to be used to form a *pasemon*; viewed in terms of their deep meaning, however, they compress history, projecting the distant Malaccan past onto the recent Johorese past and so conveying the common meaning of two 'pasts' and their lessons and experience.

Such objectives were not at all unusual for Malay chronicles, but one is unlikely to find so consistent a historical account as an integral epic biography presented in them. The Hikayat Aceh, a similarly heroized biography of Sultan Iskandar Muda of Aceh (see Iskandar 1958), is perhaps the only work that bears any analogy to the Hikayat Hang Tuah.

What were the most significant lessons of the 'two pasts' as seen by the *hikayat's* author? The answer to this question can be surmised from the forewords to the *hikayat*, one of which contains the following significant statement: 'This is the *hikayat* of Hang Tuah, whose dedication to his master was boundless and who has rendered him countless services' (Ahmad 1968:1). Thus we have here a problem familiar to us from the Hikayat Raja Pasai and the Malay Annals on the one hand, and the Hikayat Isma Yatim and the Hikayat Bachtiar on the other - the problem of the relationship between the monarch, the Sultan of Malacca, a descendant of celestial beings, and his loyal vassal, Hang Tuah, son of a poor family from the River Duyung, who with his name 'The Lucky One' and 'The One Who Brings Fortune' symbolizes Malacca's happy destiny (Hooykaas 1947:80).

According to the established idea, the monarch is endowed, by virtue of his supernatural origin and divine preordination, with sacral energy or power, *daulat*, which makes him a focus and a custodian of the social order. His subjects - both the people and the country -, symbolized by Hang Tuah, are linked to him in a kind of sacral marriage. It is this inseparable unity between the sovereign, as the agent of a creative cosmic force manifested on the social level in justice (*adilat*), and his loyal subjects that guarantees, in the interpretation of the *hikayat's* author, the state's political success and prosperity until such time as the will of Allah will put an end to its very existence.⁸

If the conception described above provides an ideological focus for the *hikayat* that has repercussions for practically all its episodes (cf. Teeuw 1964:349), the structural core of the work consists in the parallel biographies of the sultan and Hang Tuah, in whose interaction the idea finds its most complete expression (cf. Ahmad 1968:xiv-xv). The two lives personify the destiny of Malacca, and this is crucial for the artistic manner in which the *hikayat* is composed, a mode that blends spontaneous realism with symbolic elements.

⁸ Among the considerable body of literature dealing with this conception special mention should be made of De Josselin de Jong 1964 and 1980.

The romance begins with the supernatural birth of both of its heroes; their youth is coincidental with the founding of Malacca, their maturity with its flourishing. On the same unfortunate day when the monarch drops into the sea his crown, a symbol of his sacral power, Hang Tuah parts with his kris, which has ensured his and Malacca's good luck and invincibility. Thereafter both the sovereign and Hang Tuah fall ill and are henceforth constantly tormented by fever and debility – maladies which equally affect Malacca, now past its prime and showing signs of decrepitude. One of these signs is the defeat suffered in the Portuguese attack on the country, which follows in the wake of the heroes' illness and leaves the previously invulnerable Hang Tuah with a serious wound. The second is the subsequently more dominant religio-mystical mood, which for the author evidently also is a sign of old age, of the heroes as well as their country. The *hikayat* concludes with the simultaneous departure of the sultan and Hang Tuah from Malacca to become dervishes. The link between them is severed for good now, while Malacca, having reached the end of the period allotted to it by fate, is captured by the Portuguese.

The symbolism inherent in the *hikayat* manifests itself not only in the key episodes, but also in several scenes of a more subsidiary nature. Two of the latter deserve special attention (cf. Teeuw 1964:350-1). In the first, the most unusual victory of a white *pelanduk* (mousedeer) (albinos were thought to possess enormous magic power) over the powerful hunting dogs of a Javanese prince in the very place where Malacca was to be founded seems to be a distant portent of Malacca's future triumph over Majapahit. In the second, this triumph is proved inevitable by a victory scored by Hang Tuah over the greatest of Java's warriors, Taming Sari, and his acquisition of the latter's kris, a weapon imparting invincibility to its owner, which in this instance symbolizes the fact that Majapahit's good fortune is now passing on to Malacca. Incidentally, towards the end of the *hikayat*, another albino animal, a white crocodile, steals this kris from Hang Tuah, thus betokening the fall of Malacca; in this connection it will be recalled that the crocodile is a constant adversary of the mousedeer in Malay folktales and in the literary *Hikayat Pelanduk Jinaka* (Winstedt 1961:11-16; Klinkert 1893).

Because they are permeated by a single conception, the kaleidoscopic succession of episodes in the *hikayat* is similar to that in the novelettes (*exempla*) illustrating particular notions from the didactic 'Mirrors' (*vorstenspiegel*). Moreover, the *hikayat* itself appears to be a kind of 'Mirror' in terms of its inner content, where history becomes a mentor. In dealing with the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, this Mirror is predominantly concerned with the role of the ruled, while the duties which the didactic treatises usually distribute among various groups of courtiers here are imposed on only one character - Hang Tuah. The man is a great (the greatest) military commander, a wise counsellor, a sophisticated diplomat capable of defending his sovereign's honour, and a Muslim

ascetic informing his monarch about the torment of sinners in the hereafter.

To gain a more profound understanding of its character, the reader should take into consideration the didactic aspect of the Hikayat Hang Tuah. The *hikayat* not only engages the reader's attention with its masterly description of the heroic exploits of the *laksamana* and his adherents, but also offers him a correct solution, from the traditional Malay point of view, for the entire range of problematic situations in which its central idea is manifest. This helps to explain in particular the alleged 'belittlement' of the Sultan of Malacca, which is a stumbling-block for some scholars.⁹

It is noteworthy that the image created of this sultan does not include such conventional traits of a tyrant as sexual promiscuity, massive cruelty, and rapaciousness. For all his weaknesses, his rashness and his credulousness, the sultan is not presented as a tyrant – rather a regular way of portraying rulers in Malay literature (Hikayat Raja Pasai, the Malay Annals, Hikayat Aceh, Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa). Accordingly, the fall of Malacca should not be attributed to his evil nature; instead, fully in accordance with the *hikayat's* conception of the embodiment of the country's destiny in the combined destinies of the sultan and Hang Tuah, the disintegration of Malacca is represented as being the result of natural aging caused, in turn, by the termination of a span of time allotted by Allah. This notion, which is not alien to Javanese historiography (see Rickleff's 1974:176ff.), is characteristic of the historical consciousness of later Islam, with its doctrine, evolved partly under the influence of Sufism, of cyclical development: rapid growth in the early phase, consolidation in the middle phase, and decrepitude and disintegration in the final phase (Braune 1971:47-50). The idea of the inseparable unity of the monarch and his subjects and the cyclical conception of history explain the immediate replacement in the *hikayat* of defeated Malacca by a strong Johor.

The ambiguity and variability in the portrayal of the monarch are conditioned not so much by the 'realism' and symbolism inherent in the author's style, as by the didactic objectives he was pursuing. It is as unjustified to expect this character, an 'immobilis mobile' of the plot, to possess strict integrity and consistency, as it is to try to construct a consistent picture of the monarch on the basis of different stories in the 'Mirrors', which aim at resolving a specific, unconnected problem in each instance. Any reasonable and justified actions taken by the monarch in the *hikayat* not only point to his greatness, but also enable Hang Tuah to display his courage and statesmanship. Conversely, his weaknesses and whims make it possible to represent 'in persons' such important notions as the need for a monarch to listen to his wise counsellors, to avoid rashness and to turn a deaf ear to slander. Even more importantly, these weaknesses

⁹ This interpretation of this character is basic for Parnickel, who regards the principal collision in the *hikayat* as being the usual epic confrontation between a warrior and a 'light-minded and cruel ruler' (Parnickel 1974:278).

help to test a subject's loyalty to his sovereign. Were it not for Hang Tuah's willingness to carry out any assignment for his sovereign, both on the latter's orders and voluntarily (and irrespective of whether it involves a matter of importance to the state or such absurd requests as to pick some fruits from a palm tree about to collapse, to rescue a horse from a cesspit, or to bring news from the next world), he would not have become a living embodiment of this loyalty, implicit and absolute, precisely because only then can such loyalty, according to medieval Malay ideas, ensure peace, order and prosperity for the whole state. As for the consequences of disloyalty, these are illustrated in the *hikayat* by the outcome of the tragic rebellion of Hang Jebat, Hang Tuah's adopted brother and the second-strongest warrior in Malacca.

The moral of the above episode can be summarized in the words of the well-known Mirror Taj as-Salatin (The Crown of Kings), i.e., the will of even an unjust ruler must be done, not out of admiration for him, but out of the bitter necessity to avoid disturbances and revolts, which may drag the country into chaos and take the lives of countless subjects, both innocent and guilty (Roorda van Eysinga 1827:49, 224). This is exactly what happens in the *hikayat* when the monarch, egged on by slanderers, orders the execution of Hang Tuah and hands over his powers as well as the famous *laksamana's* kris to a new favourite, Hang Jebat.

Hang Jebat is overcome with confusing and conflicting feelings and passions. The first of these, arising immediately after his accession and his acquisition of the kris, is the intoxication with his power, which he was only able to acquire after Hang Tuah's ousting. But Hang Tuah had foreseen this and foretold the advent of bad times for Malacca. Upon realizing this, all of Hang Jebat's former friends and associates renounce him. The second of these passions, which grows in intensity as his rapture abates, is Hang Jebat's profound grief at the loss of a friend and his desire to take his revenge upon those who have brought him to ruin. Unrestrained, as befits a truly epic hero (Parnickel 1960), these passions break loose from the command of reason - the highest virtue in the Mirror literature (Roorda van Eysinga 1827:169-77), fully embodied in the person of Hang Tuah - and engulf Hang Jebat. Once this happens, the author, irrespective of whether noble or base passions are involved, can only regard the man as an agent of destructive demonic forces.

Starting off by slighting the courtiers and with self-aggrandizement (while the Taj as-Salatin considers the highest attribute of reason to be humility, which is so clearly manifest in Hang Tuah, cf. Roorda van Eysinga 1827:170), Hang Jebat eventually proceeds to open revolt and the usurpation of power. However, this usurpation bears the marks of madness and, were it not for the character of the usurper and the tragic consequences of his action, even has a comical tinge. Having driven the sovereign out of the palace and donned the royal attire, thus profaning the sultan's regalia, Hang Jebat becomes the ruler not of Malacca, but of seven hundred

palace women (cf. Parnickel 1974:281), hence the lord of a 'kingdom turned inside out' (see Likhachev and Panchenko 1976:16-26), as it were, in which the death and life of its subjects is governed not by law and justice, but by the arbitrary will of its ruler alone. Passions rather than reason govern the relationship between the ruler and the subjects of such a kingdom – for instance, the amorous obsession of the palace women and the disturbed feelings of the rebel. The 'interior policy' of this kingdom is uninterrupted orgy; its 'foreign policy' is an equally endless battle with the soldiers led by his former comrades in arms, now sent against Hang Jebat by the Sultan of Malacca. It only stands to reason that such a kingdom of chaos is doomed to collapse, and that the unbridled wilfulness of its 'ruler' will inevitably result in the death of its subjects. This is what happens in fact when Hang Jebat kills all the palace women before going to do battle with Hang Tuah, who turns out to be alive after all, his life having been saved by the *bendahara*. Thus, despite the noble impulse to avenge his friend which subdued the other passions in Hang Jebat's soul, the fight between the heroes assumes the dimension of a symbolic battle between the forces of harmony and those of chaos, between reason and blind passion. It is not fortuitous that, while understanding his adopted brother's motives, Hang Tuah must inevitably fight him, and yet tries to convince him of the need to carefully weigh each step, or that Hang Jebat accepts his challenge, convinced that once he has become a rebel he has to remain a rebel, steeped in blood. Nor is there anything accidental about the juxtaposition of the calm resolve of Hang Tuah during the fight and the nervousness of Hang Jebat, who is incapable of controlling his fury. Even when mortally wounded, Hang Jebat is still prone to the raging forces of evil unleashed by his uncontrollable passions. Embodying the idea of the Mirrors that divine wrath will strike the country that has given birth to a rebel (Roorda van Eysinga 1827:224; cf. Zahoder 1949:11), he runs amok, raging across Malacca and piling the bodies of his dead victims in the streets of the city.

But the author would not have been the outstanding writer he was if he had forgotten for a moment the former virtue of his hero, a virtue which was previously evident from all his words and deeds. This being the case, Hang Tuah, after striking down the rebel, spends three days in mourning and silence, Hang Jebat is given a chance to die in the arms of his adopted brother, and Hang Kesturi weeps over the dead body of the man he has renounced only a moment before. And, as a kind of epitaph for the slain man, Hang Tuah observes that nothing is simple in life.

To summarize, the Hikayat Hang Tuah is a strongly national example of the artificial historical-heroic epic, in which history, in the medieval Malay sense of the term, is unfolded as a biography of a hero. In the process, its hidden didactic message is revealed.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED:

- BKI* *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, published by the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde.
- JMBRAS* *Journal of the Malay(sian) Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*.
- MKNAW AL* *Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afdeling Letterkunde* (Nieuwe Reeks).
- RIMA* *Review of Indonesian and Malayan Affairs*.