Tales from the Malay Annals

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Badang’s Ghost
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The Malay Annals (known in Malay as Sejarah Melayu) is one of the most important works of traditional Malay literature. It is also known as Sulalatus Salatin, or ‘The Genealogy of Kings’, an indication of its primary concern, i.e. the rulers of Melaka, the most famous kingdom in the history of the Malay Peninsula.

A number of versions of the Malay Annals have survived to this day. Some of them are found in Malaysia, under the custodianship of either the Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia (The National Library of Malaysia) or the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (The Institute of Language and Literature). The majority of manuscripts, however, are housed in libraries or institutions outside Malaysia. According to a 1967 article by Roolvink, 11 manuscripts are held by the United Kingdom, 12 by the Netherlands, five by Indonesia, and one by Russia. Although the majority of these manuscripts are late copies dating to the nineteenth century, the fact that so many manuscripts were produced reflects the high regard in which the Malay Annals was viewed.
The Malay Annals was originally written in Classical Malay in the Old Jawi script (a script adapted from Arabic for the writing of the Malay language). Subsequently, the work has been Romanised, and translated. The first English translation of the Malay Annals, for example, was made by John Leyden, published posthumously in 1821. It may be mentioned that in addition to the better-known English translations of the Malay Annals, there is also an incomplete French one. It's lengthy title, *Le Séjarah malayou* (l'arbre généalogique malais), *ou, Histoire des radjas et sultans malai: depuis les origines jusqu'à la conquête de Malaka par Alphonse d'Albuquerque, en 1511* translates as *The Sejarah Melayu* (The Malay Family Tree), *Or, History of the Malay Rajas and Sultans: From the Origins to the Conquest of Melaka by Afonso de Albuquerque*, in 1511.

There are a number of questions surrounding the Malay Annals that have yet to be fully answered. For instance, the exact date of the text’s composition is unknown. According to Winstedt, the oldest copy of the Malay Annals is the Raffles MS No. 18, dating to 1612. Winstedt went on to argue that the Raffles MS No. 18 was rewritten and compiled from an older manuscript, which he believed dated to before 1536. This manuscript is also thought to be the one closest to the original version of the text. Incidentally, the Raffles MS No. 18 resides today in London, at the Library of the Royal Asiatic Society.

The identity of the author of the Malay Annals is another unsolved mystery. Winstedt believed that the author of the original text was a Melakan at the court of Sultan Mahmud Shah, the ruler of Melaka during its conquest by the Portuguese in 1511. Winstedt was of the opinion that the writer survived the fall of the city and that he continued writing until 1535. It is generally agreed that in 1612, the Bendahara Paduka Raja of Johor, Tun Muhammad bin Tun Ahmad, better-known as Tun Sri Lanang, was commissioned by Raja Bongsu (the future Sultan Abdullah Ma’ayat Shah of Johor) to rewrite, revise, and edit the Malay Annals.

The Malay Annals (Raffles MS No. 18) contains 31 chapters, beginning with a brief preface praising Allah, the Prophet, and his companions, as well as detailing the circumstances in which the manuscript was written. The story proper begins with Iskandar Zulqarnain (commonly identified as Alexander the Great), to whom the rulers of Melaka trace their ancestry, and ends with ‘Alauddin Ri’ayat Shah, the first Sultan of Johor. Apart from the rulers of Melaka, the pages of the Malay Annals are filled with many colourful characters, some of whom have become household names in Malaysia.

Despite its focus on the rulers of Melaka, the Malay Annals is much more than a mere royal genealogy. This work sheds light on various aspects of the Melaka Sultanate, including its administration, foreign relations, economy, as well as social norms and customs. Having said that, it should also be noted that the Malay Annals was not meant to be a faithful record of historical events, and that many of its stories ought to be taken ‘with a pinch of salt’.

Still, the Malay Annals is a significant piece of work, not only as a work of Malay literature, but also for the information about the Melaka Sultanate it contains, and the strong influence it has exerted on the development of the Malay civilisation. Therefore, in 2001, the Malay Annals, following its nomination by Dato’ Haji A. Aziz Deraman, the former Director-General of Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, was inscribed on UNESCO’s ‘Memory of the World’ Register.
There once was a mighty king called Raja Chulan who ruled over Bija Negara, a kingdom in India. Raja Chulan was the son of Raja Suran Padshah, and the grandson of Raja Shulan. Like his grandfather, Raja Chulan was a formidable conqueror. The whole of India was under his rule and all the kings of the East and the West were his vassals. Only the emperor of China had not submitted to Raja Chulan.

Seeing that China still lay beyond his reach, Raja Chulan planned a military expedition to conquer it. He assembled an army from the four corners of his kingdom; his vassals, as many...
by the flashing of the soldiers’ weapons, whilst the roar of thunder was overpowered by their war cries. After several months of marching, Raja Chulan’s army arrived in Temasik, now known as Singapore.

In the meantime, news of Raja Chulan’s expedition had reached the Chinese court. The emperor was amazed by what he had heard and summoned his ministers to consult them on the best way to deal with the invading army. The emperor was aware that if Raja Chulan reached China, he would certainly lose his throne and country. The Chinese prime minister came up with a cunning plan, much to the emperor’s delight. He took a boat and placed in it a number of different fruit-bearing trees. After that, the prime minister searched for the oldest, most toothless men in all of China, and gave them some needles. The men were then put into the boat and told to sail to Temasik.

The boat eventually reached the island and its arrival was reported to Raja Chulan. The king ordered some of his men to go to the boat to ask about the distance between Temasik and China. The Chinese men replied that when they had set sail from their home in China, they had been merely twelve years of age. Now, however, they were old men whose teeth had all fallen out. They added that when they had left China, they had planted some fruit seeds in the boat. These had grown into tree, and were now bearing fruit. Finally, they took out the needles and showed them to Raja Chulan’s men. They explained that when they had begun their voyage, the needles had been iron rods as thick as their arms. Over time, the metal had worn away, and all that was left of the original rods were these needles. The Chinese men concluded by saying that they had been sailing for so long that they had lost count of time.

The men returned to Raja Chulan and reported to the king all that they had been told by the Chinese sailors. Having listened to his men, the king understood that Temasik and China were separated by so great a distance that it would take him many years to reach the latter. Raja Chulan sighed and said that if the story told by the Chinese men was true, then he was still a long way from China. Since he did not know how long it would take to reach his destination, the king decided to abandon his invasion of China and to return to India with his army. Raja Chulan did not suspect, even for a brief moment, that he had been fooled.

When Raja Chulan returned to India, he resumed his duties as a ruler and governed his kingdom justly. Yet, the king had a restless spirit. He yearned to travel, rather than to be cooped up in his palace. One day, as Raja Chulan was daydreaming, he thought to himself, “I have seen everything there is to see on the earth, but what about that which lies beneath the ocean?” Thus, Raja Chulan fostered a desire to make a trip to the bottom the ocean. Believe it or not, the king managed to do just that, but that is another story for another time...!
There once was a kingdom called Palembang in the land of Andalas (more commonly known as Sumatra today). The ruler of Palembang, whose name was Demang Lebar Daun, traced his ancestry all the way back to Raja Chulan. Palembang was located on the bank of a river called Muara Tatang. Upstream from Muara Tatang was another river, Melayu, and on this second river was a hill called Bukit Si Guntang Mahameru. On the foot of this hill lived a pair of widows, Wan Empuk and Wan Malini.

The two widows sustained themselves by planting padi on the hill. One night, Wan Empuk and Wan Malini saw that the peak of Bukit Si Guntang was lit up brightly as though engulfed in flames. The two widows were terrified, and wondered what was causing the light on the hill. Wan Malini said to Wan Empuk, “Perhaps it is the great dragon gemala (gem)?” In any case, Wan Empuk and Wan Malini decided to leave the matter for the time being, and went to sleep.

The following morning, after freshening up, Wan Empuk suggested to her friend, “Let’s go up Bukit Si Guntang to see if we can find out what was causing the hill to light up last night.” Wan Malini agreed with Wan Empuk’s suggestion, and the two of them began climbing up the hill. As they passed their padi fields, the widows were amazed by what they saw. The crops, which were almost ready to be harvested, had been transformed. The grains had turned into gold, the
leaves silver, and the stalks bronze. The widows said to each other that this must have been the reason why the hill had shone so brightly the night before.

As Wan Empuk and Wan Malini continued their morning hike up Bukit Si Guntang, they noticed that the soil of the hill had also been changed into gold. When the widows reached the summit, they saw three good-looking youths seated on a great white elephant. The youths were dressed like kings, each wearing a crown studded with precious stones. Wan Empuk and Wan Malini were left completely speechless. As they marvelled at the sight of the three youths before them, the widows thought to themselves that it must have been the youths who caused their padi to be transfigured.

After staring at the youths in awe for a long while, Wan Empuk and Wan Malini finally spoke to them, “Where have you come from? Are you the children of djinns or of fairies? Although we have lived at the foot of Bukit Si Guntang for a long time, we have never seen anyone coming to the hill. It is only today that we have seen the three of you.”

The youths replied, “We are the offspring neither of djinns nor fairies. We are the descendants of Iskandar Zulkarnain. We trace our lineage to Raja Nushirwan, ruler of the East and the West, and to Raja Sulaiman (King Solomon). Our names are Bicitram, Paladutani, and Nilatanam.”

The widows asked, “If you are the descendants of Iskandar Zulkarnain, why have you come here?” Thus, the youths told Wan Empuk and Wan Malini all the tales of their ancestors, from the marriage of Iskandar Zulkarnain to the daughter of Raja Kida Hindi, all the way to Raja Chulan’s journey to the bottom of the ocean. When the youths finished their story-telling, Wan Empuk and Wan Malini expressed their scepticism. Although Bicitram and his brothers were starting to feel annoyed, they managed to maintain their regal composure.

When the widows asked the youths for a sign to prove that they were of royal blood, they pointed (perhaps with a tinge of sarcasm) to the crowns on their heads. The youths continued, “It is because of our descent from the sky that your padi and the soil of the hill were transformed. Is that sign good enough for you?” Wan Empuk and Wan Malini doubted no more. They invited the three princes to their hut, harvested the padi, and became incredibly wealthy.

The story of the three princes spread far and wide, eventually reaching Palembang. After hearing this tale, Demang Lebar Daun made a trip to Bukit Si Guntang, and invited the princes back to Palembang. Whilst the two older princes went away to become the rulers of nearby countries, the youngest stayed in Palembang. Demang Lebar Daun gave his throne to Nilatanam, and served as his prime minister. After some time, Nilatanam (whose name was changed twice, first to Sang Nila Utama, and then to Sri Tri Buana) and Demang Lebar Daun made a pact that outlined the relation between ruler and subject. That, however, is another story for another time!
One day, Sri Tri Buana, summoned his prime minister, Demang Lebar Daun. The prince sought the prime minister's advice for he wished to go to sea to find a suitable place to establish a kingdom. The prime minister supported Sri Tri Buana's idea and agreed to follow his liege. Once the necessary preparations were made, Sri Tri Buana and his entourage, including the prime minister, boarded their vessels, and set sail from Palembang. There were so many people accompanying the prince on the voyage that the sea was congested with their ships.

By the time Sri Tri Buana’s fleet arrived at Selat Sambar (the Strait of Sambar), news of his voyage had reached Bintan. This island was ruled by a queen, Wan Sri Bini, who was interested to know more about the prince. She summoned two of her ministers, Indra Bopal and Aria Bopal, and commanded them to invite Sri Tri Buana to the island. Since Wan Sri Bini did not know whether Sri Tri Buana was young or old, she was unsure how to address him. Therefore, she told her ministers that if the prince turned out to be an old man, he should say “Your sister sends her respects.” On the other hand, if he were a youth, he should say “Your mother sends her greetings.”

The two ministers left the palace, and went to search for Sri Tri Buana. The prince's fleet was so huge that it occupied the entire sea from Selat Sambar all the way to Tanjung Rungas (Cape Rungas). When the ministers finally found the prince, they saw that he was a young man. After paying their respects to him, the
his crown than endanger the lives of his followers, did as he was asked, and the storm ceased immediately.

Sri Tri Buana and his followers continued their journey and soon reached the shores of Temasik. As the prince and his men explored the island, they came across a strange animal. The creature was slightly larger than a male goat and was extremely agile. It had a red body, a white breast, and a black head. It walked in front of Sri Tri Buana before quickly vanishing into the jungle. The prince asked his entourage if anyone knew the name of the animal they had just seen, but they were as clueless as he. Finally, Demang Lebar Daun stepped forward and said that the creature might have been a singa, or lion. Sri Tri Buana saw this as a good omen and decided to settle there, naming the kingdom that he founded ‘Singapura’, which means ‘Lion City’.

Singapura prospered under Sri Tri Buana and his descendants, so much so that it attracted the attention of Majapahit, the region’s dominant power at that time. The ruler of Majapahit wanted Singapura to recognise his suzerainty and to pay him tribute. Since Singapura refused to do so, a war broke out between the two. But that is another story for another time!
Once upon a time, there lived a man called Badang. He was a commander in the service of Sri Rana Wikrama, the King of Singapura. Badang may be regarded as the ‘Malay Heracles’. Like the Greek hero, Badang was renowned for his immense strength. Unlike Heracles, however, he was not the offspring of a god. Rather, he was an ordinary man who gained his extraordinary strength later on in life. This is the tale of how Badang became a strongman.

Badang was a native of Sayung, in what is today the southern Malaysian state of Johor. Before becoming one of Sri Rana Wikrama’s commanders, he was a slave owned by a man from his own village. Badang was given the task of clearing a jungle, with the promise that he would be set free once the job was accomplished.

One day, Badang left a bamboo fish trap called a lukah in the nearby river, and went off to do his work. When he returned, he was puzzled to find the trap empty, apart for some fish bones and scales. Since Badang threw the fish scales into the river, it became known as the Bersisik river, or Scaly river. This went on for several days, causing Badang to suspect that something ‘fishy’ was going on!

Therefore, Badang placed the lukah in the river as usual, then hid himself behind some bushes, in order to see who was eating his fish. As expected, the thief finally appeared. Badang saw that the culprit was no human, but a ghost with glowing red eyes, messy matted-like hair, and a beard that reached all the way to its belly. Instead of running away in terror, Badang summoned up his courage, and confronted the ghost.
Badang took his parang, a knife with a sharp blade, leapt out of his hiding place, lunged towards the ghost, and seized it by its beard. Angrily, Badang scolded the ghost for eating his fish, and threatened to kill it. The ghost trembled as it was held by Badang, and struggled hard in an attempt to free itself from his grasp. Badang, however, had a firm grip on the ghost’s beard, and refused to let go.

When the ghost realised that his efforts were to no avail, he tried to negotiate with Badang. The ghost begged him to spare its life. In return, it would grant him either great wealth, immense strength, or the power of invisibility. Badang thought to himself, “It isn't too difficult to obtain wealth, whilst invisibility is no guarantee that I won't be killed by someone. Therefore, let me ask for strength, since that would make my work much easier.”

Badang said to the ghost, “Make me strong, so that even with one arm, I may be able to chop down the largest trees in the jungle.” The ghost agreed to fulfil Badang’s wish, but told him that first he must eat his vomit. Badang did not flinch for even a second. Instead, he urged the ghost to vomit as much as it could. As Badang ate the ghost’s vomit, he did not let go of its beard. When he had finished eating the vomit, Badang tested his newly-gained strength. True enough, he was able to break the huge trees around him easily, snapping them like twigs. Only then did Badang let the ghost go.

Badang began his journey back to his master's house, leaving a trail of destruction in his wake. He smashed some trees to bits, and uprooted others. Even the saplings were not spared, as Badang, using his hand as a fan, blew them away. In no time, the entire jungle was cleared, and an empty plain was all that was left.

Badang’s master came out of his house to see what all the commotion was about. To his great surprise, he saw that the whole jungle had vanished. Spotting Badang, the master asked him what happened, to which Badang replied that he had just cleared the forest as commanded. Naturally, the next question he asked was “How did you do that?” Badang narrated his story from beginning to end, after which he received his freedom from his master.

Soon after his liberation, Badang’s story reached the ears of Sri Rana Wikrama, who invited the strongman to his court. Badang was appointed by the King of Singapura as a commander, and he served his new master faithfully. Whilst in the king’s service, Badang performed many extraordinary feats of strength, but that is another story for another time!
After the death of Paduka Sri Maharaja, his son, Iskandar Shah, became the new ruler of Singapura. Sultan Iskandar Shah married the daughter of Tun Perpatih Tulus and had a son with her. At the same time, the Sultan kept many concubines, but his favourite was the daughter of the Bendahari, his treasurer, Sang Ranjuna Tapa. The concubine was extremely beautiful, and the Sultan loved her very much.

The other concubines were jealous of the Sang Ranjuna Tapa’s daughter and began spreading a story that she was having an affair behind the Sultan’s back. The rumour spread like wildfire until, in no time, it reached the Sultan’s ears. When Sultan Iskandar Shah heard of the alleged wrongdoing of his favourite concubine, he flew into a rage. Without investigating the veracity of the rumour beforehand, the Sultan decided to punish her.

The punishment meted out by the Sultan was unjust and cruel. He ordered her to be stripped naked in the marketplace, thereby humiliating her in public. The shame was felt not only by the concubine, but also by her entire family, especially her father. Sang Ranjuna Tapa was furious that the Sultan had punished his
daughter in this manner. He felt that if his daughter had been unfaithful, as the rumour suggested, the Sultan should have executed her, rather than humiliate her in public.

The Bendahari wanted to take revenge on the Sultan but was aware that he did not have the power to do so. Therefore, he sent a letter to the court of king of Majapahit, Singapura’s sworn enemy. Sang Ranjuna Tapa knew that the king, who ruled from the island of Java, had been waiting for an opportunity to attack Singapura for a very long time. In his letter, Sang Ranjuna Tapa wrote, “If Your Majesty wishes to attack Singapura, come immediately, for I will aid your army from within.”

As soon as he read Sang Ranjuna Tapa’s letter, the king prepared his troops. As many as 200,000 Javanese warriors were mustered for the invasion of Singapura. An equally large fleet was assembled to transport the men across the sea. The Javanese fleet consisted of 300 jongs and various other vessels, including many kelulus, pilangs, and jongkongs. In no time, the Javanese arrived in Singapura and launched their attack on the city.

A few days after the arrival of the Javanese, Sultan Iskandar Shah ordered the Bendahari to distribute rice rations to his subjects. Sang Ranjuna Tapa, however, reported that there was no more rice. This was in fact a lie, since the Bendahari was about to deliver the city to the Javanese.

Just before daybreak, Sang Ranjuna Tapa opened the city gates, allowing the Javanese to enter. A fierce battle ensued between the people of Singapura and the invading army. The number slaughtered on both sides was so great that the city was flooded in a river of blood. As a result, the plain of Singapura turned red, and so it remains until this day. Despite putting up a valiant fight, the people of Singapura were overwhelmed by the invaders. After sacking the city, the victorious Javanese returned home.

Sang Ranjuna Tapa did not live long to savour his revenge. For the crime of betraying his sovereign, the Bendahari suffered divine retribution – both Sang Ranjuna Tapa and his wife were turned to stone. The pair of stones can still be seen in the moat of Singapura, a grim reminder of the events that occurred in the island’s distant past.

As for Sultan Iskandar Shah, he managed to escape from the city. He fled northwards to Seletar and crossed the Strait. The Sultan continued his journey through the Malay Peninsula, eventually arriving at Muar, in present-day Johor. The Sultan and his followers decided to settled down there as they were tired of running.

One night, a horde of monitor lizards appeared. The next morning, Sultan Iskandar Shah’s followers killed the creatures, eating some and throwing the rest into the river. This went on for several days. As a consequence, the air was filled with the stench emanating from the corpses of the slain reptiles. Hence, the place came to be known as ‘Biawak Busuk’, which literally means ‘Smelly Monitor Lizard’.

The extremely unpleasant odour forced Sultan Iskandar Shah and his followers to abandon the place and to seek a new site for their settlement. Their journey took them northward and, in due course, they arrived at the future site of Melaka. Sultan Iskandar Shah went on to establish the Sultanate of Melaka, but that is another story for another time!
One of Melaka’s most formidable foes was the Kingdom of Siam, now known as Thailand, whose power reached as far south as the Malay Archipelago. All the kingdoms of the region, with the exception of Melaka, acknowledged Siam as their overlord and paid tribute to the Siamese king.

When Bubunnya, the King of Siam, learned that the Melakans had not accepted Siamese suzerainty, he demanded a letter of obeisance from them. At that time, the ruler of Melaka was Sultan Muzaffar Shah. He rejected Bubunnya’s demand. When the Siamese king heard of the Sultan’s refusal to submit, he was furious and ordered his army to prepare for war. The Siamese army, which was placed under the command of Awi Chakra, marched down the Malay Peninsula until they arrived in Pahang.
When Sultan Muzaffar Shah received news of the impending Siamese invasion, he assembled an army by ordering his vassals to bring their soldiers to Melaka. One of the vassals who responded to the Sultan’s order was Tun Perak, a chieftain from Kelang, Selangor. Unlike the rest of the Sultan’s vassals, Tun Perak brought not only his warriors, but also their wives and children. The men of Kelang saw this as an inconvenience and complained about it during their audience with the Sultan.

Sultan Muzaffar Shah was intrigued by what he had heard so decided to get to the bottom of the matter. He summoned one of his heralds, Sri Imarat, who was originally from Pasai, northern Sumatra. Thanks to his wit and eloquence, he had been appointed as a herald at the court of Melaka. Sri Imarat was instructed by the Sultan to question Tun Perak about this issue when he came to present himself. A stool was then placed below the Sultan’s knees, Sri Imarat’s usual spot. When he sat on this stool, the herald carried the Sword of State and delivered the Sultan’s messages.

Once Sri Imarat had taken his seat, Tun Perak entered the court and presented himself to Sultan Muzaffar Shah. The herald addressed the chieftain, “Tun Perak, your men have complained thus to the Sultan: all the other vassals of the Sultan have brought only their warriors to Melaka, whilst we were commanded by our chief to bring our wives and children. Tun Perak, what is your explanation for this?” Tun Perak made no reply, so Sri Imarat repeated his question. Tun Perak maintained his silence.

Sri Imarat questioned Tun Perak a third time, and only then did he respond, “Hey Imarat! Take good care of yourself and of the Sword of State that you bear. Let not its blade rust, nor its tip lose its sharpness. What do you know about the work of us fighting men? His Majesty resides here in Melaka with his wives, his children, and all his belongings. Do you think it would be right for a vassal to bring only his warriors to defend the city? Should anything happen to Melaka, what would it matter to us? That is why I instructed my men to bring along their wives and children, so that they would fight the Siamese to the utmost. Even if they lose their resolve to do battle for the Sultan, they will continue fighting in order to protect their families.”

Sultan Muzaffar Shah was impressed by Tun Perak’s wisdom and approved of his answer. As a reward, the Sultan gave Tun Perak some betel leaves from his own betel box. The Sultan also remarked that Tun Perak should not stay in Kelang anymore but move to Melaka so that his services may be put to better use.

Eventually, the Siamese army arrived, and a great battle ensued. The battle lasted for a long time and many Siamese soldiers were killed. The invaders, however, failed to capture Melaka and were forced to retreat.

When the war was over, all the vassals of the Sultan returned to their homes. The Sultan, however, did not allow Tun Perak to return to Kelang, but kept him in Melaka. As one might expect, the Siamese were not at all pleased with their defeat, and planned another attack on Melaka. That, however, is another story for another time…!
During the reign of Sultan Mansur Shah, the Emperor of China sent an embassy to Melaka. The emperor had heard of the kingdom's greatness and wanted to establish cordial relations with the Sultan. The Chinese embassy was brought before Sultan Mansur Shah and the emperor's letter read to him. In the letter, the emperor expressed his wish to befriend the Sultan, as there were no other rulers on earth who were more powerful than the two of them.

The Chinese embassy also presented Sultan Mansur Shah with a gift, though a rather odd one … a boat full of needles. The emperor had ordered each household in China to contribute a needle towards his gift to the Melakans. When the collection was completed, the emperor found that there were enough needles to fill an entire boat. The emperor intended to use this unusual gift as a means of demonstrating the immeasurable number of his subjects.

Sultan Mansur Shah smiled as he understood the meaning of this gift. After the letter was read, the Sultan had the needles removed from the boat, and filled it to the brim with sago. This was the Sultan’s gift to the emperor. The return gift, along with a letter from the Sultan, was delivered to the emperor by an embassy headed by Tun Perpatih Putih, the brother of the bendahara, a role similar to today’s prime minister.

When Tun Perpatih Putih and his entourage arrived in China, they were first brought to the residence of the prime minister, whose name was Li Po. The following day, Li Po took the Melakan embassy to the palace so that they might
present the Sultan’s letter and gift to the emperor. Although the men were to meet the emperor in the morning, they began their journey before dawn, for they had to pass through a series of gates before reaching the palace.

When they arrived at the palace, Tun Perpatih Putih and his entourage were brought to a large hall for their audience with the emperor. The hall was packed with Chinese officials, so much so that their knees were touching one another as they sat. The Melakans entered the hall, sat down with the officials, and waited patiently for the emperor to arrive.

Suddenly, there were flashes of lightning and the roar of thunder. This signalled the emperor’s arrival. All the officials prostrated themselves, none lifting their faces to view the emperor, who was believed to be the Son of Heaven. Only his shadow was visible, and even that was only seen through a glass box placed in the mouth of a dragon.

The letter from the Sultan was read out. Its contents greatly pleased the emperor. After that, the boat filled with sago was brought into the hall. Tun Perpatih Putih explained that the Sultan had commanded his subjects to roll sago starch into ‘pearls’, and that this gift represented the number of people who lived in Melaka. The emperor was impressed, saying that his subjects and those of the Sultan were equally numerous, and declared that he would like to make Sultan Mansur Shah his son-in-law.

The Melakan embassy stayed in China for some time. On one occasion, the emperor enquired as to the favourite food of the Malays. Tun Perpatih Putih replied that he liked to eat kangkung, adding that the longer the vegetable, the better. The emperor commanded his cooks to prepare the dish, which was then brought before the ambassador. Tun Perpatih Putih picked the kangkung up by one end, held it aloft, lifted his head, and began chewing the other end of the vegetable. By this means, he was able to catch a glimpse of the emperor.

When the time finally came for the embassy to return home, the emperor sent his daughter, Princess Hang Liu (more commonly known as Princess Hang Li Po) to Melaka, where she married Sultan Mansur Shah…but that is another story for another time!
Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah was arguably one of the most hands-on rulers of Melaka. At one point during his reign, the sultanate was suffering from a plague of thieves. These ferocious men not only stole people’s belongings but also violently murdered their victims. This happened night after night, causing all the inhabitants of Melaka to live in fear.

When the Sultan heard about the plight of his subjects, he was grief-stricken and resolved to deal with the problem himself. So, one night, Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah disguised himself as a commoner and left his palace with two of his warriors, Hang Isap, also known as Hang Siak, and Hang Isak. The three men travelled incognito around Melaka to see for themselves the situation in the city.

During their patrol, the Sultan and his companions encountered a group of five robbers who were carrying a huge chest laden with valuables. The thieves, shocked by the unexpected appearance of the three men, dropped their loot, and fled the scene. The Sultan opened the chest and commanded Hang Isak to keep his eye on it, while he and Hang Isap gave chase to the robbers.

The two men followed the robbers up a hill, finally catching up with them under a large weeping fig tree. The Sultan attacked and succeeded in killing one of them. Using his parang, the Sultan slashed the criminal at his waist, splitting him in two like a cucumber. The rest of the thieves fled for their lives but Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah still would not relent. At a bridge, the Sultan caught up
with them again, and killed another. The three remaining thieves managed to escape from the Sultan by jumping into the river and swimming to the other side. The Sultan returned to Hang Isak, ordering him to bring the chest back to the palace. After a long and tiring night, the Sultan and his men finally reached home.

The following morning, Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah held an audience attended by all the ministers and notables of Melaka. The Sultan asked the Temenggung, his minister of public security, whether he had been on duty the night before. When the Temenggung, Sri Maharaja, also known as Tun Mutahir, replied in the positive, the Sultan said, “I heard that two murders occurred last night, one on a hill and the other at a bridge. Might you know who the culprit was?” The Temenggung admitted that he had no idea and was thus reprimanded by the Sultan for sleeping on the job, quite literally so, perhaps.

Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah then ordered Hang Isap and Hang Isak to bring in the chest that they had seized from the robbers. When the chest was brought in, the Sultan commanded the two warriors to tell the court all that had happened on the previous night. Hang Isap and Hang Isak did as the Sultan ordered. When they finished their story, everyone bowed to the Sultan in fear.

Fortunately, Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah was not a tyrannical ruler so no one was punished that day. Neither was he a greedy ruler. Instead of keeping the chest of valuables for himself, which he could easily have done the Sultan ordered his men to investigate to whom it belonged. It was found that the owner of the chest was a merchant by the name of Ki Tirubalam. The Sultan had the stolen chest returned to the merchant after which everyone went back to their homes.

When night fell, Tun Mutahir, who was still feeling the sting from the Sultan’s admonishment earlier that day, doubled his efforts in guarding Melaka. As the Temenggung was making his rounds, he bumped into a thief, whom he promptly attacked. Not to be outdone by his liege, Tun Mutahir chopped at the thief’s shoulder, hacking the man with such force that the severed limb was flung onto the tie beam of a nearby shop. Imagine the shopkeeper’s shock and horror when he came to work the next morning!

The actions of the Sultan and the Temenggung sent a clear message to any would-be thieves in Melaka. Hence, from that day onwards, Melaka was free from robbery. Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah went on to enjoy a prosperous reign, while Tun Mutahir eventually attained the position of Chief Minister and became the Bendahara. That, however, is another story for another time!
One day, Sultan Mahmud Shah thought of buying some cloth for himself and his family. Since the best cloth was to be found in the Land of Kalinga, or southern India, the Sultan sent Hang Nadim, one of his courtiers, on a mission to purchase some. Hang Nadim was the son-in-law of the Laksamana, or admiral, Hang Tuah, and was also a relative of the Bendahara, Tun Mutahir. Hang Nadim boarded the ship of Hang Isap, and set sail for India.

After some time, Hang Nadim arrived at his destination and was warmly welcomed by the king of Kalinga. Having heard from Hang Nadim what Sultan Mahmud Shah desired, the king summoned the most talented clothmakers in his kingdom. As many as 500 heeded the king’s summons, and a small village of weavers sprang up outside the royal palace. Hang Nadim described the design that he wanted, and they went to work.

When the clothmakers had completed their textiles, they presented them to Hang Nadim. Much to his disappointment, Hang Nadim found that none of the designs matched his description at all. They produced several more versions, but Hang Nadim remained unimpressed.
Finally, the frustrated clothmakers gave up, saying that that was the best they were able to do. They added that, since they were unable to produce a design that would satisfy Hang Nadim, maybe the courtier should draw it for them, so that they could copy it. Hang Nadim, who must have been as frustrated as the clothmakers by this time, acquiesced to this request. He took a brush and some paper and began drawing the design he had in his mind. He drew so skilfully that the hands of clothmakers who were watching him began to tremble. When Hang Nadim had finished his drawing, he showed it to the craftsmen, telling them that this was the design he wanted.

Alas, only two weavers were able to copy Hang Nadim's design. The rest were simply too intimidated to draw in front of him. Instead, they asked his leave to return to their homes, where they might be able to practice the design in private. Hang Nadim gave them permission to do so, and soon had the cloth that the Sultan desired.

When the time came to return to Melaka, Hang Nadim loaded the cloth onto Hang Isap’s ship and prepared to leave the Land of Kalinga. But before they could sail home, a Muslim holy man came to the port and asked Hang Isap to return some gold that he owed him. The holy man had been one of Hang Isap’s passengers when he sailed over to India. Not only did Hang Isap refuse to return the gold, but he also began hurling insults at the holy man. This angered the holy man, who cursed Hang Isap to ruin. Hang Nadim apologised to the holy man and was assured that no harm would befall him.

The holy man returned home whilst Hang Nadim and Hang Isap set sail for Melaka. The voyage was going smoothly, when all of the sudden the winds stopped blowing. The ship, which was stuck in the middle of the ocean, suddenly sank, and Hang Isap and the rest of his crew lost their lives. Only Hang Nadim and a few men were able to save themselves by climbing aboard a sampan, a type of small boat. The survivors drifted to a place called Selan, where they were welcomed by its ruler. Hang Nadim stayed there for a while, during which time he made a lantern out of eggshells which greatly impressed the king, before taking a ship home to Melaka.

When Hang Nadim returned, he had an audience with the Sultan, presenting the cloth from India, and recounting all that had happened to him during his mission. Sultan Mahmud Shah showed little interest in Hang Nadim’s adventures, but asked him why he had sailed with Hang Isap, despite knowing that the latter had been cursed. Hang Nadim replied that there were no other ships sailing to Melaka at that time, and that if he had waited for another vessel, his return to Melaka would have been delayed. For no apparent reason, the Sultan became extremely angry with Hang Nadim. Sultan Mahmud Shah was not a very good ruler. It was during his reign that Melaka fell to the Portuguese, but that is another story for another time!
During the reign of Sultan Mahmud Shah, a Muslim preacher by the name of Maulana Sadar Jahan came to Melaka on a ship from the West. Being an extremely pious man, the preacher soon became well-known throughout the city. His fame even reached the palace, where he was appointed by the Sultan as his religious teacher. As well as the Sultan, Prince Raja Ahmad and many members of the Melakan elite also became his pupils. Hence, the Melakans referred to Maulana Sadar Jahan as Makhdum, which means ‘teacher of Sunnah’. Despite being a holy man, however, Maulana Sadar Jahan had a short temper. The following are two instances when the holy man’s anger got the better of him.

One night, Maulana Sadar Jahan was discussing certain religious matters with the bendahara, Tun Mutahir. Suddenly one of the Sultan’s courtiers, Sri Rama, burst into the room where the two men were sitting. Sri Rama, who was an alcoholic, was drunk as usual. The courtier had come to the palace for an audience with the Sultan. When he noticed the Bendahara conversing with the preacher, Sri Rama said “Let’s, hic, study, hic, together.” Tun Mutahir invited Sri Rama to join them, so the courtier took his place beside him.
Unlike the bendahara, Maulana Sadar Jahan was much less enthusiastic about having the intoxicated courtier with them. Therefore, the holy man searched for an insult to use against him, and found an appropriate one in no time. Staring straight into Sri Rama’s face, he exclaimed, “Alkhamru ‘ummul khaaais!”, which translates as “Alcohol is the mother of all excrement!”

Although Sri Rama was inebriated, his mind was still as sharp as ever. The courtier laughed at Maulana Sadar Jahan’s words and issued a riposte, “Why, sir, have you come to Melaka all the way from the West? Is it not to make your fortune from that alcohol you so detest?”

Sri Rama’s words had their intended effect, and Maulana Sadar Jahan saw red in an instant.

Despite Tun Mutahir’s repeated pleas, the preacher refused to stay any longer, storming out of the room to return home. After Maulana Sadar Jahan had left the palace, the bendahara reprimanded Sri Rama. The courtier, however, did not feel even a shred of remorse, and merely shrugged off Tun Mutahir’s rebuke, saying, “What can we do? What’s done is done.”

The next day, Tun Mutahir went to Maulana Sadar Jahan’s house to apologise in person for Sri Rama’s behaviour. The holy man was delighted to see the bendahara, and all was well once more.

Shortly after this incident, Maulana Sadar Jahan lost his temper a second time. This time, it was another courtier, Tun Mai Ulat Bulu, who provoked his ire. Tun Mai Ulat Bulu, originally known as Tun Muhyiddin, was the son of Tun Zainal Abidin, and the grandson of a former bendahara, the illustrious Tun Perak. Tun Muhyiddin had gained his peculiar nickname due to the fact that he was a very hairy man, ulat bulu meaning ‘caterpillar’ in Malay.

In any event, Maulana Sadar Jahan was frustrated with Tun Mai Ulat Bulu because he was unable to pronounce Arabic words properly. The exasperated preacher scolded his student, saying, “Why is your tongue so stubborn? When I say one thing, you say another.” The courtier replied, “Is that so, sir? I am trying my best to keep up, but since Arabic it is not my mother tongue, it is rather hard to do so. If you were to speak my language, I am sure you would face the same difficulties.”

Not only was Maulana Sadar Jahan unsympathetic to the plight of his student, but he also belittled him and the Malay language. The holy man, who was proud of his own linguistic prowess, boasted, “Hah, what is so difficult about the Malay language? I am sure I can pronounce perfectly whatever words you throw at me.”

Tun Mai Ulat Bulu accepted this challenge, and said, “Very well, repeat after me, kunyit (turmeric).” When the teacher mispronounced the word as kunyit, his student said, “You are wrong. Now, say nyiru (winnowing basket).”

The preacher was unable to do so, mispronouncing the word as niru. Tun Mai Ulat Bulu gave his teacher one last chance to prove himself. Maulana Sadar Jahan, however, failed miserably again, turning a simple word, kucing (cat) into kusing.

Sensing victory, Tun Mai Ulat Bulu delivered the knockout punch, “See, you can’t pronounce Malay words properly. So, how can you expect me not to mispronounce the Arabic words you are teaching me?” By this time, Maulana Sadar Jahan was hopping mad, but unable to provide a response. He could only mutter to himself, “I’ll be damned if I continue teaching this oaf!”

Although Tun Mai Ulat Bulu was blacklisted by Maulana Sadar Jahan, he became a favourite of Raja Ahmad. When the prince succeeded his father as Sultan, the courtier was rewarded with the post of Temenggung, although he was not a very capable one. That, however, is another story for another time!