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In: *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 134 (1978), no: 4, Leiden, 466-487

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TRANSITIONAL MALAY LITERATURE: PART 1 AHMAD RIJALUDDIN AND MUNSHI ABDULLAH*

During the year 1810 the Penang sea captain and trader, Robert Scott, paid a number of visits to Calcutta where, amongst other things, he gave the benefit of his advice to the 'brains trust' the Governor-General had set up to plan the invasion of Java. On one of these visits Scott took along with him a Malay munshi called Ahmad Rijaluddin bin Hakim Long Fakir Kandu who spent part of this time writing down his impressions of Calcutta and the adjoining settlements. This narrative has survived in a manuscript to which Ahmad would probably have given the title *Hikayat Perintah Negeri Benggala* ('A Narrative of the State of Bengal'). I have commented in an earlier issue of *Bijdragen* on the writer and his background (Skinner 1976) and in the present paper I would like to say something about the narrative itself and the literary background against which it was written

It opens with a brief reference to the voyage from Penang and then launches out into a panegyric of Lord Minto (the Governor-General) and of the 'empire' over which he holds sway. This is followed by a description of the towns and villages Ahmad saw as he sailed up the river Hooghly to Calcutta. For Ahmad (as for his British contemporaries) Calcutta was very much the 'city of palaces' and he devotes no less than thirty pages to the sights and sounds of the city before going on to describe the European settlements along the Hooghly north of Calcutta. The last few pages of the manuscript contain brief references to the Mahrattas and to Raffles (as the 'Agent to the Governor-General with the Malay States') before embarking on a (rather fanciful) account of the British-Indian expedition against the Ile de France (Mauritius). The narrative concludes with a (more realistic) account

* Parts of this paper were presented at the Seventh Conference of the International Association of Historians of Asia, held in Bangkok, 1977. It is a pleasure to acknowledge the generosity of Monash University in granting me the time and money to attend the Conference.

of the opening stages of the Java campaign but ends at a point in time just before the landing of the expedition (which took place on 4 August 1811). The manuscript is therefore a travel-diary, a form which in Malay (and in other Asian literature) is first met with during, and is probably symptomatic of, a transitional stage between a 'classical' and a 'modern' literature.

At the risk of oversimplification, classical Malay literature (by which I mean a written literature, composed for the edification or entertainment of the Malay rajas and chiefs) can be divided into two main categories — 'sacred' and 'profane' (or 'serious' and 'trivial'). The first category, for which 'sacral' is perhaps a better term, is almost entirely confined to the medium of prose,¹ and its two main genres are the 'kitab' literature (religious commentaries and expositions, whose nature is indicated by titles such as 'miftah' and 'bayan'), and the chronicles (whose function is illustrated by titles such as 'sejarah' and 'salasilah').² Anything that was not 'functional' in a religious or political sense would be regarded as trivial or 'profane',³ a category which includes not only virtually everything written in verse but also, at a slightly higher level (judged by local standards), the prose romance usually termed 'hikayat', whose 'profane' nature is indicated by the writer/composer's apologies for wasting his audience's time on such trivia (i.e. instead of doing his duty as a real 'littérateur' by producing material for their edification).

The men who 'wrote' — the Malay word 'mengarang' ('composed'/'arranged') gives a better indication of the age's lack of concern for originality — this 'classical' Malay literature were either professionals — scribes, copyists, clerks or secretaries — or 'amateurs', well-educated members of the ruling élite who enjoyed the rare good fortune to live in a realm relatively free from civil strife or foreign invasion. It seems likely however that many of the so-called 'amateur' authors (e.g. the Bendahara of Melaka sometimes claimed as the 'author' of the *Sejarah Melayu*) were not so much authors as patrons. Perhaps the best known of these 'amateur' writers is Raja Ali Haji, but it would be interesting to find out just how much of the *Tuhfat al-Nafis* was actually written or dictated by him and how much was the work of his 'secretarial staff', which he merely supervised or checked (and with Raja Ali we are dealing with a writer whose work was written half a century after that of Ahmad Rijaluddin).⁴ In the field of 'lighter' literature, Juynboll has claimed that the *Syair Sinyor Kosta* was composed by that distinguished 'amateur', Sultan Mahmud Badruddin (who occupied the throne of Palembang — whenever he got the chance — in the first two decades

of the 19th century, and is thus an exact contemporary of Ahmad Rijaluddin).⁵ However, apart from the poor quality of the Malay of the manuscript concerned (which would not of course rule out its being composed by someone in Ternate, where Badruddin was exiled after 1821) another manuscript of the story exists which was copied in Malacca in 1810,⁶ i.e. while Badruddin was still enjoying 'life at the top' in Palembang. Despite Juynboll's claim being accepted by van der Linden and others, there are clearly difficulties in the way of adding Badruddin to our list of royal authors.⁷

Normally then the writers of classical Malay literature would be 'clerks' with the distinction between 'clerk' and 'cleric' as blurred as it was in feudal Europe. Thus a Sultan's 'Clerk of the Seal', besides being respected for the skill with which he kept the royal accounts and wrote the ruler's state correspondence, might be as much or even more respected for the profundity of his religious knowledge, with literacy (i.e. proficiency in the Arabic script and, if possible, in the Arabic language) as the key to both skills. At the same time, he would not shrink from turning out something in a lighter vein, something 'profane', e.g. a 'syair' (ballad) on some topical event — a marriage, a battle or a court scandal — all this, of course, in addition to his normal literary tasks of 'composing' (i.e. copying or adapting) the 'classics', both sacred and profane, for the edification and entertainment of his employer and patron (Skinner 1963, Introduction). To speak of 'artistry' in such circumstances may be misleading inasmuch as its patrons were not accustomed to separate the 'artist' from the 'craftsman'.

In view of their position in society, it would be unreasonable to expect much in the way of a literary 'revolution' from the professional writers of the age, and for some two or three hundred years the literature produced at the Malay courts is homogeneous enough to be referred to as 'classical Malay' without causing overmuch confusion. For writers to break out of the established pattern and begin to subject their society and its norms to an even moderately critical scrutiny, as a result of which new themes, new forms, new styles — in fact a new or 'modern' literature — would emerge, required some form of 'cultural shock'.

At the risk of appearing European-centric,⁸ it seems likely that in many Asian literatures, the initial stimulus to such a reconsideration of traditional values was provided by the 'shock' of contact with the European colonial powers. Confronted with a way of life that was clearly alien, yet surprisingly (often dismayingly) successful in solving — on its own terms, though this point might not be taken until much

later — many of the problems (not least the political problems) faced by his own society, the Asian writer would first note and then begin to produce material which implicitly or explicitly reveals an awareness that there is a wider range of options open to his society than would have seemed possible to his predecessors. These initial efforts were, of course, not always spontaneous; often they were the direct result of prompting or encouragement by foreigners wishing to learn more about the writer's country and its civilisation. They may take various forms — a diary, a memoir, a biography, an autobiography or a narrative of a journey (not infrequently undertaken in the company of, or at the bidding of, foreigners, often to regions outside the cultural ambit of the local writer).

As this paper is concerned with writers of Tamil descent, it may be of interest to note that one of the earliest Asian reactions to contact with Europeans is the Tamil diary kept by Ānanda Ranga Pillai (Dupleix's secretary in Pondicherry) in the middle of the 18th century. Writing some two hundred years later, its English editor described it as "a strange mixture of things trivial and important", a judgement which, one suspects, reflects his perplexity in trying to categorise a work in which 'traditional' elements are found side by side with 'modern' (Pillai 1904, vol. 1: xi). Some thirty years later (c. 1786), in the closely related language of Malayalam, "a new type of literature ... the travelogue ..." was created when, as the direct result of accompanying the Bishop of Kodunggalūr (Cranganore) on a visit to Rome, Paramakkal Thoma wrote the *Vārṭtamana Pustākam*, a work which it has been suggested, "may well be the first travelogue in any Indian language" (George 1972: 60).⁹

Such 'transitional' works were not confined to Southern India and the Dravidian languages. Only a decade before Ahmad Rijaluddin described his journey *up* the Hooghly to Calcutta, the North Indian, Mirza Abu Talib Khan, had written of his journey *down* the Hooghly and across the seas to England, a journey made in the company of (in fact at the request of) his Scottish friend, David Richardson. Abu Talib stayed in London for over a year (1800-1801) mixing in 'high society' (where he became known as "The Persian Prince") and on his return home wrote a lengthy account of his travels in Persian.¹⁰

Nor are examples of a 'cultural shock' leading to a 'modern' literature confined to India and the British impact upon it. One can find good support for the thesis that modern Arabic literature owes a great deal to Bonaparte's Egyptian expedition, while in the case of the one South-

East Asian country that succeeded in maintaining its political independence against strong European pressure, Thailand, one of the very first Thai works to earn the title of 'modern' is the travel-journal compiled by Mom Rachothai after accompanying the Siamese embassy to London in 1857.¹¹

In Malay literature, the transitional stage between a 'classical' and a 'modern' literature is usually associated with the name of Munshi Abdullah who, although obviously writing with one eye fixed firmly upon his patrons,¹² seems nonetheless sincere in expressing views that are at variance with (and sometimes severely critical of) many aspects of the society he had grown up in; he does so moreover in an individualistic, even 'journalistic' prose style that is clearly different from that of the 'classical' writers.¹³ The sheer range of Abdullah's work is impressive and shows clearly how Abdullah bridged the gap between classical and modern. As editor-cum-copyist Abdullah played his part in transmitting the Malay classics, both serious ('Sejarah Melayu', 'Hikayat Patani', 'Adat Segala Raja² Melayu') and trivial, the latter including prose romances ('Hikayat Khoja Maimun'), verse romances ('Syair Ken Tambuhan'), and topical syairs ('Syair Kamung Gelam Terbakar') covering the whole range of classical literature except that of the *kitab-literature* (and even here it might be argued that the many tracts Abdullah produced for the missionaries were Abdullah's version of *kitab-literature*).¹⁴ However, works such as the 'Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah' and the 'Hikayat Abdullah' can by no stretch of the imagination be termed 'classical'. Not only are they written in an individualistic, even 'journalistic' prose style that is clearly different from that of his classical predecessors, but both works are characterised by an unusual emphasis on the true and the real *for its own sake*. Abdullah's rejection of the classical tradition and his insistence upon a 'realistic' approach are well summed up in a passage from a booklet he produced in 1843 which runs:

Sebermula maka adalah dalam negeri Eropa itu pada tiap2 tempat belajarnya itu adalah suatu ilmu yang dipelajari oleh segala kanak2 itu maka ia-itu dinamai ilmu hikayat tetapi artinya hikayat itu bukannya seperti hikayat2 yang ada di sebelah sini. Maka adalah yang kebanyakan hikayat yang dipakai orang sebelah sini penuh dengan cerita jin, péri, déwa, mambang, gergasi, naga dan geruda dan jenis2 rupa dan perkara yang belum dilihat dalam dunia atau akhirat; seperti yang tersebut dalam Sejarah Melayu ada seékor lembu jantan muntahkan buih maka keluarlah dari dalam buih itu seorang manusia yang bernama Bat serta dengan serbannya yang besar maka segeralah ia terbangkit lalu menyanyi puji2an akan Sang Seperba. Dan lagi seperti hikayat Raja Suran turun ke dalam laut dan

kahwin di sana dan seperti hikayat ikan todak dan lagi beberapa pula cerita yang bodoh2 yang lain2 daripada asal negeri Singapura itu; kecuali adalah suatu hikayat yang dikarang oleh Encik Alauddin ia-itu anak Ki Demang dan nama negerinya Semangka. Maka adalah tersebut dalam hikayatnya itu dari hal dirinya dan segala keluarganya dan bagaimana hal kesusahannya sampai ia cerai-berai ke negeri2 asing. Maka adalah isi hikayat itu sekalian daripada perkara yang benar dan sesungguhnya yang telah jadi demikian itu adanya. Maka adalah kami umpamakan hikayat itu seperti sebuah manikam diantara segala kotor hikayat2 Melayu adanya.¹⁵

a free translation of which is as follows:

Now in every institution of learning in Europe the children study a subject called 'composition', but 'composition' in this sense is different from the compositions produced locally. Most of the compositions which people here are familiar with are full of stories about djinns, fairies, gods, hobgoblins, giants, dragons, garudas and various other things no one has ever cast eyes upon, in this world or the next. For example, in the *Sejarah Melayu* there is a bull who spews up some froth out of which emerges a human being called Bat, complete with a big turban, who promptly stands up and sings the praises of Sang Seperba. Other examples are the story of Raja Suran descending into the sea and getting married there, and the story of the swordfish and various other silly tales about the origin of Singapore. An exception is the work composed by Encik Alauddin, the son of Ki Demang, from the Semangka region, who in his narrative tells of himself and of his family and of the difficulties they encountered, to the point that the family was forced to break up and emigrate. The contents of this work are concerned entirely with real occurrences that actually happened. Indeed, among the dross of Malay compositions in general, this work may be likened to a pearl.

The 'work composed by Encik Alauddin' is of course the work usually referred to as the 'Hikayat Nakhoda Muda' which was written round about 1770, at the prompting of the author's employer, Mr. Butter Hunnings.¹⁶ It contains many of the characteristics of a classical 'sala-silah' or 'sejarah', e.g. Nakhoda Muda's dying speech (wasiat), but basically it is a biographical memoir of the author's father — something new in Malay literature. For Abdullah its 'newness' derives from its realism and it is this realism that is seized upon by Abdullah as being the hallmark of a new, a modern, literature.¹⁷ Abdullah's 'Kisah' and 'Hikayat' show how Abdullah did his best to emulate and excel Alauddin.

There is then a direct link between Encik Alauddin and Abdullah. The question now arises: is there a similar link between Ahmad Rijaluddin and Abdullah? At first sight such a link seems well within the bounds of possibility. As I have shown in my earlier article, Ahmad must have formed part of the group of Malay interpreters who accompanied Raffles on the Java expedition and for over six months (from

December 1810 to June 1811) Raffles and his staff had made Malacca their 'planning headquarters'. It was during this period that the 15-year old Abdullah was taken on by Raffles as a supernumerary Malay 'writer' and it is difficult to imagine that the inquisitive and talkative Abdullah would have had no contact with a colleague who, although somewhat senior in years (Ahmad must have been about twice Abdullah's age) shared the same racial and linguistic origins. In this connection it is interesting that the only possible quotation from Ahmad to be found in Abdullah's *Hikayat* relates to the Malacca period. In describing how the 'Pathans' in Bengal exercised their horses, Ahmad had written (in 1810):

"... dipacu kuda itu seperti burung terbang lakunya ... dan sekalian Ingran, Portugal, Belanda, Armani berkata: 'Bukannya manusia yang naik kuda itu, adalah ia-itu jin atau peri maka demikian lakunya'." (Ms. p. 89)

("They spurred on their horses [so fast] as to give the impression of flying like birds ... and the English, Portuguese, Dutch and Armenians exclaimed: 'It can't be human beings riding these horses, they must be djinns or sprites to act in this fashion'.")

Some thirty years later when Abdullah came to write his 'Autobiography' he could still remember how the Governor-General's Bodyguard of 'Mogul' cavalymen had impressed the townsfolk of Malacca with their superb horsemanship. Describing how the troopers responded to the commands of their English officers, Abdullah depicts them:

"... melarikan kuda seperti terbang rupanya ... maka kata seorang: 'Ini bukannya manusia melainkan jin yang pekerjaan yang demikian'."

("... galloping their horses [so fast] as to give the impression of flying like birds ... so that people would exclaim: 'These can't be human beings, they must be djinns to act in such a fashion'.")¹⁸

It is tempting to speculate that Abdullah, consciously or unconsciously, is quoting or paraphrasing Ahmad but one cannot rule out the possibility that both writers are drawing upon the clichés of traditional Malay romances.¹⁹

One rather negative similarity between Ahmad and Abdullah is that, despite their South Indian origin, very little Dravidian linguistic influence can be detected in their work. In Abdullah the only expression I can recall offhand that hints at Tamil influence is the phrase "naik kuda hijau" which Abdullah himself paraphrases as 'mabuk' (Abdullah 1953: 70) but which may well owe something to the Tamil 'paccaik-kutirai' (literally: 'green horse') an expression used to describe the

jerking or leaping movements of someone playing a game such as leapfrog. In Ahmad's manuscript, apart from the word 'rupia(h)' being spelt 'rūpay' on one occasion (in all other places it is spelt 'rūpiā') which may be an unconscious reproduction of the Tamil written form of the word ('rūpāy'), there is only the frequent use of the rather unusual expression "buah2 bermasakan" which may just possibly be influenced by the Tamil habit of classifying fruits as either 'ripe' or 'unripe' by affixing to the generic word a morpheme indicating 'ripe' ('paḷam') or 'unripe' ('kāy'). However, the fact that only two doubtful examples of Tamil influence can be found in the 97 pages of Ahmad's manuscript shows how unimportant such influence was.

To proceed further with the comparison between Ahmad and Abdullah can probably only serve to show how much better a writer Abdullah was than Ahmad. It is true that Abdullah's style has come in for criticism from scholars such as Winstedt who, while recognising "the genuine greatness of his literary talent", appears to praise or find fault with Abdullah's style according to the degree it approaches or departs from the style used by the author of the *Sejarah Melayu*, and goes on to criticize Abdullah for being "too fond of abstract nouns" and for using "many idioms not in accordance with the spirit of the Malay language".²⁰ It would seem more reasonable to compare Abdullah not with what is in every sense a 'classic' written some two hundred years before he was born but with the Malay writings contemporary with Abdullah, e.g. with Ahmad's *Hikayat Perintah Negeri Benggala*. Only when this is done can one really appreciate Abdullah, for while Ahmad is occasionally diverting but too often cliché-ridden and repetitive, Abdullah stands out as the S. T. Alisjahbana of his day (the essay-writer and critic, that is). This is not to say that Abdullah is never boring. His propensity for moralising manages to combine the worst features of the Islamic 'khutbah' and the Christian sermon, causing us to shift uneasily in our seat whenever the dreaded word 'Nasihat' looms up on the page, but if we persevere until we come back to the main narrative, then we are reading something that is usually informative, frequently entertaining and often perceptive. The same cannot always be said of Ahmad, although the first part of his work (the description of Calcutta) is not without its merits, while the story of how the brothel-keeper and his female accomplice succeed in fleecing the unwary sailor (enlivened by what appears to be a rather original set of pantun) is a piquant mixture of romance and realism. As the work continues however, and Ahmad goes on to describe the various

settlements to the north of Calcutta, he tends to repeat himself, so that if it were not for the occasional 'eyewitness reports' (e.g. of the 'bhroto' rites or of the holiday celebrations) or the 'Thucydidean' dialogue put into the mouths of the Dutch officials preparing for the British invasion of Java, one might perhaps wish that Ahmad had confined himself solely to a description of Calcutta.

But leaving all questions of style aside, the basic difference between Abdullah's travel-diary ('Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah') and Ahmad's is the former's insistence upon realism for its own sake, without regard for the literary conventions of the time. While Ahmad no doubt set out to describe Calcutta in as realistic a fashion as possible, the very fact that he was writing a Malay 'hikayat' in the year 1810 imposed upon him certain conventions, certain restrictions, that his talent was not great enough to overcome.²¹ The result may strike us as an amusing mixture of fact and fantasy but we must make some effort to place Ahmad within the context of his own age. His somewhat fanciful descriptions of large but fairly ordinary buildings in and around Calcutta should not be taken to mean that Ahmad was naive enough to take every country-house for a Moghul palace²² but rather that the literary conventions of the time required that the residence of anyone who was not a peasant should be described in terms of the 'istana' (palace) in a contemporary hikayat or syair.

To talk of 'a contemporary hikayat or syair' poses the question: just what *was* Ahmad's literary background? It is a pity that so few clues are to be gained from his *Hikayat*; it contains only a handful of literary references, viz. 'bidadari Sekerba' (7 times), 'bunga Wijaya Mala', 'Seri Rama', 'taman Banjaran Sari' (twice), 'Sang Ranjuna', 'taman Jaya Angsoka' (twice), 'Indera(pura)' (twice), 'bidadari Tunjung/Tanjung Biru', 'Henduman Tugangga' and 'Maharaja Wirya Séna'. The names 'Seri Rama' and 'Henduman Tugangga' indicate an acquaintance with a Malay version of the Ramayana, perhaps with a Kedah 'penglipur lara' version,²³ though we cannot rule out the possibility that Ahmad (who probably came from Kedah, where the 'wayang Siam' is still performed to this day) had witnessed these Thai/Malay shadow-play versions of the Rama story in which 'Henduman Tugangga' appears as a character (Sweeney 1973, especially pp. 264-265).

'Indera(pura)' is of course far too common to be given any 'local habitation'; in Ahmad's lifetime, one of the royal towns of Kedah was Kota Indera Kayang(an) in Perlis.²⁴ The remaining references (with the exception of 'Maharaja Wirya Séna', a name that, in this form,

I have not so far been able to place) are all firmly within the Panji orbit, though upon which particular Panji romance(s) Ahmad drew for similes to describe the daughters of British businessmen bathing in their suburban villas we shall probably never know. Was it perhaps the *Hikayat Cekel Wanèng Pati*, a manuscript of which (containing the names 'Tanjung/Tunjung Biru', 'Banjaran Sari' and 'Sekerba') was owned by (and perhaps copied for) Ahmad's contemporary, Stamford Raffles, one of the very few Europeans Ahmad mentions by name in his *Hikayat*?²⁵ Or could it have been the *Syair Kén Ta(m)buhan* of which we have some half a dozen manuscripts from all parts of the archipelago, dating from around the beginning of the 19th century, and which must surely have been known to Ahmad, a professional copyist.²⁶

It would not be particularly surprising if in describing the charms of the young ladies of Calcutta (whether displayed involuntarily or professionally) Ahmad drew either directly or indirectly upon the Panji romances, a genre which perhaps more than any other in Malay literature, is concerned with the art of dalliance.²⁷ When it comes to describing the architectural splendours of Calcutta however, Ahmad appears to derive his ideals from the 'Indo-Persian' genre of Malay romances (whose 'stately pleasure domes' may well reflect (or distort) the palaces of the Moghul rulers of India). Thus in describing Government House (which is imposing even now and must have seemed literally dazzling when Ahmad saw it, a few years after its completion) he is not content to put down what he sees — a palatial three-storey brick mansion covered in white plaster²⁸ — but must needs give it the full 'hikayat' treatment, telling us that it was built of *seven* (a satisfyingly propitious number) separate layers of *seven* different types of stone or brick — "jet-black stone, white stone, large bricks, small bricks, blood-red bricks, figured bricks", with the crowning layer being appropriately (and perhaps symbolically) "of pure white European stone". Similarly in describing 'Calcutta Fort' (i.e. Fort William, the finest exemplification of Vauban's principles to be erected in Asia) Ahmad must needs gild the lily assuring us that the moat was "several parasangs deep, lined with jet-black stone" and contained "the most ferocious of crocodiles".

Perhaps the best example of Ahmad's 'structuring' of his subject matter is to be found in the way he depicts life in Calcutta and the adjoining settlements. His task — consciously or unconsciously — is to describe places and events in these 'negeri' along the river Hooghly in a way that will be meaningful to the reader of a contemporary Malay hikayat, i.e. someone for whom the largest Malay 'negeri' would be an

Alor Setar or a Kuala Kedah and for whom the closest parallel to Calcutta would be the East India Company's 'negeri' of Penang. The resulting picture is necessarily a compromise and one that reflects not only aspects of life in the settlements but also Ahmad's views as to those features that *ought* to be present in an ideal (if somewhat exotic) 'negeri'.

Ahmad gives us descriptions of seven of the more important settlements — Calcutta, Barrackpore, Dumdum, Serampore, Chandernagore, Chinsura and Hooghly²⁰ — and in most cases the descriptions follow very much the same pattern. This may simply mean that whereas European visitors tended to comment on the *differences* between the respective settlements, to a Malay visitor such as Ahmad these differences were less striking than the *similarities*. Ahmad's descriptions however are so structured, with the features presented in such a regular order, that it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that he was writing with an ideal 'negeri' in mind, a 'negeri' characterised by the following features, presented in the following order.

1. *a raja*:

This might be a 'Raja Lord Minto' in the case of Calcutta, or a 'Raja Besar' (for Chinsura) or a 'Raja Kecil' (for Serampore).

2. *a fortress*:

This may take the form of a fort proper ('kota') or minor fortifications ('kubu'). Where a fortress has been demolished (e.g. at Chandernagore) this must be explained in some detail.

3. *a palace*:

The residence of the 'raja' (who may, of course, be a mere judge/magistrate). Ahmad is obviously aware that the East India Company's officials are not really comparable to Malay rajas and it is interesting that his description of the Governor-General's 'palace' (which was certainly more 'palatial' than anything Ahmad could have seen in Malaya) starts off by describing it simply as 'rumah' (house). He soon succumbs to the demands of the genre however and the next time he refers to the building (some four lines later) he uses the word 'istana' (palace); from this point on, all subsequent references use the word 'istana'.

4. *a town:*

Although there is usually a brief mention of 'roads' and 'streets', it is clear that for Ahmad a town was defined in terms of its market districts, with the emphasis very much on the markets and the goods sold there.

5. *a brothel area:*

This feature may consist of one or two (or in the case of Calcutta, three) sections, viz.:

- A. a 'general description' of the brothels and the 'gay life' therein;
- B. a particular example of the 'gay life' — the 'drunken butler' episode;
- C. the story of the seaman who is fleeced by a tavernkeeper and a prostitute (this episode occurs only in the description of Calcutta).

6. *religious observances:*

- A. a description of the festivities held in celebration of the 'holy days' of the two main religions (e.g. 'Muharram' or 'Dussehra'). These are usually centred around a particular locality.
- B. a description of a temple or a church, often accompanied by a description of the rites practised therein.

7. *mansions:*

This feature almost invariably includes descriptions of:

- a. the houses (usually dealt with fairly perfunctorily);
- b. the gardens, including the 'tanks' or ornamental bathing pools;
- c. a description of the young ladies of the house sporting in the pool and garden.

8. *the countryside:*

Ahmad appears to regard this feature ('dusun') as an 'optional extra', and it occurs in only two of the seven descriptions. It may consist of one or both of the following:

- a. a description of the crops grown and the game found in the area;
- b. a description of the horsemen exercising.

In schematic form, Ahmad's description of the various settlements may be represented as follows:

<i>Settlement</i>	<i>Features in order of occurrence</i> ³⁰									
Calcutta	1	2	3	4	5A	5B	5C	6Am	7	8
Barrackpore	1	2	3	4	5A			4	7	
Dumdum	1	2	3	4	5A		8		6B	
Serampore	1	2	3	4	5A				7	6 8
Chandernagore	[2]	4	7	4	5A	4	3	6Arsd		
Chinsura	1	2	5A	4	5A	5B			6B	
Hooghly	1	2	1	4	5A				7	6B 6Am

It can be seen that the descriptions follow very much the same pattern, with one exception — Chandernagore. To what extent is the (comparatively irregular) pattern of the Chandernagore description affected by the absence of what Ahmad appears to consider the two main features of a 'negeri' viz. a 'raja' and a 'kota'? It is perhaps worth mentioning that, alone among the settlements, Chandernagore is given a (three-page) historical introduction relating how the wars between the French and the English led to the capture of the French 'raja' and the destruction of the fortress. Is it too fanciful to suggest that because the basis for Ahmad's ideal negeri no longer exists, his ensuing description is literally 'unbalanced', with an unduly high proportion of the description being taken up by festivals — the Rathjātra or Jagannāth (Juggernaut), the Shab-é-barāt and Béra and the Durgā-pūjā or Dasahrā (Dussehra)?³¹

However, although the Chandernagore description as a whole might be considered unbalanced, there is at least one part of Ahmad's description of it that follows very much the same pattern as that of the other settlements. This feature is one in which it is difficult to see the influence of any literary models, viz. the descriptions of the brothel area. One might perhaps argue that the space Ahmad devotes to describing the brothels appears to depend on the status of the particular settlement, e.g. as a conquered territory (and hence a minor settlement) Chandernagore is not considered worthy of a 'fleecing the unwary seaman' episode (5C above, which is reserved for *the* settlement, Calcutta), nor even a 'drunken butler' episode (5B above which is reserved for the two administrative centres of Calcutta and Chinsura), but in most respects Ahmad's description of the Chandernagore brothel is not markedly different from his description of the brothel areas of the other

settlements (Section 5A above). These descriptions usually contain the following sub-sections:

- (a) a classification of the prostitutes into three classes (rather like railway travel in pre-war England except that Ahmad's classification is based upon the floor of the brothel occupied, with the first-class girls living on the top floor and so on, in descending order);
- (b) a comment on the different attractions of the different races working in the brothels;
- (c) the finery worn by the prostitutes and their afternoon parades;
- (d) the musical entertainments that take place, the refreshments offered (liquor, drugs, etc.) and the ensuing rowdiness.

A break-down of Section 5 will show how 'structured' Ahmad's approach to this feature is, even in the case of Chandernagore.

<i>Settlement</i>	<i>Sub-Sections (as above) in order of occurrence</i>			
Calcutta	a	b	c	d
Barrackpore	a	b	c	
Dumdum			c	d
Serampore	a	b	c	d
Chandernagore	a		c	d
Chinsura	a	c	b	d
Hooghly	a	b	c	d

The patterning here would seem to derive not from any particular literary or historical model but rather from the natural limitations of a man with no great powers of observation and/or description, a man whose tidy mind, whose 'rage for order', often leads him to present his material as a succession of stereotypes.

It is however only fair to let Ahmad speak for himself and in the second part of this paper I propose to present that part of Ahmad's manuscript that deals with Calcutta proper.

APPENDIX A

Alfred North's Letter (attached to the 1843 ms. of the *Hikayat Abdullah*)

Singapore, October 1843

When Com. Wilkes, commander of an exploring squadron was here, in February 1842, being anxious to collect native manuscripts and all sorts of curiosities, on hearing me mention the accompanying Malay work, he left money with me to buy it and send it after him to the U. States. The composition of it was at that time but just begun. The author is a native of Malacca, between 45 and 50 years of age, the son of a respectable Malay employed many years ago by the Dutch Government at Batavia to make a tour about the Archipelago and collect Malay manuscripts. His name (i.e. the author's) is Abdullah ben Abdulkadir. In 1838 he was sent by the British Government, as interpreter, with a deputation to Kalantan, a Malay country on the east coast of the Peninsula, to look after a vessel with a valuable cargo belonging to some merchants in this place, detained by a civil war which had just broken out. On his way it occurred to him that it would be a good opportunity to keep a journal, in imitation of European travellers. On his return he showed me a meagre outline of the occurrences of the trip, and wished to know what sort of matter European travellers are accustomed to introduce into such journals. I took some pains to inform him; he re-wrote the whole, and made a variety of remarks on the manners and customs of the inhabitants of the east coast, as I had suggested. This was printed in the Roman character, inter-paged with the Arabic, a copy of which I forward with this work, as a present to the library to which this belongs. Nothing else of the kind has ever been composed in the Malay language.

Some time after, I suggested to him that he might compose a work of deep interest, such as had never been thought of by any Malay, unless an exception be found in the little work mentioned in Marsden's Malay Grammar, page 214. I told him that I had never found any thing in the Malay language except silly tales, useful indeed as showing how words are used, but containing nothing calculated to improve the minds of the people; and that it was a sad error into which they had fallen in supposing every day occurrences, and all manner of things about them, too vulgar to be subjects of grave composition; nay, that unless they could be convinced of their error, they could never go forward a single step in civilization. I then gave him a list of topics on which it

would be proper to enlarge a little, in writing a memoir of himself, such as the character of his father, his opinions, treatment of his children, and the like; then the circumstances of his own early education, and whatever of interest he could recollect of his whole life; with these things should be interspersed remarks on the character of the eminent men he had taught, Raffles, Dr. Milne, Crawfurd, and others; on Malay superstitions, schools, domestic life; their rajas, customs, laws, and whatever Europeans would like to be informed of, which would naturally be concealed from their observation. From these general hints, he has composed a work of singular interest, in beautiful Malay, and in all respects a new thing in the language. He has dwelt much on the character of one of the Malay Sultans of Singapore, and the fortunes of his family. He has taken particular pains to introduce many of the every day phrases or idioms of the people; so that the book is also a storehouse for the student of the language.

This copy is taken from the autograph by Husin,* a Bugis, who writes a good Malay hand.

A. NORTH.

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NOTES

- ¹ I would regard the verse of Hamzah Fansuri (a writer who is "unique ... in the entire vista of Malay literature", al-Attas (1968, p. 63) as the exception that proves the rule.
- ² All these terms are derived from Arabic: 'kitāb' - writing, document, book; 'miftāh' - key (to); 'bayān' - elucidation; 'sejarah', from 'šajarah' - (genealogical) tree; 'salasilah' - from 'silsilah' - chain (of descent).
- ³ It is easy for modern readers to underestimate the importance of the kitab-literature. In this connection we might perhaps recall the situation that prevailed in 18th century England, when no gentleman could claim to be a man of culture unless the shelves of his library were stocked with volumes of 'Collected Sermons'. The fact that these same volumes now grace the lowest of the shelves of the second-hand booksellers is not a true indication of their intellectual impact upon the society for which they were composed.
- ⁴ In fact, evidence has recently been produced to show that the real 'author' of the *Tuhfat al-Nafis* was not Raja Ali Haji but his father, Raja Ahmad, who survived his son to die c. 1878. The evidence does not however show convincingly that Raja Ahmad was more than a patron-cum-editor, while the date suggested for Raja Ahmad's authorship — c. 1865-66 — is no earlier than that originally proposed for Raja Ali Haji's authorship, see Matheson (1973) pp. 26-33.

* i.e. Husain bin Ismail. It is of course Husain's calligraphy that is illustrated in Thomson (1874), frontispiece.

- ⁵ Juynboll apparently bases his claim on the first verse of the Leiden Codex 1895 and a superscription (in a different hand) on the cover, see Juynboll (1899) p. 20. For Badruddin, see e.g. Woelders (1975).
- ⁶ Maxwell ms. 58 in the Royal Asiatic Society in London. This manuscript (which incidentally was copied by a certain Ibrahim — could this be Raffles' Malay secretary?) is also written in sub-standard Malay, described by Van der Tuuk as "het gewone volksdialect van de stad Malakka" (the popular language commonly used in the town of Malacca), see Van der Tuuk (1849) pp. 388-389.
- ⁷ Van der Linden (1937) pp. 106-115, see also Woelders (1975) p. 3. Winstedt entertains some reservations about the 'royal' authorship, see Winstedt (1961) pp. 155-156.
- ⁸ The risk is one that Indians in particular seem not afraid to take, e.g. "The Indian Renaissance, which has now run through its course for about a century and a half, began with the consolidation of British authority in India and the impact of Western thought on the Indian mind through English language and literature", Gokak (1957) p. 29; "The Real Renaissance in India came through the contact with English literature and European culture, from the early part of the 19th century; and from this time we have a new orientation and totally new development of modern Indian literature", Chatterji (1963) p. 104; "Briefly stated, the West revitalized our poetry and revealed the potentiality of prose", George (1972) p. 249.
- ⁹ Another Malayali critic, while agreeing that the *Varttamana Pustakam* is "a great landmark in Malayalam prose" suggests that the first travelogue in Malayalam was in the form of a 'tullal', a dramatic work in the traditional medium of verse, but the date of this work — "about 1783" — is late enough not to contradict my thesis (see Krishna Chaitanya (1971) p. 125, p. 207). Another claimant for the honour of being the 'first Indian travelogue' (of particular interest in as much as it shows that 'Western' need not be equated with 'European') is the *Waqā-i Manāzil-i Rūm* which is (part of) the travel diary of one of the envoys sent by Tipu Sultan of Mysore to the Sultan of Turkey in 1786, see Abdul Qadir (1968).
- ¹⁰ He gave copies of his manuscript to his friends, one of whom passed the work on to Charles Stewart, the East India Company's Professor of Oriental Languages, who translated it into English in 1810. The work proved so popular that a second edition was called for in 1814, by which time the East India Company had ordered the publication of the original Persian text, see Abu Talib (1814).
- ¹¹ For modern Arabic literature see e.g. Badawi (1975) p. 9; for Mom Rachothai see Rachothai (1964).
- ¹² The influence upon Abdullah exerted by his employer, the European and American missionaries, is obvious. The latest translator of the *Hikayat* (Hill) has suggested it was Benjamin Keasberry who 'inspired' Abdullah to write the autobiography and not Alfred North, as an earlier translator (Thomson) had suggested. Thomson based his translation upon the 1843 manuscript of the *Hikayat*, a copy of which recently came to light in Washington. Attached to the manuscript is a letter from North which, whatever one may think of its tone, makes it clear that, as Thomson had stated, it was North who 'inspired' not only the *Hikayat* but the *Kisah* as well, see Hill (1955) p. 275; Thomson (1874) p. 1; Teeuw (1967); ms. of the 1843 version of the *Hikayat Abdullah*; letter from North dated "October 1843" (see Appendix A).

- 13 See e.g. Skinner (1959) pp. 2-7. I am now working on a paper in which I endeavour to show that, as regards form, Abdullah's syairs, too, show marked differences from those of his more 'classical' contemporaries.
- 14 For details of the works referred to see Hill (1955) pp. 25-33 and the 'Bibliography' at the end of this paper.
 Not the least interesting of Abdullah's works is the *Ceretera Haji Sabar Ali* which I propose to publish shortly. This work (which is referred to by Buckley) contains an account of a 'bloody murder' and one of Singapore's 'famous trials' followed by a dissertation on the benefits of the jury system, see Buckley (1902) pp. 557-558; Hill (1955) p. 32. Another 'occasional' work is his McGonagall-like 'Poem on New Year's Day 1848' which commences 'Selamat Kiranya Kewin Biktoria' ('God save Queen Victoria'), see Abdullah (1848).
- 15 The quotation is on pp. 67-69 of *Segala jenis hikayat kepandaian yang telah jadi di negeri Eropah*, lithographed in Singapore in 1843, see Abdullah (1843).
- 16 "Kerana tuan pétor Butter Hunnings pétor di Lais hendak mendengar khabar itu, itulah sebab maka disuratnya khabar ini", see Drewes (1961) p. 103; Marsden (1830) pp. 1-2.
- 17 It should however be pointed out that in this, as in so many other aspects, Abdullah seems to be echoing the words of his employer and mentor, Alfred North, who in a letter written in October 1843 tells how he had suggested to Abdullah "... that he might compose a work of deep interest, such as had never been thought of by any Malay, unless an exception be found in the little work mentioned in Marsden's Malay Grammar, page 213. I told him that I had never found anything in the Malay language except silly tales...". It comes as no surprise to find that the work referred to is the *Memoirs of a Malayan Family* alias the *Hikayat Nakhoda Muda*. However the fact that Abdullah echoes North's views is no evidence that he did not subscribe to them himself (see Appendix A; Marsden (1812) pp. 214-215).
- 18 This quotation is taken from the original (1843) manuscript of the *Hikayat Abdullah*. When he came to re-write the Hikayat for publication (in 1849) Abdullah amended the passage to read "... melarikan kuda seperti terbang rupanya ... maka seorang ini berkata: 'Ini bukannya manusia', maka kata seorang yang lain: 'Inggeris ini betul jin maka sebab itu dapat diperbuatnya pekerjaan yang demikian'" — "... galloped their horses [so fast] as to give the impression of flying like birds. And some would exclaim: "These can't be human beings!", while others say: "These English must be djinns — that's why they are able to perform in this fashion".', Abdullah (1953) pp. 91-93.
- 19 Elsewhere in the ms. (p. 41) Ahmad writes: "Adapun bangsa Mughal dan Patan itu terlalu amat gagah berani pada berperang diatas kuda semberani sangat tinggi ... bilamana disuruh oleh segala orang besar2 Inglan berlarilah sekalian mereka itu seperti singa [yang a]mat galak mencahari lawan ke sana ke mari" ('When they are mounted on their tall steeds the Moghals and Pathans are superb cavalymen, absolutely fearless ... when their English officers give them the command they gallop to and fro as fierce as lions spoiling for a fight.')
- 20 Winstedt (1961) p. 144. It is interesting that North, Abdullah's contemporary, describes the Hikayat as "... a work of singular interest in beautiful Malay..." (see Appendix A).
- 21 In this respect Ahmad resembles his contemporary, the 'other' Abdullah, i.e. Shaikh Abdullah b. Muhammad Abu Bakar al-Misri. The earliest work that

- can be ascribed to Shaikh Abdullah with any certainty is the 'Hikayat Mareskalak', written about 1820, an account (often as fanciful as Ahmad's) of recent events in Java, with comments on both the Dutch and British administrations. Subsequently, as the result of accompanying missions undertaken with the Dutch Government, Shaikh Abdullah produced at least two other works, both of them travel-narratives, the 'Hikayat Raja2 Siam' (1823) and the 'Hikayat Bali' (1826), see Van Ronkel (1918), De Hollander (1873) and Van Hoëvell (1845).
- ²² Bearing in mind that the word 'palace' features not a little in contemporary descriptions of these mansions, cf. Boxer (1949); Hickey (1925) *passim*; Parkinson (1937) pp. 31-34; Spear (1963) Chapter III.
- ²³ The spelling 'Henduman' (for 'Hanoman') is typical of the spellings found in contemporary Kedah mss. (e.g. ms. Add. 12394, the *Syair Sultan Maulana*, which must have been written within a year or two of Ahmad's *Hikayat*).
- ²⁴ A picture of the 'makam' (royal grave) at Kota Indera Kayangan is reproduced in Muhammad Hassan (1968) p. 90.
- ²⁵ Raffles ms. 23 in the Royal Asiatic Society, London, see Winstedt (1961, pp. 48-54, pp. 187-203).
- ²⁶ The only ms. version of this *Syair* available to me (on microfilm) was copied by Munshi Abdullah in Singapore in 1838, but the earlier surviving mss. of the *syair* appear to date from the end of the 18th century. The Abdullah version (which Teeuw has not used for his edition of the *syair*) contains the names 'Sekerba', 'Wijaya Mala', 'Banjaran Sari', 'Sang Ranjuna' and 'Tanjung/Tunjung Biru', see Teeuw (1966) especially pp. 229-240; Teeuw (1967) p. 518.
- ²⁷ One of the expressions Ahmad uses to describe the breasts of the Calcutta girls is 'nyiur gading' - ivory coconuts. This expression is found (in reversed form) in the Middle Javanese Panji-romance *Wangbang Wideya*, "wwahning nyudanta kadi nurojaning dyah kenjeni" ('the fruits of the ivory coconut were as delectable as a girl's breasts'), Robson (1971) pp. 102-103.
- ²⁸ For a contemporary description of Government House see Graham (1813) p. 137. This work includes a plate showing the "S.W. View of the Government House".
- ²⁹ Ahmad calls them 'Kalkata', 'Acanak', 'Damdama', 'Serampur', 'Dangga Cani Nagar', 'Cicuda', and 'Hugli', names which are appreciably closer to the original names (Kalikāta, Achānak, Damdama, Srirampūr, Farashdangā Candarnāgar, Cico(ṇ)ḍa(?) and Hūgli), see Yule and Burnell (1903), Platts (1884), Klerk de Reus (1875) p. 1 (who refers to "Chinsoera eigenlijk Tjoentjoera" - 'Chinsura, really Cuncura'). Ahmad also makes a brief mention of Gēr(e)ti - Hickey's 'Ghyretty' - and a town he calls 'Balanagar' (which suggests Barānāgar/Bernagore but which in fact must be Bandel), see Hickey (1925) especially vol. 2, pp. 161-162.
- ³⁰ The numbers and capital letters refer to the features listed above: [] = feature that formerly existed; d = Dasahrā ('Dussehra') or Durgā-pūjā; m = Muḥarram; r = Rathjātra or Jagannāth ('Juggernaut'); s = Shab-é-barāt + Béra festivals.
- ³¹ For the (Bengali) Muslim festivals of Shab-é-barāt (celebrated on the 14th of Sha'bān) and the Béra (celebrated on the last Thursday of the Bengali month of Bhādoṇ (Bhadra)), see e.g. Rahim (1963) pp. 277-279.

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