CHAPTER II

Structure and themes of the Hikayat Kerajaan Sikka

Structure

The sense of the term myth, as it has evolved in anthropology in the past century or so, is that of a tale whose message or messages are not historical, but are explanatory. Anthropologists consider myths to be stories whose origins are usually unknown, that are transmitted orally, and that a community invokes to explain a particular practice, natural phenomenon, social institution, or belief (especially those associated with religion) by reference to its origin. In the Malay world, a hikayat is neither myth nor history. It is simply a narrative, a tale, a story. Hikayat can be largely factual (that is, historical), they can be largely mythical, and they can incorporate mythic and historical elements into a single narrative. I do not propose here to launch a lengthy essay on what is myth and what is history but, insofar as a number of Ata Sikka with whom I have spoken over the years have raised the question of the historicity of a number of the characters (principally, Don Alésu) in Hikayat Kerajaan Sikka, a few, brief remarks on the role of myths that are taken to be history in Sikka are in order.

In an exemplary study of the dynastic myth of Negri Sembilan, Malaysia, P.E. de Josselin de Jong commented that some scholars accepted as historical such stories as that of the foundation of the Negri Sembilan ruling dynasty by one Raja Malewar, who came to Negri Sembilan after the people there requested a prince from the Pagarruyung rulers of their Minangkabau homeland. Those scholars placed stories such as that of Malewar on a par with Dutch records (P.E. de Josselin de Jong 1975:281), but De Josselin de Jong failed to find evidence for the historicity of Malewar, either in the Daghtregister or the Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlando-Indicum; nor is Malewar mentioned in the Sejarah Melayu (Malay Annals). De Josselin de Jong concluded that the Malewar story is not an account of a historical person and events, but is a myth. The problem of the historicity of the person notwithstanding,
It is undeniable that in present day Negri Sembilan the Raja Malewar story has the social function of myth, in the sense of a text (either written or oral) [...] that is value-laden (De Josselin de Jong 1975:281).

Nor does the mythic dimension of the story preclude its incorporation of historical or historically founded narrative elements. But the analysis of the tale poses a problem, the problem of ‘putative events’:

[...] how must we consider the contents of this myth? The authors we have just cited obviously hold that the contents [are] a generally reliable account of what did once actually happen. It may be so, and then we would be dealing with a piece of historiography that has become a national myth, as the story of Joan of Arc has become part of the national myth of France.

On the other hand it could be that the Malewar tradition, as it has been told [...] will prove to be markedly at variance with historical events as we know or infer them. In that case we would be dealing with mytho-formation in two senses: not only would a tradition have assumed the social role of a myth, but the contents of the traditional tale itself would have been ‘formed’ out of material other than the records of actual events alone. (De Josselin de Jong 1975:281.)

If the myth is not a representation of historical events, then it must be compounded from material other than the historical (De Josselin de Jong 1975:287), that is, out of ‘themes, ideas and ideals’ (1975:287). And, in ‘moving out of the field of history’ we shall move:

[...] into that of anthropology and philology, and out of the realm of facts and events and into the realm of ideas (De Josselin de Jong 1975:287). Analysis of the Hikayat Kerajaan Sikka presents many of the same problems as those which worried De Josselin de Jong, with the significant exception that it is a tale which begins as myth, part of the oral traditions of the Sikkanese people, and ends as a chronology of events whose historicity is verifiable.¹ That is, at a point in the evolution of Kondi’s narrative, especially, a sequence of mythic episodes shades into subsequent episodes that are founded in historiography.² In the Hikayat, earlier, mythic episodes serve to establish the

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¹ It is worth iterating that, in contrast to Kondi’s text, Boer’s text begins and ends in the mythic narrative of Sikka’s past and does not treat the historical period of the rajadom except as incomplete and isolated notes.

² Kondi relates a dispute between the Raja of Nita and the Raja of Sikka over an ivory tusk in the village of Térú (Lewis and Mandalangi 2008:217-20). Settlement of the dispute turned on whether the ivory was such as those that had been placed in villages by Don Alésu as mangung lajar (SS, ‘mast and sail’, tokens of alliance) or, as the Raja of Nita claimed, he himself had given the ivory to Térú. This episode is dated 1900, in the years of posthouder Kailola’s time in Maumere. Here we find an interesting account in the historiographically founded section of the Hikayat of an event in which the characters in the tale refer to a feature of the first, mythic part of the Hikayat.