Kings of Rum, Their Heirs and Vassals (1): 
Turkey in the Dynastic Space of the Malay World and Beyond

In the two preceding chapters, the emphasis of the discussion rested upon knowledge about the Turks and Turkey available in the Malay world through pieces of translated literature and infrequent direct contact. Another issue relevant to our discussion was the use of this knowledge for the solution of local problems and political agendas. The emphasis in this and the next chapter, which examine texts of a third group of texts, is different. It rests not so much on the knowledge about the Turks and Turkey (although some new snippets of knowledge will occur in the chapters under discussion now and then) as on the localization, that is, the indigenization, of Turkish and pseudo-Turkish motifs within two literary genres of the Malay world: fantastical adventure hikayats and historical writings or chronicles. The third group includes four works of the first genre (Hikayat Indraputra, Hikayat Isma Yatim, Hikayat Si Miskin and Hikayat Indra Nata) and five works of the second genre (Sejarah Melayu, Tambo Minangkabau, Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa, Hikayat negeri Jambi and Silsilah keturunan raja Jambi). Composed roughly between the seventeenth and the early nineteenth century, these works narrate tales of the king of Rum and the origin of Malay and Minangkabau dynasties from Turkish ancestors.

The king of Rum – Raja Rum (or, rather, a constellation of these rajas)\(^1\) – is an imaginary character in both the fantastical adventure hikayats and the chronicles. And yet, the fantasies of hikayats about him stand in sharp contrast to the influential political mythology of historical works, which often represent Raja Rum as a major hub in the system of the Malay Archipelago’s power relations. In the genre of hikayat, Raja Rum turns into a typical hero of Malay fantastical narratives, their protagonist or antagonist, major or supporting personage, who is associated with both the world of humans and the world of supernatural creatures. In the genre of chronicles, he appears as a great ancestor evolving from a quasi-Persian into a quasi-Turkish monarch who founds a number of dynasties in the Malay world.

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\(^1\) In this chapter, the word raja in the expression, or rather name-title, Raja Rum is treated as either singular or plural depending on the context.
Actual information about Raja Rum in his own Middle-Eastern setting is scarce in this group of works. Even when the Rum of the studied texts implies Turkey, his Turkish features are usually limited to little more than his title, the king of Rum. However, the choice of this figure for the role as the founder of local dynasties is far from being random, while the process of his localization – the metamorphoses of his foreign prototypes plunging into the whimsical atmosphere of Malay hikayats and the syncretic ideas of kingship of the Malay chronicles – are extremely interesting. As it is precisely this process that is the focus of Chapters 3 and 4, their frame of reference is more Malay than Turkish.

So Many Diverse Kings of Rum: Malay Raja Rum in his Favorite Habitats

Raja Rum, no matter whether his seat of power implies Persia, the Byzantine Empire, Turkey or a totally fictitious realm, belongs to the pantheon of popular figures of traditional Malay literature. This personage shows various facets of his protean character in ‘framed stories’ like Hikayat bayan budiman and didactic ‘mirrors for kings’ like Bustān al-salāṭīn (see Chapter 1). However, fantastical adventure narratives and historical or quasi-historical chronicles are his favorite habitats.

Riding Winged Horses, Marrying Sorceresses and Fighting Ogres: Raja Rum of Malay Fantastical Adventure Narratives

Malay fantastical adventure narratives (hikayats) are usually extensive pieces that entwine indigenously Malay miraculous motifs with those from Hindu-Javanese and Arabic-Persian literatures to create a specific world of fantasy, which as often as not is mythologically grounded. It is precisely the nature of this world, in which a verisimilitude of temporal and spatial dimensions (including distances), characters and settings are mostly ignored, that makes the image of Raja Rum and his kingdom so protean.

For all the unusual diversity of miraculous motifs in these narratives, their composition – or rather, the kind of canvas on which these motifs are embroidered – is rather simple and uniform. They begin with the birth of a prince in a powerful and flourishing country. Then follows an account of a misfortune or a deficiency, which forces the young prince to leave his native land. Next comes the story of his wanderings in which he usually crosses the borderline that divide realms of humans and supernatural creatures: jinns (genies), peris (fairies), raksasas (ogres) and celestial races of dewas and indras. During his journey through these realms, the prince battles with