Never-Neverland Revisited: Malay Adventure Stories

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Citation

Plomp, M. (2014, September 30). *Never-Neverland Revisited: Malay Adventure Stories*. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/28939

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Title: Never-neverland revisited : Malay adventure stories : with an annotated edition and translation of the Malay story of Bahram Syah
Issue Date: 2014-09-30

2 | Malay Writing in Barus, 1851–1857

This chapter deals with Malay writings that were present in Barus in the period 1851–1857. It presents the different types of writings that were known there and lists and discusses the individual titles that were collected in the port town. It aims to show how the make-up of Malay writing in this region was closely tied to the specific socio-economic and political landscape of Barus in the mid-1800s. Since I believe that the very existence of cultural expressions is linked to their function in society, the relations between writings and society have the form of societal needs. An analysis of the texts against the background of historical Barus reveals the different kinds of human needs the Malay writings catered to, both on a group level and at the individual level. Men turned to writing in an attempt to justify the political status quo, to propagate religious views, to instruct, to define themselves vis-à-vis the Other, to fight out religious conflicts, to make sense of the world around them and to free themselves of existential anxiety. As Malay indigenous genres proved too broad for the current analysis, the texts have been grouped together according to Western textual categories. These categories loosely correspond to those that are encountered in older catalogues of Malay manuscripts (Juynboll 1899; Van Ronkel 1909, 1921).

An investigation into Barus' Malay writing practices makes clear that temporal and spatial specifics have shaped the nature of local Malay writing. In other words, it shows how the size and make-up of Malay writing – its genres, themes, narrative devices and plots, for instance – were closely linked to the place and time the texts were produced, copied and consumed. This challenges the idea that is expressed in many publications on Malay writing of a homogeneous textual practice throughout the Malay World and over several centuries. Alongside socio-economic and political factors, the outlook of Barus' Malay writing is connected to the nature of the local sources authors could tap into.

The presence of at least four different ethno-cultural groups in the area – Minangkabau, Malay, Batak and Acehnese – means that authors had access to a wealth of sources they could borrow from. These different groups will be addressed at the end of this chapter, after the textual map of Barus has been drawn.

The group of texts that were collected in Barus between 1851 and 1857 could only be reconstructed after thorough comparative codicological research and careful examination of Van der Tuuk's notes on Malay texts. It is known that Van der Tuuk collected Malay manuscripts in other places besides Barus, such as Batavia, Padang and Sibolga, but he did not keep records of the place where he acquired them. Fortunately, some of the manuscripts do contain a colophon that mentions Barus as the place of production. This made it possible to compare the codicological characteristics of these manuscripts with those of the manuscripts that lack references to their provenance. The following features were examined and compared: the watermarks of the European paper used in the manuscripts, notes found in the margins and on end or fly leaves, draft letters and notes in the manuscripts, the use of blind ruling, line fillers and catch words, the style of page numbering and illuminated characters, ink colour and the format of the colophon. Identification of manuscripts on the basis of handwriting alone is fraught with pitfalls, but in this particular case it has proved a valuable tool when it was combined with a comparison of the characteristics mentioned above. Appendix A lists the titles of Malay writings that were found in Barus (and Sorkam, see below) between 1851 and 1857.

Among Van der Tuuk's notes is a draft list with 35 titles of Malay writings that was assumedly compiled by him during his stay in Barus.[1] It probably concerns the titles that were in his possession at that time. Some of them still exist today; they are included in the research corpus. But the majority can no longer be found; these manuscripts must be considered lost.

Five of the Malay writings actually originate in Sorkam, a port settlement approximately 25 kilometres to the south of Barus. They were incorporated in the list of titles to be studied to create a substantial corpus of texts. Their inclusion is justified by the assumption that Barus and Sorkam formed a single Malay cultural unit in a region inhabited by other ethnic groups. With respect to its geographical, political and socio-economic character, Sorkam was very similar to Barus; however, its population was smaller and consisted of relatively more Batak. In precolonial and, for a while, colonial times, the two port communities were linked through family ties and alliances. For instance, Sorkam's rulers were related to Barus' *hilir* ruling house and part of Sorkam's Batak population maintained longstanding bonds of allegiance to the *hilir* ruler (Drakard 1990, 39, 150). Whenever 'Barus' is mentioned in this chapter in relation to Malay writing, it denotes the combined coastal settlements of Barus and Sorkam.

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[1] Cod. Or. 3260 s.

The texts that were examined also include titles of Malay writings that Van der Tuuk claimed to have seen in Barus. These references are found in his notes and publications. In addition, the list mentions two chronicles that are connected to the two ruling families in Barus, but are not found among Van der Tuuk's manuscripts. Jane Drakard's study on these writings indicates that it is likely that either one or both were (re)written in Barus around the time that Van der Tuuk collected Malay writings in the area (Drakard 1990). This means that, although Van der Tuuk – for reasons unknown – did not add these texts to his collection, both works were, in all probability, present in Barus around the middle of the nineteenth century.

It is very likely that more Malay texts were circulating in Barus in this period than the 58 that have been traced here. This assumption is based on several arguments. First, after the comparison of the codicological characteristics of all Malay manuscripts in the former collection of Van der Tuuk, there remained a number of manuscripts of which the provenance could not be established. Some of them may well have been encountered in Barus. But even manuscripts that were produced elsewhere in the Malay World could have been acquired in Barus. For instance, an 1838 or 1839 copy of the *Sejarah Melayu* written in Riau and formerly in the possession of Van der Tuuk could have been bought by him in Barus (Wieringa 2007, 49–50). If this is indeed the case, the text should have been included in the research corpus. Unfortunately, manuscripts seldom contain references to their history of use. Besides, it turned out that Barus' Muslims were not eager to lend out their Malay manuscripts to the white Bible translator; to them he was a *kafir* or infidel. Similarly, Van der Tuuk's precarious financial situation, in combination with the sometimes considerable lending fees or prices, may also have limited the number of Malay texts that he managed to preserve (Groeneboer 2002, 182). The locals' initial distrust towards Van der Tuuk and their misunderstanding of his motivations for collecting manuscripts must have played a role as well.

In spite of these limitations, an examination of the 58 titles sheds light on a number of important issues related to Malay writing in Barus in the mid-nineteenth century. To begin with, a quick survey of the types of texts that were present reveals a developed Malay writing practice, with texts representing almost all known kinds of Malay writing.[2] This suggests that the works that were circulating in the port settlement were not occasional phenomena, but formed part of a larger network. The port settlement would have been too small for such a fully fledged Malay writing practice to have developed locally. Further, the texts offer glimpses of the mental world and preoccupations of Barus' citizens at a time that the world they inhabited had just undergone some significant changes.

[2] Wieringa's excellent catalogue of the manuscripts and papers in the former collection of Van der Tuuk has been of great help for this chapter (Wieringa 2007). The collection is kept at the Special Collections of the Leiden University Library.

Malay Writings in Barus: An Overview

The majority of the titles that circulated in Barus concern Islamic religious writings. They include textbooks for the instruction of new converts and narratives that present episodes from the life of the Prophet Muhammad and other Islamic prophets, and tales about the early history of Islam. A relatively large number of the manuscripts contain Sufi writings.

The textbooks intended for the study of Islam cover the religions' basic principles and its main practices, such as the unique character of God, Muslim prayer, Quran recitation, fasting, and the *hajj* or the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. Many of these *kitab*, as these works are called in Malay, are Malay translations or adaptations of Arabic texts or Malay commentaries on works from the Arabic tradition. The titles that were found in Barus are those that were read throughout Southeast Asia. In imitation of the showy practice of the Arabic composers these works were often given titles in rhyming Arabic. An example is the *Masā'il al-muhtadī li-ikhwān al-mubtadī* (Guided inquiring for students aspiring), a copy of which was encountered in Barus (Proudfoot and Hooker 1996, 60–61).[3] Like several other *kitab* titles, this text is arranged as questions and answers to present the subject matter in easily digestible chunks for the prospective converts to learn by heart. Two other examples of religious textbooks that catered to the newly converted Muslims and circulated among the Muslim population of Barus are the *Bidāyat almubtadī bi faḍl Allāh al- muhdī* and *Syair Tajwid Quran* (Poem on the Rules for the Recitation of the Quran).[4] The anonymous work titled *Tuḥfat ar-rāghibīn fi bayān ḥaqiqat īmān al-mu'minīn* focuses on a central doctrine in Islam: the unwavering belief that true Muslims must have in the existence of God. In three chapters it is explained exactly what a Muslim should believe in and what the possible dangers are that can destroy this belief. The text presents Islam as the one and only true religion and contrasts it with other, false religions and sects.[5] Also belonging to this genre, but of a more general nature, is a text bearing the title *Khalā'iq al-yaqīn*. It deals with the numerous names and attributes of God and with the Muslim prophets (Juynboll 1899, 276).[6] Most religious writings that were read in Barus were written or translated outside the region, except for one composition that seems to be the product of a local author. The above mentioned *Poem on the Rules for the*

[3] Van der Tuuk claimed that he owned a copy of this work and that he had seen another copy in Barus (Cod. Or. 3260 l, 47). The first copy he referred to is probably Cod. Or. 3282 (see also Wieringa 2007, 168–70).

[4] Cod. Or. 3281. No less than 15 copies of this work are kept in the collection of Museum Nasional in Jakarta (*Katalogus Koleksi Naskah Melayu* 1972, 270–272). Cod. Or. 3331 (Cod. Or. 3260 l, 63r; Wieringa 2007, 265–267).

[5] Van der Tuuk's personal notes and papers include a list with all the titles of *kitab* known to him: Cod. Or. 3260 f. *Tuḥfat ar-rāghibīn fi bayān ḥaqiqat īmān al-mu'minīn* is mentioned as number 142. Van der Tuuk added the remark that he had seen a copy of this text in Barus (Cod. Or. 3260 f, inserted note).

[6] Cod. Or 3200 1.

Recitation of the Quran mentions a certain *Encik* Barus, 'a man from Barus,' as the person who rendered the text in verse.[7]

Popular pendants of Islamic text books were edifying narratives on the life of the Prophet Muhammad and other champions of Islam. These narratives instructed the readers in a casual manner in the moral values of Islam. Stories narrating, for example, Muhammad's ascension and shaving (*Hikayat Mi'raj Nabi Muhammad* and *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur*) enthralled the audience during evening readings.[8] They familiarized neophytes with the special nature of Islam's most prominent prophet, while at the same time entertained them. The following citation from the *Story of the Prophet's Shaving* gives an impression of the miraculous flavour of this type of Malay writing:

> After the victory over Raja Lahad, Allah told His Messenger that he should be shaved. The one who shaved the Prophet was the Angel Jabrail himself. The Prophet was shaved in the presence of his Light. When the shaving was over, Muhammad's head was covered with a shining leaf of the paradisical Tuba-tree. None of his 126,666 hairs fell down to the ground, as the host of houris, who has ascended from Heaven to watch the Prophet being shaved, managed to catch one hair each and then bound it around their right hand as an amulet (Braginsky 2004, 606).

No less miraculous is the *Story of the Mystical Light of Muhammad (*Hikayat Nur Muhammad). It is known in different versions in Malay, but also in other languages of the Archipelago.[9] It narrates the metaphysical birth of the Prophet and the creation by God of the Mystical Light in the form of a bird. The world is then created from the drops of water that fall from the bird's body (Braginsky 2004, 602). Reading or listening to stories on Muhammad's life was considered a highly pious and beneficial occupation (Braginsky 2004, 612). The colophon of Van der Tuuk's copy of the *Story on the Prophet's Shaving* from Barus states that any reader or listener who reads or listens to the complete text will receive God's forgiveness for all his sins, like "an enormous tree dropping twigs".[10] The *Mawlid an-Nabi* also falls in the same category; it is a pious literary work on the life of the Prophet Muhammad that was meant to be recited during the yearly celebration of Muhammad's birth.[11] The private collection of *Tuanku* Sigambo-gambo – the raja of Barus *hilir* – held a copy of the *Book of One Thousand Questions (*Kitab Seribu Masalah).[12] It is a Malay rendering of an Arabic story dating from the tenth century on

[7] The text also mentions a certain Sidi 'Ulma as its composer. It is possible that this name refers to the author of the prose text, and not of its adaptation in verse.

[8] *Hikayat Mi'raj Nabi Muhammad*: Cod. Or. 3306 1; *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur:* Cod. Or. 3304 II 2. Van der Tuuk refers to the popularity of stories such as these on Sumatra's northwest coast in his letters to the NBG (Groeneboer 2002, 258–259, 289).

[9] Cod. Or. 3304 II 1.

[10] Cod. Or. 3304 II 2.

[11] Cod. Or 3289.

[12] Cod. Or. 3260 l, 31r.

conversion from Judaism to Islam and it is set in seventh-century Arabia. It depicts the Prophet Muhammad answering questions posed to him by a rabbi; the questions pertain to a wide range of topics spanning ritual, history, belief and mysticism. The story was adapted and translated into various languages and spread across a vast geographical area (Ricci 2009, 2011). A last hagiography that was read in Barus is the *Story on King Skull* (Hikayat Raja Jumjumah).[13] It recites how Nabi Isa (Jesus) revives the skull of an unjust king, and the skull then gives an account of the sufferings of sinners in hell (Braginsky 2004, 358). Hagiographies also existed in verse; the *Poem of the Prophet Ayub*, the biblical Job, (Syair Nabi Ayub) for instance, was also found in Barus.[14]

An interesting find among the Islamic narrative texts that were known in Barus is the *Poem on Nasuha (*Syair Nasuha).[15] Only a few copies of this text have been preserved and the title is seldom mentioned in studies on Malay writing.[16] According to Van der Tuuk, the *syair* was written by a certain Abdul Karim from Penanjuan.[17] The work was intended to instruct Muslims in the practice of repentance or *tobat. Tobat nasuha* is the most commendable form of repentance, hence the title of the text. It means that the sinner turns to God, admits to all his sins, expresses his sincere feelings of remorse and vows never to stray again from the path of the virtuous. To convey the benefits of this particular *tobat,* the author chose the format of an entertaining story instead of a treatise. After a life of stealing, a notorious thief named Nasuha decides to convert to Islam. He repents of his crimes and promises God to lead an honourable life. He is so dedicated to this cause that he actually becomes known for his honesty and is tested by the archangel Jibrail (Gabriel).

Among the favourite stories on the northwest coast were those that celebrate the Holy War against the infidels in the early history of Islam. The fact that all four stories that were found in Barus revolve around the illustrious son-in-law of Muhammad and Shiite champion 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and his offspring is remarkable.[18] Especially so, when one considers the dominant orthodox Sunnite character of Islam as practiced in island Southeast Asia from the nineteenth century onwards. This marked presence and positive characterization of a Shia hero finds its equivalent in Malay-Muslim hagiographies in

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13 Cod. Or. 3306 2.
14 Cod. Or. 3332.
15 Cod. Or. 3260 l, 52v. Van der Tuuk saw a copy of this poem in Barus.
16 A publication dedicated to this text exists: *Syair Nasuha: Sebuah Kajian Filologis*, by Muhammad Isman. Program Pascasarjana Universitas Padjadjaran, Bandung, 1999. Unfortunately, I have not been able to consult the work.
17 Spelled p-n-n-j-*wau-alif* -n. The name is not found on maps of Sumatra I had access to.
18 Van der Tuuk's list, which we can assume lists all titles of Malay text in his possession in Barus around 1853, mentions a fifth narrative writing on the early wars of Islam, *Story of King Lahad (*Hikayat Raja Lahad). However, it has been impossible to establish whether Van der Tuuk acquired this text in Barus or in Padang or Sibolga, where he had spent some time before moving to Barus. For a synopsis of the text, see Iskandar 1995, 201–202.

general. According to Muslim tradition, 'Ali took part in all the great wars against the infidels and stories about his feats abound in the Islamic world. In Barus, the stories of King Khaibar (*Hikayat Raja Khaibar*) and King Khandak (*Hikayat Raja Khandak*) were read.[19] The first loosely refers to the war between Muslims and the Jewish tribe of Khaibar that took place in 628 CE, but centres around an infidel ruler named King Khaibar. He is described as a cruel tyrant, a worshipper of the Sun and murderer of innocent merchants. When he decides to stage a war against the Prophet, he is defeated and killed by Muhammad's son-in-law, 'Ali ibn Abu Talib. In the second story, King Khandak and his son king Badar are powerful kings, who hold sway over humans and Islamic ghosts with the help of magic. They are infidels who do everything in their power to eradicate Islam from their kingdoms. Like King Khaibar, both kings are defeated by 'Ali (Braginsky 2004, 605–6). The *Story of Muhammad Hanafiyah* (Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyah), an account of the exploits of one of 'Ali's sons, was read out aloud at evening gatherings during Ramadan (Groeneboer 2002, 258, 289). Closely related to this text is the *Story of the Commander of the Faithful 'Umar* (Hikayat Amir al-Mu'minin 'Umar or Hikayat Baginda 'Umar') (Brakel 1975, 51–53).[20] Despite its title, it is not the second caliph 'Umar who is allotted a central part in this story, but his adversary 'Ali. His battle against the infidel king, Kisra, of the state Sair, which took only a few lines to describe in the story on Muhammad Hanafiyah, is spun out in this text (Wieringa 2007, 306–308).

In line with Muslim tradition, 'Ali is portrayed in Malay texts as the greatest warrior of Islam and as the rescuer of the early Muslim community from its innumerable enemies. His wisdom is contrasted with the stupidity of 'Umar, another of Muhammad's companions and the first to thwart 'Ali in his aspiration to take over the Prophet's authority after the latter's death (Braginsky 2004, 612; Wieringa 1996, 104–105). This contradiction is addressed by Wieringa (1996) in a study on Malay stories that narrates events from the lives of 'Ali and his wife Fatimah. He explains the presence of Shiitic elements in Malay writings by referring to the influence of Persian narratives on Malay writing. Several popular Malay works such as *Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyah*, *Hikayat Amir Hamzah* and *Hikayat Bakhtiar* are translations or adaptations of Persian texts. It is generally assumed that this Persian influence was of Indian origin, as was the case with early Indonesian Islam. These works and other hagiographies were introduced in the Archipelago as popular reading material for new converts, presumably somewhere between the fourteenth and sixteenth century. At that time, Indonesian Islam still had a Shia tinge. Over time, a process of 'deshiitization' of Malay writings took place; stories

19 The *Story of King Khandak* is found in Cod. Or. 3307. The *Story of King Khaibar* is not found among Van der Tuuk's manuscripts. It is, however, mentioned in one of his letters to the board of the NBG as an example of Islamic stories that were read by Batak who were educated in the Malay language and *jawi* script in government-sponsored schools (Groeneboer 2002, 258–259).

20 Cod. Or. 3345 2.

in which ʿAli or members of his family played a central role were gradually neutralized to such an extent that they would not offend the Sunnite Muslim reader. That said, it should be kept in mind that also in Sunni Islam, particularly in Sunnite Sufism, ʿAli was held in high esteem (Braginsky 2004, 612).

Among the group of religious writings, Sufi works stand out, both for their numbers and the variety of Sufi doctrines they address. Most of the main Sufi philosophers, scholars and writers who have contributed to the development and dissemination of Sufi thought in the Malay World are represented.[21] From the renowned Sumatran Hamzah Fansuri, who lived in the late sixteenth century, to Sirajuddin Ibn Jalaluddin, whose work *Durrat an-naẓirah tanbihan li-durrat al-fakhirah* was finished in 1238 AH/1822 CE, only three decades before Van der Tuuk laid eyes on the text in Barus.[22]

The earliest Malay works written in the spirit of the mystical branch of Islam that were read in Barus are those by Hamzah Fansuri. Hamzah was a Muslim ascetic and mystic, who was either born in Barus or spent part of his working life there – hence the *nesba* al-Fansuri.[23] He became a master in conveying highly abstract Sufi concepts such as Divine Love and God's Essence in Malay verse using similes and symbols derived from Persian sources. He traveled extensively, to Bagdad, the centre of the Qadiriyya Sufi Order with which he became affiliated, and to Mecca and Medina (Braginsky 2004, 617–642). Hamzah's favourite form for propagating his monist Sufi convictions was the *syair*, a long poem that consists of a string of four line quatrains with monorhyme of the type *aaaa*, *bbbb*, *cccc*. Van der Tuuk saw at least one copy of Hamzah's *Asrār al-arifin* (Secrets of the Gnostics) in Barus.[24] The text is a line by line auto-commentary of 15 quatrains and explains how a Sufi adept must first renounce the transient world and shed his ego before he can meet his Divine Creator (Braginsky 2004, 620–21). Next, Van der Tuuk copied a collection of Hamzah's poems in Barus from a manuscript dated 1851. A colophon that follows one of the poems mentions the 'deputy to the r*aja* Barus' as the copyist.[25]

[21] Several of these Sufi pioneers hailed from and/or worked part of their life in Sumatra, notably Aceh. Riddell 2001b offers an overview of the development of Sufi thought in the Archipelago from the sixteenth until the twentieth century. His work includes short biographies of Sufi thinkers and authors and discussions of their main works. Similarly, Braginsky 2004, Chapter 8.

[22] Cod. Or. 3260 f, 58r, number 403.

[23] Fansur is an alternative name for Barus. Drakard has investigated the long and complex history of the use of these two names in depth. Fansur is probably derived from the Malay word *pancur*, 'spring' or 'well'. It seems to be linked to an area called Lobo Tua, to the northwest of Barus. Recent archeological finds in the area indicate that, prior to the sixteenth century, the area's centre of trade was situated near Lobo Tua (Drakard 1989, 1990, 4 n. 10).

[24] Cod. Or. 3260 f, 57r.

[25] 'Pemangku Raja Barus'; Cod. Or. 3372. The title *Raja* Barus belonged to the *mudik* ruler. Since the *hilir* chief was viceroy, *pemangku Raja Barus* perhaps refers to the *raja hilir*, *Sutan* Ibrahim, or his predecessor, *Sultan* Main Alam. It was this *Sutan* Ibrahim who, in all probability, gave Van der Tuuk access to his private collection of Malay manuscripts.

A second collection of poems by Hamzah was also copied in Barus, in 1853.[26] From his informants, Van der Tuuk learned of the existence of two other titles by Hamzah: *Poem of the Pure Bird* (Syair Burung Pingai) and *Poem of the Assembly of Dervishes* (Syair Sidang Fakir). He failed to procure copies of these texts, though.

The *Poem of the Wanderer* (Syair Dagang) and the *Poem of the Boat (*Syair Perahu) were attributed to Hamzah by Van der Tuuk's local informants.[27] It is almost certain that both poems circulated in Barus.[28] The former narrates the trials and tribulations of a wandering trader. The poem cannot fail to have struck a chord with the west-coast seafarers and traders residing in Barus or visiting its port.[29] But the prudent reader in search of esoteric knowledge knew that the peregrinations of the merchant could also be read as an allegory on a Sufi adept's path to union with God (Braginsky 2007). The *Poem of the Boat* is written in a similar spirit. Here, the well-prepared traveller on the path to knowledge of God is compared to a fully-equipped sailing boat that successfully carries its passengers across the raging seas (Braginsky 2004, 688–691; 2007).

Nuruddin al-Raniri is the second Sufi author whose work was known in Barus. He is as acclaimed as Hamzah, but derives his fame primarily from his vehement attacks on the monist ideas expounded in the works by Hamzah and his follower Shamsuddin al-Sumatrani. Nuruddin was an influential Islamic scholar originating in Gujarat in India, who worked as *Syaikh* al-Islam under the patronage of the Acehnese *Sultan* Iskandar Thani from 1637 until 1644. He considered it heresy that Hamzah Fansuri and his followers believed that man and God were essentially one (Riddell 2001b, 116–125). A copy of al-Raniri's *Explanation of Faiths* (Tibyān fī ma'rifat al-adyān) in the former collection of Van der Tuuk was probably found in Barus as well.[30] In two chapters, the text informs the reader about the various religions, from the Prophet Adam to the Prophet Isa and Muslim sects. The work contains a direct attack on Hamzah's views as presented in his *Muntahī*; the author supports his arguments by calling upon the authority of several renowned Arab theologians and commentators. The quotations taken from their works teach the orthodox Muslim doctrine about the relationship of God and the world (Drewes and

[26] Cod. Or. 3374 2–9.

[27] See the note in Cod. Or. 3260 f.

[28] *Syair Dagang*: Cod. Or. 3374 10; *Syair Perahu*: Cod. Or. 3374 11. There is no conclusive evidence that Van der Tuuk copied the *Poem of the Wanderer* and the *Poem of the Boat* in Barus. However, based on the fact that both autograph texts are found in a bundle with other texts that are linked to Barus, these two titles have been included in the research corpus.

[29] Nowadays, the attribution of the *Poem of the Wanderer* and the *Poem of the Boat* to Hamzah Fansuri is considered doubtful (see, for instance, Braginsky 2004; Drewes and Brakel 1986). For more on Sufi boat symbolism in Malay writing, see Braginsky 1998, 2004, 677–694, and 2007.

[30] Cod. Or. 3291 1. There is no conclusive evidence that this manuscript was collected in Barus. However, I follow Voorhoeve, who suggests that the manuscript may have been collected in Barus, as it betrays Acehnese influence in the Malay language that is used (Voorhoeve 1955a, 24). The title has therefore been included in the research corpus.

Brakel 1986, 15–6; Voorhoeve 1951, 354–355, 1955b, 156; Wieringa 2007, 184). The same manuscript contains another text by al-Raniri, a short treatise about the world before creation in the form of a catechism (Voorhoeve 1955b, 158).[31] A second writing from the pen of al-Raniri that was available in Barus is titled *Evident Victory Over All Those Who Do Not Believe That God Exists* (Fatḥ al-mubīn 'alā'l-mulḥidīn).[32] According to Van der Tuuk, the work was written by al-Raniri on the request of the Sultan of Aceh to refute the assumptions of the 'heretic' branch of the Wujudiyya sect. Today, the work is considered lost (Voorhoeve 1951, 359 n. 17).

The seventeenth century saw yet another mystic teacher dominate religious life at the Acehnese sultanate for a while: Abdurrauf al-Singkili (*c.* 1615–1693). Born in the coastal town of Singkil, to the north of Barus, he was the first to write a Malay commentary on the Quran. This *Tarjuman al-mustafid* however, was not found in Barus (Riddell 2001b, 162–163).[33] Instead, another work by Abdurrauf, titled *Majmū ' al-masā'il*, was known among Barus' Muslims.[34] The text presents the Sufi doctrine according to Syattariyya, the Sufi order that became firmly established in the region due to author's efforts. Abdurrauf's orientation was orthodox; he propagated a reformed type of Sufism, such as had been promoted by al-Raniri. It emphasized the importance of adhering to the *syariah* (Muslim laws), while allowing room for following the mystic path (Riddell 2001b, 125–132).

In 1789, a Malay adaptation of al-Ghazali's important work *Revival of the Religious Sciences* (Iḥyā' 'ulūm ad-dīn) saw the light. It took the author, Abdussamad al-Palimbani (*c.* 1704–1789) from Sumatra's Palembang region, ten years to finish. He gave the work the Arabic title *Sayr as-sālikīn ila 'ibadat Rabb al-'alamin.* It became an important contribution to Islam in the Malay World and is still reprinted in parts of Malaysia and Indonesia today (Riddell 2001b, 184–185). Al-Ghazali played an important role in the incorporation of Sufi ideas in Islamic orthodox teachings by promulgating the view that there is an essential separation between Creator and Creature. Several of the main Malay Sufi thinkers hark back to his teachings (Riddel 2001b, 72). With the large Muslim population and mystical tinge of Islam on the west coast in mind, it is not surprising to find at least one part of Abdussamad's voluminous work in Barus.[35] It informs the reader about the nature of sins according to Muslim doctrine, and how to recognize

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[31] Cod. Or. 3291 2. More on this text is found in Wieringa 2007, 184–185. Except for al-Raniri's *Explanation of Faiths* and *Evident Victory Over All Those Who Do Not Believe That God Exists*, this manuscript contains two short treatises, one on the five senses (*pancaindera*) and one on good and bad *nafsu*, 'lust' or 'desire.'

[32] Cod. Or. 3260 f, number 396. Van der Tuuk claimed to have seen a copy in Barus.

[33] The *Tarjuman al-mustafid* was compiled around 1675. It is a Malay rendering of the renowned commentary in Arabic, *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* (Commentary on the Two Jalals), which was written the Middle East in the second half of the fifteenth century. For five centuries, this particular *tafsir* played a major role in the education of Muslims throughout the world, including Southeast Asia (Riddell 2001b, 48–49).

[34] Cod. Or. 3260 f, 57r, number 401.

[35] Cod. Or. 3260 f, 57v–58r.

and counteract them before they destroy the sinner. Like his predecessors, Abdussamad travelled to Arabia in search of esoteric knowledge. He was a pupil of the founder of the Sammaniyya Order and brought Sammaniyya Sufi teachings to Palembang and beyond. He too was a reformist Sufi, who criticized the speculative monist teachings of the earlier Wujudiyya (Riddell 2001b, 184–186; Wieringa 2007, 174).

The issue concerning the Essence of God continued to divide Sufi thinkers from the seventeenth century and beyond and it continued to generate new writings. In Barus, there was at least one copy of the early nineteenth-century Sufi title *Durrat al-nazirah tanbihan li-durrat al-fakhirah* (1822 CE) by *Syaikh* Sirajuddin ibn Jalaluddin.[36] The text is intended for people "who are in search of knowledge that results in the certainty of faith".[37] It is a Malay adaptation of a commentary titled *Durrat al-fakhirah* on al-Sanusi's (d. 1490) *Mother of all Proofs* (Umm al-barahin). As in many of the earlier Sufi treatises, it is the topic of the sublime being of God that prompts extensive commentary.

A contemporary of Sirajuddin and fellow traveller of the mystic path was Daud ibn Abdullah Patani or Daud al-Fatani. Born in the 1740s in Patani, on the east coast of modern day southern Thailand, he wrote his Sufi-inspired religious works in Mecca where he spent most of his life. He was a member of several Sufi orders, including the Syattariyya. A prolific writer, there are fifty titles that bear his name as author (Braginsky 2004, 655–657). Only his earliest work was known in Barus. This *Kitāb īḍāḥ al-bāb* is a treatise dealing with matrimonial law; it is based on various works by Shafi'i authors and was finished in 1809 (Riddel 2001b, 198–199).

This enumeration of religious writings ends with an anonymous work titled *Tadhkir al-yaqīn.*[38] It presents a commentary on a well-known collection of Sufi aphorisms by the Egyptian Sufi Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh (d. 1309) with the title *Kitāb al-Ḥikam* (Wieringa 2007, 182–183).

Barus was home to a substantial number of writings on other topics, beside religious matters. There were texts on court rituals and ceremonies, dynastic histories, biographic accounts, fantastic adventure stories and frame stories. These non-religious works can be divided into two groups: narrative and non-narrative texts. An important subgroup of the latter is writings composed and consumed at the two local courts. With the presence of two ruling *raja* and their extended family in Barus, it is not surprising to find texts that pertain to court customs, dynastic histories and genealogies.[39] There are different versions of the histories of both *mudik* and *hilir* houses. The *History of Tuanku Batu*

[36] Cod. Or. 3260 f, 58r, number 403. A *haji* named Ibrahim in Barus owned a copy of this text.

[37] [...] orang yang menuntut ma'rifat yang menghasilkan yakin.

[38] Cod. Or. 3290.

[39] These Malay court chronicles or dynastic genealogies are narratives. However, I have decided to discuss them under the heading of non-narrative writings in a court setting for practical reasons. This chapter shows that there are other Malay texts that resist categorization along the lines of Western textual categories. This issue will be discussed in depth in Chapter 3.

Badan (Sejarah Tuanku Batu Badan) centres upon the founder of the *hilir* settlement and his successors, while the upstream line of chiefs is described in *Origins of the Raja Barus* (Asal Keturunan Raja Barus) (Drakard 1990, 2003). The downstream *raja Tuanku* Sigambo-gambo or *Sutan* Ibrahim owned a copy of a *hilir* chronicle entitled the *Poem of Raja Tungtung* (Drakard 2003, 51; Wieringa 2007, 41).[40] Another text dedicated to the royal downstream lineage and the establishment and history of the settlement is the *Poem on the History of Sultan Fansuri*; a similar text in prose was also known.[41] Barus' *mudik* chief kept an unnamed *tambo*, a chronicle or genealogy, perhaps a copy of the *mudik* chronicle *Origins of the Raja Barus*.[42] Another work that belongs to this genre was acquired by Van der Tuuk from the local government administrator, *controleur* Palm.[43]

An important part of Malay court life consisted of ceremonies. At significant moments in the life of the Malay ruler or a member of his family, the special status of the *raja* as the worldly and religious leader of the community was confirmed in a meticulously orchestrated display of authority. His power was reinvested every time anew, in front of his subjects, and by the use of symbolical objects and actions (Milner 1982, 94–111). It was essential that the ceremonies were performed according to custom, in particular in the case of Barus. Here, the members of the Malay elite had to present themselves as markedly different from the Batak, who formed the majority of their subjects. Therefore, the regulations for royal births, marriages and funerals, for example, were written down and the manuscripts were kept in the court library.[44] A compilation of laws and customs from Barus copied by Van der Tuuk probably derives from court circles as well.[45]

Most of the non-religious writings that were encountered in Barus are narratives. They are written in either prose or verse. This category comprises adventure stories, frame stories, long romantic poems and autobiographies. The first to be discussed is the adventure story.

As was explained in the Introduction, Malay adventure stories are prose narratives that relate the adventures of a young prince on a quest. The object of his desire varies from the girl of his dreams or mystical knowledge to a magic animal or an extraordinary medicine. The initial departure of the prince is often preceded by a dream, in which the object of his desire is introduced to him. The subsequent nightly vision is found at the beginning of the *Story of Bahram Syah*, one of the four adventure stories that circulated on the northwest coast:[46]

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[40] Cod. Or. 3205 2.

[41] Cod. Or. 3303 1 and 2.

[42] Cod. Or. 3303 3.

[43] Cod. Or. 3343. Carel Hendrik Palm (1814–1864) was *controleur* and the highest civil representative of the colonial government in Barus at the time Van der Tuuk lived there (Groeneboer 2002, 116).

[44] Cod. Or. 3294 and 3295.

[45] Cod. Or. 3303 4. See also Wieringa 2007, 208.

[46] Cod. Or. 3317. The manuscript originates in Sorkam.

> One night, when Sultan Maharaja the Great was sleeping in his palace, he had a dream. In his dream, an old man appeared to him and Sultan Maharaja the Great said, "Oh Lord, who are you?" He replied, "I am a messenger from God and I have come to you. I have witnessed you accomplish great wealth and splendour, but there still is something you do not possess, and that is an extremely beautiful bird named *Marah* Jalin. When it speaks, gold and silver are scattered from its beak, when it tells a story, diamonds and all sorts of small gems are sprinkled from its eyes, and when it flaps its wings and wags its tail, precious gems of all kinds fly from its nose. Its breast feathers are red like the resin from the dragon's blood plant, and its neck feathers are ruffled. It is the pet of Princess Drifting Beach Hibiscus Flower, who is the child carried in the folds of Princess Apalu Apala's sarong, and the offspring of His Royal Highness *Marah* Inda Sultan the Magnificent. She lives in the state of Gastu Gasta in the village called The Queen's Field. The mountain is called Field of the Wild Camels, the valley, Slanting Board, on the island called Sinawilan. The estuary goes by the name of Narrow Passage, and the bay is called Smooth Curves" (*SBS* 2).

The detailed description of the beautiful and miraculous bird *Marah* Jalin evokes such a desire in the king that his sons cannot but promise their father to find the bird for him. Thus, the dream sets off the rest of the story. As for its fantastic flavour, the *SBS* is comparable to another adventure story that was known in Barus, the *Story of Syah Mardan* (Hikayat Syah Mardan).[47] The more than thirty surviving manuscripts that were found in different parts of the Malay World attest to its wide dissemination and popularity. In this story, the prince is separated from his family after he gets lost in the woods. His wanderings bring him to various kingdoms, where he has amorous adventures with princesses and meets with mystics who instruct him in religious matters. The story is marked for the many transformations the main protagonist experiences (Braginsky 1990, 107–135; 2004, 716–719).

The *Story of Ahmad and Muhammad* (Hikayat Ahmad Muhammad) was not only enjoyed in Barus, but also in other regions of the Malay World.[48] It relates the peregrinations of two princes named Ahmad and Muhammad. They had to leave their country to escape from execution by their stepfather. The narrative seems to be a Malay rendering of a Javanese story. Like the *SBS* and *the Story of Syah Mardan*, this text features a magic bird, alongside esoteric teachings, abducted princesses, fierce battles and miraculous cures for the sick and wounded (Wieringa 2007, 228–231; Juynboll 1899, 144–147; Van Ronkel 1909, 112–119).

Similar in content and narrative style to the three texts mentioned above is the *Story of King Slave*, also known as the *Story of the Merchant's Daughter Who Became a Raja* (Hikayat Raja Budak or Hikayat Anak Saudagar Menjadi Raja).[49] The storyteller presents a wise and talented merchant's daughter, who becomes the ruler of a kingdom after the despotic, old king has been chased away. With her beauty and status as ruler

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47 Cod. Or. 3197 2.
48 Cod. Or. 3314.
49 Cod. Or. 3318.

of a vast state she receives many noble suitors at her court. She decides to marry the one suitor who can solve a number of riddles. A sly king sends his speaking bird to the royal abode. The animal wins the girl's heart, and this way the king succeeds in marrying the merchant's daughter without having met any of her demands (Wieringa 2007, 241–243).

The Poem of Silindang Delima (Syair Silindang Delima, also knonw as Syair Sari Banian) is an adventure story in verse. Two copies of northwest coast provenance have been preserved.[50] One was written in Sorkam for a local patron named *Raja* Megat.[51] The storyline is reminiscent of that of the well-known fairytale of Cinderella. A princess named Silindang Delima is raised at the court of her uncle. He is unaware that she is the daughter of his own sister. Because Silindang Delima is extremely pretty, the king's wives fear the king might fall in love with her. Thus, they scheme to make sure the king will never notice her beauty. They smear her face with charcoal to make her ugly and force her to do domestic chores. When she succeeds in warning her uncle, the king, of an impending storm just before he is about to leave by boat, he discovers her true identity (Braginsky 2004, 528–538; Wieringa 2007, 262–265; Iskandar 1995, 490–92). The abundance of maritime motifs in this adventure story becomes significant in light of the maritime and trade environment of Barus. Braginsky remarks that in the story

> [...] we encounter descriptions of the building of the boat, rituals related to its launching, its sailing across rough seas and arrival at ports, ceremonies of its meeting and, later, seeing off in richly decorated *sampan*-lighters 'with wings like those of a garuda bird' (*Syair Sari Banian* cited in Braginsky 2004, 429).

Details like these formed an all too familiar picture for the readers who lived and worked in a maritime world.

The identification of the *SBS* and the *Story of Syah Mardan* as adventure stories is arguable. A second look at the texts makes clear that the stories offered the readers more than an entertaining adventure; the *SBS* and the *Story of Syah Mardan* also instructed their readers on religious matters. Both texts have a doctrinal component, next to a narrative one. This means that they should be considered not only as adventure stories, but as religious writings as well. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 6, the *SBS* contains multiple religious messages. For example, Bahram Syah's faith and confidence in God's Power during his quest for the magic bird illustrates the Islamic concept of *takdir* or Divine Preordination as contained in the sixth Article of Faith. Muslim doctrine is summarized in five – sometimes six – articles that state what a Muslim should believe in. The sixth article pertains to the belief that God has preordained everything that has happened in the past and that will happen in the future. This belief entails the concept of Divine Will and the acknowledgement of God's Power (Riddel 2001b, 24–29; Nigosian

[50] Cod. Or. 3333 and 3334.
[51] Cod. Or 3334.

2004, 93–105; Sodiq 2010, 98–108). Implicitly, the *SBS* urges the reader to completely surrender himself to God, so that he will reap the benefits in this life and the next, in the Hereafter. The display of the grandeur and omnipotence of God in the *SBS* is set in the larger framework of the text's call for conversion to Islam. Moreover, Bahram Syah functions as a model for pious and virtuous Muslims. In contrast to his two brothers, he fulfils his religious duties, such as giving out alms to the poor, and leads a virtuous life. Through the identification of Bahram Syah with the Quranic Yusuf, the text's religious messages are reinforced.[52]

As for the *Story of Syah Mardan,* Braginsky has eloquently argued on several occasions that the work can be read as a Sufi allegory (Braginsky 1990, 107–135; 2004, 716–719). Different from Sufi treatises or poems that discuss the mystical teachings in a direct manner, Sufi allegories give symbolic expression to the Sufi doctrine, such as the concepts of the Seven Grades of Being, the four stages of the Sufi Path and the Perfect Man (see Chapter 1). The various transformations and new names of the main protagonist indicate the successful transition from one station along the mystic path to the next. Sufi allegories are commonly found in the larger Islamic world (Braginsky 1990, 107–135; 2004, 715–742).[53]

Similarly popular in the Islamic world were frame narratives. The frame narrative consists of a primary narrative that acts as a frame for a number of smaller narratives. A renowned example is the *Book of One Thousand and One Nights*, a collection of Middle Eastern and South Asian stories and folktales compiled in Arabic in the Middle East during the Islamic golden age (c. 750–1250 CE). Sheherazade, new bride to a Persian king, narrates a set of tales to her husband over many nights in order to postpone her execution. Frame narratives were found throughout the Malay World. Two of the known Malay titles were found in Barus: *Story of the Wise Parrot* (Hikayat Bayan Budiman, also known as *Story of the Lucky Merchant* or Hikayat Khoja Maimun) and the *Story of Bakhtiar* (Hikayat Bakhtiar).[54] In the *Story of the Wise Parrot* a talking parrot narrates a series of stories to the wife of a traveling merchant, in order to prevent her from meeting the young prince who wishes to seduce her (Iskandar 1995, 173–186; Wieringa 2007, 22–24). It is not unusual to find the framed stories separately; at least one copy of story

52 Crucially, the analysis of the *SBS* that is presented in Chapter 6 rests on the similarities between the *SBS* and the Quranic story of Yusuf of the twelfth *sura* of the Quran.

53 Although I do not intend to present here a full reading of the *SBS* as a Sufi allegory, it is interesting to note that the images in the *SBS* of the extraordinary bird and the precious stone resemble popular Sufi images from other parts of the Islamic world. See, for instance, De Bruijn's *The Ruby in the Dust: Poetry and History of the Indian Padmāvat by Sufy Poet Muḥammad Jāyasī* (2012) on Sufi metaphors in the work of the sixteenth-century South Indian Sufi poet Muḥammad Jāyasī. Or the poems by the twelfth-century Persian court poet Khāqāni Sĭrwāni that contain illustrative examples of Sufi bird imagery (Beelaert 2000).

54 These texts are contained in, respectively, Cod. Or. 3208 and Cod. Or. 3197 1.

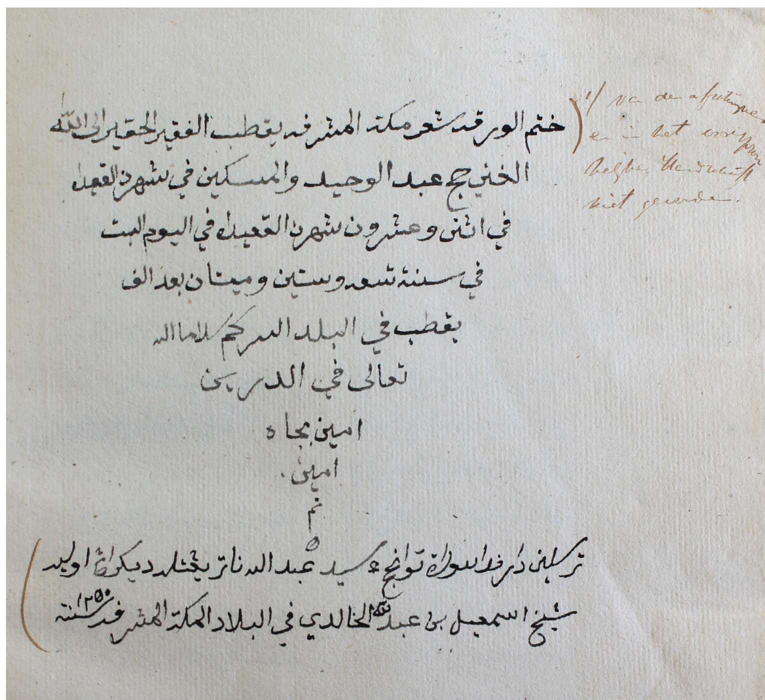

Figure 2. The colophon of Cod. Or. 3338 contaning the *Poem on Mecca and Medina* (Syair Makah dan Madinah) by *Syaikh* Ismail bin Abdullah al-Khalidi al-Minangkabauwi or al-Barusi. In the second line the copyist mentions his name: *Haji* Abdul Wahid. Line five contains the name of the place where the copy was written: (al-)Sorkam. The last two lines read “Copied from a manuscript in possession of *Tuan Haji Sayyid* Abdullah Natar” (Natar = Natal). The original text is written by *Syaikh* Ismail bin Abdullah al-Khalidi in the year 1250 AH. The year corresponds to 1834–1835 CE. The orginal text is an adaption of a long poem by the same title by *Syaikh* Daud of Sunur. The note in the margin by Van der Tuuk explains that the colophon was not found in the original.

number 39 of the long version of the *Story of Bakthiar* was made for Van der Tuuk in Barus: the *Story of Siti Abasah* (Hikayat Siti Abasah) (Wieringa 2007, 330).[55]

Long, narrative poems on animals, flowers or fruit were quite common in the nineteenth-century Malay World (Overbeck 1934, 108–148). Some can be read as allegories. In Barus we find the *Poem of the Carp* (Syair Ikan Tambera).[56] This work prompted scholars Hans Overbeck and, later, C. Hooykaas to interpret some of these narratives as allegorical poems relating the love affairs of travelling merchants (Overbeck 1934 and Hooykaas 1937 cited in Braginsky 2004, 579). Braginsky 2004 gives an allegorical interpretation of the *Poem of the Carp* in favour of this hypothesis. As it forms a telling illustration of the universal predicament of the seafaring trader – always at sea, away from his spouse and children, and having a sweetheart in every port – Braginsky's interpretation of the poem is reproduced here. The text tells about a *kakap*-fish (the merchant), who lives on the high seas and falls in love with a she-carp living in the estuary (the local girl living in a port settlement near the estuary, like Barus or Sorkam). Only after the rains have fallen in the mountains (an allusion to the end of the rainy season, after which the traders' ships began to arrive in the Malay ports), the two are able to meet. But the she-carp rejects a fish from the sea as her lover. Upon hearing this, the *kakap*-fish visits a spiritual teacher, who gives him a charm and its antidote. First, he uses the charm to cause the object of his love to fall ill, and then pays her a visit and cures her. But the treatment turns out not only to have cured the she-carp, but to have made her fall madly in love with the fish from the sea as well. The next evening they meet again and make love (Braginsky 2004, 579; Wieringa 2007, 216).

The last genre that was represented in Barus is the autobiography. Two titles were found: *Syair Makah dan Medina*, also known as *Syair Rukun Haj* (*Poem on Mecca and Medina*) and *Syair Sunur* (*Poem on the Village of Sunur*).[57] The texts were written by *Syaikh* Daud of Sunur. The first deals with the *syaikh*'s voyage to the Middle East and his pilgrimage. The second text contains the rather tragic life story of this Minangkabau religious teacher. He wrote the poem in Trumon, a port settlement north of Barus, only about a decade before Van der Tuuk commissioned a copy of the text in Sorkam.

Syaikh Daud was born in Sunur, a Minangkabau village on Sumatra's west coast, somewhere between 1780 and 1795. During his religious education he came into contact with modernist ideas that called for the 'reformation' or reinterpretation of Islam. Islamic reformism was a modernist strand of Islam that was brought from Arabia at the beginning of the century by returning pilgrims and religious teachers (Suryadi 2005, 89–90; Riddell 2001b, 80). Reformist ideas opposed popular Islam and were aimed at restoring Islamic worship to its pure form. They were primarily spread by the combatant Padris, militant

[55] Cod. Or. 3374 1.
[56] Cod. Or. 3306 3.
[57] Cod. Or. 3338 and Cod. Or. 3336 2.

reformist Muslims from West Sumatra who, for a while, held sway over parts of northern Sumatra.[58] *Syaikh* Daud renounced the syncretic form of Islam that he was brought up with. This included the doctrine of emanation, popularly known as the Seven Grades of Being (Malay: *martabat tujuh*). Instead, he preached a more *syariah*-minded version of Islam. Upon returning home, however, he discovered that his modernist views did not find fertile soil.[59] Consequently, he decided to depart for Mecca to perform the *hajj*. This trip formed the basis for his autobiographical travel account titled *Poem on Mecca and Medina*, which was written around 1832. A second attempt by *Syaikh* Daud to resettle in his native village failed and, disappointed, he once again embarked for Mecca. This time he ran out of money in Trumon. There, he became a trusted teacher at the local court, but never failed to escape from his feelings of longing for Sunur. As a kind of open letter to his former friends and family, he composed the *Poem on the Village of Sunur*. It recounts his life story and expresses his longing for his native *kampung*. When the villagers of Sunur read the epistle, they sent out a small fleet of vessels to bring the old *syaikh* home. But it proved too late; the old man died on his way home, near Singkel, without having set eyes on his beloved village again (Suryadi 2005, 83–104; Wieringa 2002, 174–198).

Syaikh Daud's *Poem on Mecca and Medina* was reworked and elaborated in Mecca in 1250 AH/1834–1835 CE by the renowned Sufi *Syaikh* Ismail bin Abdullah al-Khalidi al-Minangkabawi or al-Barusi. *Syaikh* Ismail was a prominent Sufi and the earliest Khalidiyya teacher in the Malay World on record. He was initiated in the Khalidiyya Order in Mecca in the 1820s. In the 1850s, he returned to the East, but only for a short period. After having spent some time in Singapore, he travelled to Mecca, where he stayed for the rest of his life (Van Bruinessen 2007, 226).

The Texts in their Historical Context

An overview of the Malay titles yields a number of interesting observations. First, the large scale of Malay writing in Barus is striking, taking into consideration the fact that more texts must have been present in Barus than those that have been preserved. Barus was a small community; the combined population of the two main settlements did not

[58] Recently, Michael Laffan has questioned this commonly accepted theory in his book *The Makings of Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past* (2011). While he acknowledges the role of Wahhabi influence from Mecca to a certain degree, he argues that it is more helpful to understand the Padri movement as having developed from a local conflict among scholars of the Syattariyya Sufi Order than seeing it as a 'Wahhabi genesis' in West Sumatra (Laffan 2011, 41–44).

[59] In his article titled 'A Tale of Two Cities and Two Modes of Reading: A Transformation of the Intended Function of the Syair Makah dan Madinah,' Edwin Wieringa discusses *Syaikh* Daud's *Poem on Mecca and Medina* against the background of a religious conflict between two West Sumatran Sufi schools (Wieringa 2002, 174–198).

exceed eight hundred.[60] Of those eight hundred, a considerable number lacked the skills to read Malay texts in *jawi*-script.[61] Second, the diversity of the types of Malay writing is remarkable. Almost all known Malay genres were represented. Next, works that deal with religious matters are conspicuous, both for their number and variety. Among them, treatises linked to the mystical branches of Islam are eminent. Works by almost all renowned Sufi authors who contributed to the spread and development of Sufi thought in the Malay World were found in Barus. Finally, several chronicles that are connected to two ruling houses were written or rewritten around the middle of the nineteenth century. These observations yield the contours of Malay writing in Barus. Together, they paint a picture of a localized Malay writing practice that distinguished itself from Malay writing practices in other parts of the Malay World. Local circumstances determined to a great extent what kinds of texts were composed, copied and consumed. Thus, the configuration of Malay writing varied with its geographical location albeit only to a certain degree. Because, antagonistic to this heterogenizing force, Malay writing – irrespective of its location – was susceptible to the homogenizing pull of the greater Malay writing tradition.

The marked presence of Malay textbooks on Islam on Sumatra's northwest coast can be explained by the rapid spread of Islam in the area around this time. Proselytizing endeavours and the religious education of new converts created a demand for texts that explained the basic Muslim doctrine and worship practices in a simple manner. The expanding market for Malay writings prompted the copying and adaptation of extant texts as well as the production of new ones. The west coast of North Sumatra, it is argued, was particular in its scale of Islamization. Whereas other trade ports welcomed visiting Muslim traders and religious teachers and students from nearby and far away, facilitating the march of Islam just as in Barus, these ports lacked the combination of factors that was specific to the settlement in Barus and its surroundings. Barus attracted devout Muslims from Sumatra's interior and west coast, who awaited a chance to embark on a ship that would bring them to the transit ports of Penang or Singapore. Upon their return from the Holy Land, some of these *haji* stayed in the port where they disembarked, to teach or to proselytize. Furthermore, Barus saw Muslim-Malays of Kerinci descent from nearby Kota Tinga fervently preaching Islam within its borders (Ritter 1839, 22–23). But, above all, it is argued, it was the specific ethnic and social make-up of Barus that facilitated the speedy march of Islam in the area. The dominant position of Muslim-Malays in the local society in combination with the low status of the Batak created a pull for Batak to convert and become Muslim-Malay.

Prose narratives portraying the exemplary behaviour of a devout Muslim protagonist were the popular pendants of religious textbooks. They wrapped the edifying message in an appealing story of exciting adventures and miraculous encounters in strange lands.

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60 Nearby Sorkam, where five of the titles were collected, was even smaller.

61 On literacy in Barus, see Chapter 1.

They were enjoyed in private or at public readings and were quite popular at the time. With the growing number of Muslims in the area, the demand for such texts increased. It was these circumstances that prompted texts such as the *Story of Bahram Syah* to be composed (see also Chapter 6). Translation and adaptation of existing narratives were common practices in the Malay World. In Barus, oral Batak stories, together with Malay, Minangkabau and Acehnese narratives, formed a wealth of material for aspiring authors to work with. The popular Acehnese *Story of Banta Beuransah* (Hikayat Banta Beuransah*)* was reworked into a Malay adventure story with an Islamic edifying component. The Malay version, the *Story of Bahram Syah,* reveals its place of production in the Malay, Minangkabau and, possibly, even Batak elements that were used to create the Malay story.

The Malay writings on the various strands of Sufism, together with *Syaikh* Daud's autobiographical texts, are evidence of the way Islam was experienced on Sumatra's northwest coast in the 1850s. The texts bear witness to competition between adherents of the traditional, mystical and syncretic form of Islam, and reformist-minded Muslims. The nineteenth century saw a renewed zeal among Sumatra's population for mystical Islamic teachings, especially along its west coast. This resulted in a proliferation of diverse Sufi brotherhoods. Most Sufi orders that were known from the previous two centuries were still attracting followers at the time, but newly developed sub-branches, such as the Naqsbandiyya-Khalidiyya, were introduced into the Malay World as well.[62] The old conflict on the concept of *Wahdat al-Wujud* or Oneness of Being flared up. The conservative Sufi voice, propagating the Separation of Being, was heard in the teachings of the reformist Sufi. They favoured the writings by Nuruddin al-Raniri, Abdurrauf al-Singkili, Abdassamad al-Palimbani and Sirajuddin Jalaluddin over those by Hamzah Fansuri, who was an exponent of the extreme end of Wujudiyya.

Most of these Sufi works are treatises that meticulously discuss the doctrinal issues that distinguished the diverse orders. Such texts are highly theoretical and intended as study material for advanced Sufi adepts. This makes the two autobiographical accounts by *Syaikh* Daud of Sunur, which circulated in this coastal region, rather unique. His *Poem on the Village of Sunur* is of particular interest here, as it contains the life story of a reformist *syaikh* from the west coast. Daud's memoirs form an illustration of the way the religious conflict had an impact on the personal lives of those involved. After his unsuccessful attempt to convince his fellow villagers in Sunur to give up their syncretic practices and follow him in his more conservative teachings, he had to leave his family and friends and never saw his native *kampung* again. His writings did gain recognition from the Padris, though, who used them as propaganda (Suryadi 2005, 83–104; Wieringa 2002, 174–206). *Syaikh* Ismail's reworking of Daud's *Poem on Mecca and Medina* provides testimony of Khalidiyya presence on the west coast in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Barus' court circles were the scenes of an increased textual activity in the period under

[62] See Chapter 1.

discussion. The local political history was treated in a series of works that were (re)written and copied around this time.[63] It is argued that the creation of new historical texts and adaptations of existing texts, by or on the behest of members of the two ruling houses, was motivated by recent changes in Barus' political climate.[64] Barus' historical writings were (re-)written between 1830 and the 1870s. The manuscript of a *hilir* chronicle titled *Story of Raja Tungtung* (Hikayat Raja Tungtung) was begun 31 December 1844, while a related historical narrative on the *hilir* dynasty *History of Tuanku Batu Badan* (Sejarah Tuanku Batu Badan) was composed between 1834 and 1872. The main part of the *hulu* chronicle *Origins of the Raja Barus* (Asal Keturunan Raja Barus) is assumed to have been finished in the year 1866 (Drakard 2003, 44–50, 103–105). A fourth historical writing, entitled *Hikayat Cerita Barus* (*Story of Barus*), dates from 1873 (Chambert-Loir 2009, 524).

In the seventeenth century, the VOC ended dual kingship in Barus because the successful cooperation between the two *raja* was not in the economic interest of the VOC. But, it was also the Dutch who backed the re-establishment of a second ruler in the Barus *hilir* around 1830. This happened after a family member of *raja* Barus *hulu*, named Sutan Main Alam, left the latter *kampung* and challenged the authority of the *raja mudik* by establishing himself as an independent ruler (Drakard 1990, 38–40; 42–45; Ismail 1985, 10). This act, the subsequent quarrels and fights, the reinstitution of dual kingship, plus the precarious relationship between the two *raja*, prompted the royal chronicles to be (re-)written. In particular, *Sutan* Main Alam, the newly re-established *hilir* chief, needed a reaffirmation of his status in the form of an adapted, authoritative court chronicle.

The composition of a Malay court chronicle was a proved means of fighting the anxieties of the ruling elite; by reinterpreting the course of historic events the author could steer its outcome: inscribing the future by writing the past.[65] A Malay chronicle legitimized the ruling dynasty by stressing its noble origins, and by offering a justification for specific historic events by implicitly referring to hidden powers that were present beneath the surface of a historic reality, for instance (Bradley 2009, 272; Houben 2009, 17–28; Ras 1968, 15–18; Kratz 2000; Kukushkin 2004). This functional aspect of historical Malay writings is illustrated by Drakard's reading of two court chronicles from Barus. She demonstrates that the two narratives present two versions of a shared past. They each aim, in their own way, to solve the 'problem' caused by the presence of two rulers in Barus. The *mudik* narrative portrays the port settlement as an undivided kingdom with

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[63] It falls outside the scope of this study to delve deeper into the exact relationships between the various writings that are related to Barus' ruling houses. Drakard 1990, 54–55, makes a first attempt.

[64] See also Drakard 1990, 176. Drakard remarks that the two court writings she discusses in her study "clearly respond to a particular situation" (Drakard 1990, 176).

[65] This latter phrase is borrowed from the title of Nancy K. Florida's monograph on the Javanese chronicle *Babad Jaka Tingkir*: *Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future: History and Prophecy in Colonial Java* (1995).

the *mudik* ruler as sole ruler, thus negating the *hilir* claim for a share in Barus' political authority. In contrast, the *History of Tuanku Batu Badan* describes a long tradition of dual kingship, with a rightful place for a *hilir* chief alongside a ruler residing upstream. Drakard's thorough analysis demonstrates how Malay texts from the fringe of the Malay World are worthwhile reading, notwithstanding the fact that, at first glance, they seem stylistically modest and are written in a 'less sophisticated' form of Malay than that of the prose texts from the Strait of Malacca. Moreover, the dialogue between the two indigenous texts provides insight into the complex issue of dual kingship that cannot be gained from European sources. Through their organization and recurrence of particular themes, the texts give expression to two different ideas on authority. *Mudik* ideas on the right to rule are based on the original ownership of land; the *mudik* style of rule is characterized by the importance of rules and regulations, orders and boundaries. In contrast, the *hilir* text is imbued with more 'mainstream' ideas linked to the concept of the Malay kingdom. Here, political authority is presented as more ambiguous and complex, with stress on loyalty, consensus, oaths and court ceremonies. The two versions of Barus' dynastic history together produce an image of variation within a Malay World that is otherwise deemed uniquely homogenous (Drakard 1990).

There are similar texts from other Malay polities that support the thesis that this kind of historical texts were often (re)written in an era of political and social collapse. The *Story of Jambi* (Hikayat Negeri Jambi) from the riverine kingdom of Jambi in South Sumatra, for instance, was composed at a time when the relations between *hulu* and *hilir* settlements were severely strained. Its author was primarily concerned with the legitimacy of the *hilir* sultan's rule over the hinterland settlements. This became especially poignant in 1858 when the *hilir* sultan was overthrown by the Dutch and fled upstream where he governed the *hulu* settlements (Kukushin 2004, 56, 59 n. 10). A much older chronicle from Patani, now the most southern province of Thailand, was written as a way to re-establish a moral order after a period of political turmoil in the 1650s. The authors saw the collapse of the moral order exhibited by the disintegration of long-established rules and customs as the signs of the doom that had befallen their state (Bradley 2009, 267–293).

Apart from local feuds, the political consequences of the (re)colonization of Barus in 1839 demanded the attention of Barus' rulers. With the advance of the Dutch colonial administration in nineteenth-century Sumatra, local rulers had lost their political authority. They had been persuaded or forced by way of military sanctions to sign treaties with the Dutch, and had subsequently become mere district heads: paid officials in the service of the colonial government. In the constellation of the Malay kingdom, with its stress on the *raja* as sovereign, this submission to a foreign power entailed a considerable loss in status, or *nama*. The Dutch prohibition of the *raja* of Barus using their royal seals formed the final sign that their time as sovereign rulers had really ended (Joustra 1926, 31–33; Drakard 1990, 26, 45; Milner 1982, 94–111). In an attempt to counter

the effects of this disgrace, Barus' rulers commissioned a revision of their authoritative court narratives that either explained past events as inevitable or predestined, or stressed continuities instead of ruptures. One can even speculate that Barus' Malay elite turned to the field of Malay writing to restore some of their former sovereign aura; patronage of the arts was traditionally linked with the Malay court. It is in this context that the active role of the *hilir* ruler *Sutan* Ibrahim in Van der Tuuk's search for Malay texts and copyists gains significance. In 1851, it had only been two decades since *hilir* authority had been re-established through Dutch mediation, and the *mudik* side continued to undermine it. By presenting himself to Van der Tuuk as a patron of Malay writing, the *hilir* ruler would have been able to increase his prestige.[66]

Multiple Narrative Practices

Local societal developments left their imprint on the shape of Malay writing on Sumatra's northwest coast. But so did the nature of the available narrative sources authors and creative copyists could turn to. Malay authors in Barus had access to different narratives from their colleagues in, for instance, Palembang in South Sumatra or Banjarmasin in South Kalimantan. The latter two areas experienced political and cultural influence from Java during certain periods of time and this is reflected in the Malay works that originate there. As for Barus, it formed the watershed of Acehnese, Malay, Minangkabau and Batak spheres of cultural influence: a crossroads where different textual traditions met and influenced each other. Writings in Malay, Arabic, Minangkabau and Acehnese circulated among the local population and temporary settlers. Oral stories, songs and poems in various Batak languages, Malay, Acehnese and Minangkabau added to the already rich stock of narrative material. Narrative elements, such as plots, protagonists, scenes, descriptive passages, textual dreams and other narrative devices, moved freely from one narrative practice to the other, crossing boundaries that divided languages and media. An example of this phenomenon in a Sumatran context is found in the *Story of Princess Balkis* and her meeting with the Prophet Sulaiman. Written prose versions of this story exist in Sumatra's three major languages: Acehnese, Malay and Minangkabau (Gerth van Wijk 1881; Alamsjah B. 1993). It is assumed that the origins of several Batak narratives can be traced to a Minangkabau-Malay original. A first phase of such a cultural crossover could have had the form of a Minangkabau-Malay story written in Mandailing script. Van der Tuuk saw such a text – the *Story of King Orang Muda* (Hikayat Tuanku Orang Muda) or – during his trip to Angkola and Mandailing in 1852 (Groeneboer 2002, 123).

[66] Mulaika Hijjas (2011) explains the revival of Malay writing in the Riau/Johore region in the nineteenth century in a similar way.

The itineraries of most derivations and adaptations seem impossible to trace, although further study may reveal cross-cultural relationships between texts.

Malay writing on the northwest coast of Sumatra was profoundly influenced by Minangkabau narrative practices and the Minangkabau language. The use of Minangkabau vocabulary, spelling characteristics, stock scenes and characters, and Minangkabau genre indicators such as *tambo* and *kaba* attest to this.[67] This picture fits in with what was said earlier; that is, that Sumatra's west coast, Barus included, had been host to a Minangkabau diaspora since at least the sixteenth century. Modern-day linguists even consider the local variant of spoken Malay to be Minangkabau (Wurm and Mühlhäusler 1996, map 68). With such a conspicuous Minangkabau presence in the coastal areas of North Sumatra, it is not surprising to find texts written in the Minangkabau language in Barus.[68] One of the copyists who assisted Van der Tuuk in Barus, *si* Liek, was probably of Minangkabau origin. He was the copyist of several Minangkabau stories for Van der Tuuk: *Story of Malim Deman* (Kaba Malim Deman), *Story of Ahmad* (*Hikayat Ahmad)*, a moral warning against self-exaltation, *Si Sakapiang*, and a short story on the illicit relation between a princess and the son of a *penghulu*.[69] At least one copy of a Minangkabau law digest or *Undang-Undang Minangkabau* was available in Barus.[70] The *hilir* ruler, *Sutan* Ibrahim, who was of Minangkabau-Malay lineage, owned a copy of the Minangkabau *Story of Malin Deman* (Kaba Malim Deman).[71] Two other Minangkabau stories, which we know were collected in Barus, are *Story of the Murai Batu Bird* (Hikayat Si Kicau Murai Batu) and *Story of the Monkey Who Climbed a Durian Tree* (Kaba Baruak Mamanjek Durian).[72]

To give an idea of how the Minangkabau element in Barus' society coloured Malay texts that are rooted in northwest coast soil, I turn to the *Story of Bahram Syah*. Although it is a Malay reworking of an Acehnese story, the *SBS* displays Minangkabau influence on the level of language, spelling and content. First, the text contains a considerable number of Minangkabau words. Some have an equivalent in Malay, while others are specific to Minangkabau. Examples of the first are: *kutiko* (Malay: *ketika*, 'when,' 'mo-

[67] The textual category of *tambo* comprises traditional Minangkabau historiographies, whereas *kaba* is used for long prose narratives that were often exemplary of the ideal conduct in life.

[68] The relative size of Minangkabau writing in Barus compared to local Malay writing is difficult to determine. Moreover, such an investigation goes beyond the aim of this study.

[69] Respectively Cod. Or. 3204, 3203 2, 3, 4 and 5. Cod. Or. 3204 is ascribed to *si* Liek on the basis of the handwriting; his hand is quite characteristic. *Si* Sakapiang tells the story of a child the size of a '*kapiang*' or coin. He is born as result of a hasty wish by his parents. A childless couple prayed to have a child, however small it would be. Their prayer was answered and *si* Sakapiang was born to them (Wieringa 2007, 34–47, 137–139).

[70] Cod. Or. 3260 I, 52v.

[71] Cod. Or. 3203 1. See also Wieringa 2007, 34–37.

[72] Cod. Or. 3205 1 and Cod. Or. 3295 3. The *Hikayat Si Kicau Murai Batu* recounts a dramatic romance; its title refers to the *murai batu* bird, which acts as a go-between and advisor to Princess Canda Dewi in the story (Wieringa 2007, 39–41, 191–192).

ment'), *tindawan* (Malay: *cendawan*, 'mushroom'), *mantahari* (Malay: *matahari*, 'sun'), and *pansan*, (Malay: *pingsan*, 'to swoon'). Representative for the second group are *nian* ('really'), *mangulisa* ('to move'), *mamupue* ('to pick'), *kucikak* ('a joke'), *salapan* ('eight'), and *kuhue* (''to cough'). Furthermore, the text's spelling is marked by spelling practices commonly referred to as *pemelayuan* or Malayization. *Pemelayuan* is the practice of writing Minangkabau words that have a Malay counterpart as Malay words. This convention came about in the nineteenth century, when the *jawi* script, originally adapted for writing in the Malay language, was used by the Dutch to write down the Minangkabau oral (Muhardi s.n., 7). The following examples taken from the *SBS* illustrate this spelling convention: the Minangkabau word for rice, *bareh,* is spelled *baras* (Malay: *beras*). The Minangkabau word for 'to fetch' or 'to collect' is *manjapui'*; in *jawi* script it is spelled *menjaput* (Malay: *menjemput). Manjamue* (Minangkabau, 'to dry') is spelled as *menjamur* (Malay: *menjemur*). And lastly, *tabieng* (Minangkabau, 'river bank') is spelled as *tabing* (Malay: *tebing*).

The society that is depicted in the *SBS* is easily recognizable as Sumatran *pesisir* Malay: a coastal Malay society marked by Minangkabau elements.[73] References to Minangkabau culture include the honorific title *Marah* for male members of the aristocracy and the golden *rangkiang* or rice barn that Bahram Syah is challenged to erect; the latter is a specifically Minangkabau architectural form (*SBS* 60a). Next, the character of *Rajo* Ange' Garang or King Fierce and Fiery in the *SBS* is known as a stock character in several West Sumatran narrative traditions. In these, he is presented as a cruel and wicked person, like his Malay counterpart in the *SBS* (*SBS* 10b–12a). When, in the *SBS*, Bahram Syah wishes to wed Princess Wandering Beach Hibiscus Flower, he is subjected to a series of tests. One of these involves the production of a huge piece of cloth to cover the mountain Soaring Cloud (*SBS* 61a–62b). The image of a miraculous cloth that can cover mountains and even cities, but fits in a single fist when folded, similarly derives from West Sumatra.[74] And finally, there is the intrusion of the Minangkabau language in the Malay text that reveals the Minangkabau-Malay background of the text's author (or copyist, for that matter). It concerns a curse uttered by Grandmother Kebayan, the old lady who adopts Bahram Syah as her son. When, in the *SBS*, Bahram Syah directly addresses the princess in Grandmother Kebayan's presence, his adoptive mother pretends to be furious with him, because of this inappropriate behaviour. She threatens to smack him and curses him loudly in her 'native' tongue, Minangkabau: "Hai anak Singiang-ngiang rimbo, anak Bincacak Kaling kuduang, anak Katumbi aleh sandi, anak pamalik batang buruak!" (*SBS* 34a). This translates as "Oh son of the ghost Singiang-ngiang, who lives in the woods!

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73 These correspondences will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

74 This image refers to a well-known Minangkabau metaphoric saying: *Dibalun seujung kuku, dikembang saleba alam* or 'Rolled up as small as a nail, unfolded as wide as the world' (Moussay 1995, 640; personal communication with Suryadi, Leiden, 24 June 2014).

Son of Bincacak, child of Singiang-ngiang. You maimed Kling![75] Son of the ghost named Ketumbi who lives under the cornerpole of the house! Son of the ghost who resides in dead tree trunks!"(*SBS* 34a).

Although less pronounced than the Minangkabau colouring, Batak influence can be pointed out in some of the Malay writings from Barus. Like other port villages on Sumatra's west coast, Barus was a Malay enclave in a region inhabited by other ethno-cultural groups. The hinterland was home to Batak, whose forefathers had come down from their mountainous homeland to settle on the flat, coastal strip bordering the Indian Ocean. The Barus *mudik* dynasty traced its ancestry back to these Batak settlers. In the mid-nineteenth century, the prospect of a good profit from maritime trade was still attracting Batak to the coast; most of these newcomers settled in the *mudik* compound. They brought their languages, writings and narratives with them. The extensive collection of Batak texts that were gathered by Van der Tuuk in Barus and environs is evidence of the presence of once lively Batak textual practices in Barus and environs (Brakel-Papenhuyzen 2007, 2014; Voorhoeve 1977). Beside the impressive number of 152 *pustaha* and numerous inscribed bamboo strips, the collection contains 25 bound volumes with oral narratives that have been noted down by Van der Tuuk and his Batak assistants.[76]

Specific Batak terms mark the *mudik* chronicle *Origins of the Raja Barus*. Of another Malay historical text connected with the *mudik* settlement, Chambert-Loir states that its linguistic particularities seem to suggest that the Malay text is a translation of a text in one of the regional languages (Drakard 1990, 61; Chambert-Loir 2009, 507–528). Considering the mixed Batak-Malay ancestry of the *mudik* ruler, this was probably a Batak language. While on a linguistic level, the *SBS* does not seem to contain Batak particularities, some of its passages find parallels in Batak stories. The journey of Bahram Syah and his brothers up until the point they part ways at the three-forked path is reminiscent of a Batak story about two brothers named *si* Aji Panurat and *si* Aji Pamasa. Furthermore, the motif of the three grateful animals is also found in the Batak Story of *si* Parmiskin (Voorhoeve 1927, 103; 155–156).[77] Bahram Syah's futile hunt for a pregnant male deer that starts off the second plot of the *SBS* shows resemblances to a Dairi creation story

[75] '*Kling*' or '*Keling*' refers to South Indians. In Malay writing it is often used in a derogatory way.

[76] Batak narratives were almost without exception oral. The *pustaha* contained secret knowledge on topics such as divination and medicine. Short texts on bamboo or pieces of bone include love letters, threatening letters, laments and writing exercises. In some cases, the writing was considered potent and the piece of bamboo or bone was kept as a charm (Durie 1996b, 231–252). Voorhoeve's PhD thesis (1927) and Clara Brakel-Papenhuyzen's recent publication *Dairi Stories and Pakpak Storytelling* (2014) are rich sources of stories in the various Batak languages.

[77] On the motif of the lost ring and its retrieval by three animals in the different narrative tradition in the Archipelago, see De Vries, 1925, 382.

(*SBS* 67a–70b).[78] The latter tale relates how the pregnant wife of the divine Creator in heaven asks him for the meat of a pregnant male mouse deer. Upon hearing this request, the Creator orders his assistant, with his seven ferocious hunting dogs, to go out on a hunt for the animal (Brakel-Papenhuyzen 2007, 16–18). It is illustrative of Barus' multicultural narrative field that correspondences are found in Malay narratives as well. The tale with the three grateful animals, which retrieve a stolen object for their master, is known from other Malay stories. And the Dairi creation myth is strikingly similar to a widely disseminated Malay oral story on a much feared male ghost called *hantu pemburu* or spectre huntsman.

Acehnese narrative and non-narrative texts were particularly known in the *hilir* community. Seafarers and traders from the harbours to the north of Barus brought the tales – in both oral and written form – to the other west coast ports. A copy of Nuruddin al-Raniri's *Tibyān* that was acquired by Van der Tuuk in Barus, for instance, can be linked to Aceh on the basis of its spelling characteristics (Voorhoeve 1955a, 24; 1955b, 156). But the Acehnese contribution to Malay writing from the northwest coast is epitomized by the *SBS*. The story was written on Sumatra's northwest coast based on a renowned Acehnese narrative that is linked to the region directly north of Barus.[79]

To recapitulate, in the 1850s, the relatively small coastal community of Barus was the scene of a varied Malay writing practice comprising various types of Malay texts. Most of the works that circulated in Barus between 1851 and 1857 were produced outside the region. Among the few original writings are Barus' court chronicles and adaptions of texts that derived from other places, in Archipelago and beyond. Lastly, the analysis of the titles and textual categories that were encountered in Barus yields two findings. First, Malay writing occupied an important place in Barus' society and its significance was based on the multiple functions the writings fulfilled within that society. And second, the presence of a fully developed writing practice in a relatively small community with limited literacy can only be explained by the fact that Malay writing in Barus formed part of a larger textual network that stretched Sumatra's west coast.

The number of Malay writings that were circulating in the relatively small town of Barus must have been considerable. The 58 titles that have been traced so far only offer us a peek at the complete picture of Malay writing in Barus. The relative scale of Malay writing practices on the northwest coast becomes even more remarkable when one takes into account the fact that literacy in *jawi* script was quite low, as many 'Malays' were, in fact, recently converted Batak. But the reach of Malay writings was wider than one would expect it to be in a small, semi-literate society. Malay writings were not only read in

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[78] The story is found in Van der Tuuk's collection of Batak texts: Cod. Or. 3420, 392: *Permungkahen Pertengahan Ena*.

[79] Chapter 6 addresses the relation between the Malay *SBS* and the Acehnese *SBB* in detail.

private, but also recited before an audience. This way, the illiterate part of the community was able to participate in local Malay narrative practices.

The Malay works from Barus offer a unique opportunity to investigate the relations between the writings and genres, and the time and place of their production and consumption. As has been argued, recent changes in local politics and the loss of the chiefs' sovereignty to the Dutch instigated the composition or adaptation of texts associated with the two ruling houses of Barus. At the same time, Islamization led to a growing demand for religious works and hence prompted the production of new writings, adaptations and translations. Moreover, the presence of religious works that advocate a more orthodox branch of Islam, in addition to writings that expound Sufi doctrine and practices, form a reflection of the religious competition that was going on in nineteenth-century North and Central Sumatra. In short, Malay writings educated, propagated and legitimated, while often, at the same time, they entertained the reader or audience.

These conclusions challenge the idea that is implicitly or explicitly conveyed by many publications on Malay writing; that is, that Malay writing is considered a homogeneous practice throughout the Malay World and over several centuries. If historical particularities have, at least partly, determined the nature of Barus' Malay writing practices, then this might also have been the case in other places were Malay writings were composed, copied and read. In this chapter, it has been argued that localized Malay writing practices, besides the elements they shared with Malay writings from other times and places, had their own distinctive character. Features such as the kinds of writings that were read, the relative numbers of the extant writings and the marked presence of specific themes or topics covered, together define the specifics of localized Malay writing. On the necessity to turn our attention to examples of these regional writing practices, Drakard remarks:

> We still know little about the way in which language, style and the use of literary conventions vary between texts and between regions, and the study of local literature, [...], is one means of identifying the *presence of specific content and form* [emphasis mine] in the context of conventional literary features and genre expectations (Drakard 1990, 74).

Unfortunately, to date, not much research has been done in this field. As mentioned above, it proves difficult to create a suitable research corpus of texts on the basis of extant Malay manuscripts. Some collections are limited to one specific environment, such as the private collection of the sultan of Bima (Mulyadi 1990–1992). Others bear the stamp of the predilections of their nineteenth-century Western collectors. There are lists drawn up by European observers with titles of Malay works that were known at a particular place and time. For instance, Den Hamer listed all long narrative writings in prose and verse that circulated in Banjarmasin, Kalimantan, in the 1880s (Den Hamer 1890, 531–564). But such lists often only include titles that were of direct interest to the compiler. Writings that represent other genres were not included: historical writings, books on

medicine and divination, religious works, writings dealing with *adat*, and so on. To gain a complete view of a localized Malay literature, one needs to have access to a wide variety of texts, from diverse social groups. This is exactly what Van der Tuuk has made possible. With his developed social skills and strong dedication to his work he managed to gather texts from different social environments.

It is argued that Malay writing in Barus was sustained by its participation in a larger, west-coast complex of Malay writings. This network was defined by a notable Minangkabau colouring. In turn, it was linked through Barus' trade, religious and social contacts with Penang and Java to a yet larger web of Malay textual practices that covered the Malay World. The west coast yielded writings that Drakard has described as "frontier writings": with themes such as settlement, travel, relations between *mudik* and *hilir* and consensus between different groups of a society. These themes, I contend, not only occur in Malay historical writings where they are expected to feature, but also in Malay adventure stories, such as the *SBS*.[80] Besides their frontier character, there is another angle these works can be viewed from. Many Malay works that were written, copied, translated, adapted and consumed in Sumatra's coastal regions fit Overbeck's category of *dagang* or traders' writings. In Overbeck's review of Hooykaas' *Over Maleische literatuur* (1937) he pleads for the distinction between different categories of Malay writing based on the different environments in which the texts were produced and consumed: court literature, *dagang* literature and folk literature (Overbeck 1938). The world of *dagang* writings painted by Overbeck was inhabited by men like the Muslim *syaikh* and author Daud from Sunur, the west-coast trader Muhammad Saleh and *Haji* 'Abd al-Manāf al-Jududuh in Sorkam, grandson of an illustrious Khalidiyya Sufi *syaikh* and *si* Liek, the Minangkabau-Malay scribe. It is a world where writers, learned Muslim men, rulers cum merchants, traders and seafarers shared the same space. They travelled the same route along the coasts and shared lodgings, boats, books, stories and beliefs. Malay was their common language. Most of them lived itinerant lives and, thus, were true *dagang*.[81]

This chapter examined Malay writing in relation to the 'local.' But since all Malay texts are also tied to a larger network spanning the Malay World, they must also be studied in the framework of Malay writing in general. Therefore, Chapters 4 and 5 investigate the *SBS* as part of a second group of Malay texts, consisting of works from various places and ages. However, two issues have not yet been discussed here; that is, the problematic categorization of the writings from Barus, and the negative judgement of Malay adventure stories by collectors and scholars in the past. These will be dealt with first in the following chapter.

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[80] Chapter 6 discusses in depth the relation between the world depicted in the *SBS* and the world outside the text.

[81] In Malay, *dagang* ('trader') is also used to mean 'wanderer.' On *dagang* in the *SBS*, see Chapter 6.