

# The Malacca Empire: Sayings of Prophet Muhammad in Sulalat Al-Salatin

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**Abstract**—In the fifteenth century, the Malacca Empire emerged as the centre of Islamic civilization in the Malay Archipelago. The history had been recorded in Sulalat Al-Salatin, an important literary source about the genealogy of all Kings in Malacca. The objective of this study was to analyze the understanding of sayings from Prophet Muhammad among Malays in Malacca during the fifteenth century through all of the hadith quoted in Sulalat Al-Salatin. This study used content analysis methodology to validate the sayings where all of them were critically analyzed and compared with the classical hadith sources from prominent Muslim scholars. As a result, only two out of the four quotations were considered as authentic sayings of Prophet Muhammad. This study also showed the importance of the palace as the centre of the Islamic education system and the role played by Muslim preachers from outside of Malacca to propagate Islam in Malacca.

**Keywords**—Hadith in Malay Annals, Malay Annals, Sejarah Melayu, Sulalat Al-Salatin.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THE Sulalat Al-Salatin or also known as *Sejarah Melayu* has become one of the most important sources of historical facts about the Malacca Empire as one of the important seaports in the Malay Archipelago during the fifteenth century. The Sulalat Al-Salatin was written using classical Malay language in *Jawi* script. The original title of this book was in Arabic and the author translated it as “*Petuturan Raja-raja Melayu*” or the Genealogy of the Malay Kings. Among scholars, this manuscript is widely known as the Malay Annals [1][2][3] or *Sejarah Melayu* [4][5]. Consequently, the main theme of this book relates to the genealogy of the Kings, the history of the Malaccan kingdom that began in early fifteenth century until it was conquered by the Portuguese in 1511, and its relationship with other civilizations namely Java, Arab, China, India and Europe.

The issue of who authored this historical manuscript has been discussed and debated in many previous studies. Reference [6] concluded that the author of the manuscript drafted the book in Malacca and died shortly after 1535. The

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true identity of the author who first drafted the manuscript remains, until today, unknown [7]. Raja Bongsu, who was then the King of Johor, gave the order to Tun Bambang in 1612 to start editing the Sulalat Al-Salatin and he probably completed his work while in captivity in Aceh [8]. However, [9] strongly disagrees with [8] and stressed that this book was in fact written by Tun Seri Lanang, who had been the Bendahara (Chief Minister) of Johor since the 1580s. Another study even suggested that the editor may have come from Perak or from the northern regions of Peninsula Malaysia [1].

With these disagreements among scholars [1][6]-[9], the true author of this book remains anonymous. Nevertheless, it was believed that both Tun Seri Lanang and Tun Bambang were involved in the process of copying and editing the manuscript. Moreover, the contribution of Tun Seri Lanang to this manuscript cannot be denied as his name appears in many variant versions of this manuscript [10]. Among the main reasons why different historical figures have been associated with the author or editor is the existence of variant copies of Sulalat Al-Salatin which have been preserved in many libraries throughout the world including in Malaysia, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Indonesia and Russia.

A study by Roolvink [11], in which all 28 copies of the manuscripts, excluding the manuscripts from Malaysia and Russia were examined, concluded that all of the manuscripts are late copies and the earliest copy was only dated as early as the nineteenth century. A more recent finding revealed that the manuscript in Russia is dated back to 1798, which can be considered as the earliest copy compared to the other manuscripts [12]. The Sulalat Al-Salatin has been transcribed into Roman alphabets and translated into many languages including English, Dutch, French, Russian, Chinese and Japanese starting as early as the nineteenth century.

In the past, many scholars focused their studies about Sulalat Al-Salatin only from the literature and linguistics point of views. In addition, it has been considered as the best of all Malay literary works [7]. This literature marked the beginning of Malay Muslim literature when Quranic verses and Islamic terminologies started to appear in and provide substance to the story, although the elements of Hinduism and Buddhism can still be found especially at the beginning of the book [13]. This was the result of the transition period from old Malay literature which was influenced mostly by Hindu-Buddhist elements to a new Malay Muslim literature system when the King of Malacca embraced Islam.

The analysis of the sentence structure and words has been done by many scholars including [14][15][16][17]. Moreover,

the elements of Hinduism in this literature have also been analyzed and the conclusion made from this analysis was that there was a close cultural relationship between the Malay Archipelago and India [18]. Another study analyzed the structure of the writing in Sulalat Al-Salatin and found that the anecdotes were written not only to record the facts of history, but also to serve as a medium for political propaganda in which the King used to elevate his political stature by providing a politically biased version of the history [19].

To provide an Islamic point of view, a recent study about the Quranic verses in this literature had been done and it was found that one of the Kings had misquoted a verse and used it in a wrong context [20]. However, no specific study has been conducted to analyze the hadith or sayings of Prophet Muhammad in this literature.

Thus, this study aims to identify all of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad which were written in Arabic and analyze the context of their usage among Malays in the Malacca Empire. In the final analysis, it is hoped that the findings of this study will help scholars evaluate the understanding of Malay Muslim towards the hadith and the entente of Islam had on the Malay culture and identity during the fifteenth century.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study used content analysis methodology where the hadith or sayings which were claimed as coming from Prophet Muhammad in Sulalat Al-Salatin will be validated through classical hadith literatures to check its authenticity. The understanding and usage of the hadith in Sulalat Al-Salatin was compared with the hadith commentaries from prominent Muslim scholars to gauge the level of understanding for the hadith. At the end, it was expected that all of the sayings were validated and the depth of the impact of the hadiths on the Malay Muslim society during the fifteenth century in Malacca can be understood.

## III. FINDINGS

All Muslim scholars unanimously agreed that the hadith is one of the primary sources of Islamic law besides al-Quran. Literally, hadith means communication, story, and conversation. Technically, it refers to what was transmitted on the authority of the Prophet Muhammad, who died in 632 AD, including all of his deeds, sayings or tacit approvals [21]. Nevertheless, the word hadith in this study is focused only on the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad which was written using Arabic script in the body of Sulalat Al-Salatin excluding the long preface.

The version that has been referred to is the version known as MS Raffles No. 18 which has been romanised and transcribed from the original *Jawi* manuscript by Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail from Universiti Sains Malaysia. Based on this version, four hadiths were identified.

The hadiths according to the chronological order in which they appear in the text, are as follow:

### A. "*Min tawakkal 'alaLahi kafi*"

The hadith has been mentioned by Sultan Mansur in his will before he died. He reminded his successor, Raja Radin to put his trust to Allah in all matters so that Allah will bless him.

### B. "*Kullukum ra'in wakullukum masulun min ra'iyati*"

This hadith was mentioned by Sultan Alauddin before he died in his will to his successor, Raja Mamat. He reminded Raja Mamat to always help the people and not abuse them. Sultan Alauddin drove home this point by mentioning the hadith. He also translated it as "all of you are shepherds and all of you are responsible for it." He later explained that all Kings are responsible for his people and that in the hereafter, God will ask them about how they carried their responsibilities towards their people when they ruled.

### C. "*Al-'Abdu tinul murabbi*"

The translation is "the slave is like the ground for his master". This hadith was mentioned by Sultan Alauddin in his will before he died. He reminded his successor not to simply execute anybody except by valid reasons as indicated by God's law and he used the hadith to support his advice.

### D. "*Al-Khamru ummul khabais*"

The translation is "alcoholic drink is the mother of all evils". In the story, when Makhdam Sadar Jahan saw Seri Rama who was drunk and he smelled alcohol on his breath, he mentioned the hadith to advice Seri Rama about the danger of alcoholic drinks.

## IV. DISCUSSION

### A. "*Min tawakkal 'alaLahi kafi*"

In the story, it is clearly mentioned that the saying came from Prophet Muhammad. However, the saying is actually *not* a hadith from Prophet Muhammad. In addition, the word "*min*" in the hadith should be written as "*man*" to give the correct meaning of the sentence. Therefore, the meaning of the saying should be "whoever puts his trust in Allah, He will suffice him."

Although the Sultan had misquoted it as a hadith, the saying is still relevant and can be found in classical Muslim literature. For example, it has been quoted by Ibn Kathir when he explained the meaning of verse eleven of the fifth chapter in the Quran which means "O ye who believe! Remember Allah's favor unto you, how a people were minded to stretch out their hands against you but He withheld their hands from you; and keep your duty to Allah. In Allah let believers put their trust."

In this verse, God explained that He will protect the believers when they become very good Muslims and put their trust in Allah. This verse relates to a hadith that narrates the story of Prophet Muhammad who was protected by God from being killed by a person who had already got a sword in his hand, while the Prophet was resting under a tree. To conclude this verse, Ibn Kathir wrote "*man tawakkal 'ala Allah kafahu*" which means that whoever puts his trust in Allah, He will

suffice him and he will be protected from bad people [22].

More importantly, based on the saying, the Sultan emphasized the concept of "*tawakkal*" to be applied by his successor. *Tawakkal* is to completely put one's trust and reliance in Allah. The prophet said, as reported by al-Tirmizi "If you put your complete trust and reliance on Allah, He will provide for you as He provides for the birds. They feel hungry in the morning but they return filled in the evening" [23].

However, this does not mean that Muslims must put their trusts completely in Allah without making any effort to change their lives. Muslims are taught to give their best effort in all endeavors and only after the efforts have been carried out do they submit their trusts to Allah. This concept is very important to instill peace in their hearts and minds and encourage them to always do their best in life.

This is not a new concept but it has been stated clearly in many verses in the Quran, for example verse three in chapter 65. In this verse, it is clearly stated that "And whoever puts his trust in Allah, He will suffice him." The trust to God is only applicable after the person has tried his best effort to complete his responsibility, because the consequence of his actions will be determined by God. In this case, the Sultan advised his successor to give his best effort to rule his country. Only after he had done so, he should put his trust in God since God will determine the success or failure of his efforts to rule his country.

#### B. "*Kullukum ra'in wakullukum masulun min ra'iyati*"

This hadith is the beginning of a longer hadith text and it was mentioned in many classical hadith literatures. For instance, Al-Bukhari had mentioned it eight times in his book [24] and it was also mentioned by Muslim [25] and Abu Dawud [26]. However, there is a minor difference with the original hadith text where the phrase "*min ra'iyati*" should have been replaced with "*an ra'iyati*."

This hadith is considered as an authentic hadith (*hadith sahih*) because it fulfills the requirements of an authentic hadith, such as having the continuity of the chain of narrators, not being an isolated hadith (*shadh*) and not containing any hidden defects [21].

The translation of the full text of this hadith from Sahih Al-Bukhari is "All of you are guardians and all of you are responsible for the things under your care. The ruler is the guardian of his subjects and he is responsible for them. And a man is the guardian of his family and he is responsible for them. And a woman is the guardian of her husband's house and she is responsible for it. And a servant is the guardian of his master's belongings and he is responsible for them."

Based on this hadith, the prophet reminds Muslims about the responsibility of each individual in the society especially the responsibility of the leader towards his people. In Islam, everybody has his or her own responsibility including the housewife and the slave. The higher their positions are in the society, the more responsibility they will have. Therefore, everybody from all levels of society must fulfill his or her responsibility and be accountable for it in front of God in

hereafter.

This is a very important reminder from the King to his successor before he becomes ascending to the throne because ordinary citizens were not allowed to simply advice or reminds the King about his responsibilities towards his people. In addition, since the King is the highest authority in the country, he is accountable for every matter in his country.

This reminder also shows that Sultan Alauddin was a religious ruler and learnt about that hadith, understood its meaning and applied it during his reign. His responsibilities towards his people can be seen clearly when he went undercover at night and together with his assistant, managed to catch thieves who had become the biggest problem in Malacca during that time [5].

#### C. "*Al-'Abdu tinul murabbi*"

The saying which was claimed by Sultan Alauddin as a hadith is in fact *not* a hadith. This saying as recorded in Sulalat Al-Salatin associated the slaves with clay. From Islamic perspective, clay has always been related with the creation of Adam as a slave of God and vicegerent on this earth.

When God created Adam, He used clay as mentioned in many Quranic verses. For example, in verse two, chapter six of the Quran, God said that "It is He Who created you from clay." Therefore, every Muslim scholar unanimously agreed that Adam, as the first human being, was created from clay.

Since every human being is a descendent of Adam, it indirectly shows that human beings originated from clay. It is very important to remind people about their origins so that nobody can claim that their nations or tribes are better than the other.

In Islam, the best among human beings is not according to their specific nations or races, but it is based purely on their deeds and good actions as the most righteous of Muslims based on verse 49:13 of the Quran which means "O mankind! We have indeed created you from a male and a female (which is Adam and Eve), and made you nations and tribes so that you may come to know one another. Truly the noblest of you in the sight of God is the most God-fearing among you."

Therefore, although the saying is not the word of Prophet Muhammad, it is still relevant as an important advice to the successor of the King to always treat his people justly as all human beings are created equal because we were all created from clay.

#### D. "*Al-Khamru ummul khabais*"

The hadith comes from Makhdam Sadar Jahan, one of the Muslim scholars who was in Malacca during the reign of Sultan Mahmud. It is the beginning of a long hadith text and the full translation as reported by Al-Daruqutni is "Alcoholic drink is the mother of all evils. And whoever drinks it, Allah will not accept his prayers for forty days. And if he dies and the alcoholic drink is still in his stomach, he will die as those who died in the period of ignorance" [27]. Al-Albani agreed that this hadith is considered as an authentic saying of Prophet Muhammad [28].

During the early period of Islam, alcoholic drink is not totally prohibited. For example, it has been stated in verse 4:43 of the Quran which means "O believers! Do not approach your prayers when you are in a state of drunkenness, but wait till you can grasp the meaning of what you utter". Later on, it was gradually prohibited based on the verse 5:90 of the Quran when God said "O believers! Wine and gambling, idols, and divining arrows are (all of them) abominations devised by Satan. Avoid them, so that you may prosper." After the verse was revealed, it was clear that alcoholic drinks were totally prohibited in Islam.

In the time of Malacca, it is believed that the Muslim scholar in this story, Makhdum Sadar Jahan, was not a Malay. Based on his name, it is suggested that his origins is either Indian or Persian. Moreover, it is clearly stated in the story that he arrived in Malacca from another country via sea [5].

From the story, it showed that Malacca at that time faced the serious problem of alcoholic drinking because one of its important officials in the palace was also an alcoholic. In Islamic perspective, all Muslim scholars agreed that alcoholic drinks are forbidden based on verse 5:90 of the Quran. This problem did not occur in the early period of the Malacca Empire, but it had been highlighted by the author of Sulalat Al-Salatin during the last period of this empire before it was conquered by the Portuguese in 1511.

Since Malacca was one of the most important Islamic centers in the Malay Archipelago, this cardinal sin must be prevented from becoming widespread in the society especially in the palace. Furthermore, the King might have known about the bad attitude of Seri Rama who was always drunk because it happened in his palace but the King neither did something to stop him from practicing this bad attitude nor fired him from his important position in the palace. This had become one of the weaknesses of the ruler during that time which consequently led to the weakening of the Malacca Empire and later its fall into the hands of the Portuguese.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Four Arabic quotes were found in Sulalat Al-Salatin which were claimed as hadith or sayings of Prophet Muhammad. From all of the quotes, only two are correctly identified as authentic sayings of Prophet Muhammad while the other two are not hadiths. The first hadith was mentioned by Sultan Alauddin which shows that he was among the religious King of Malacca who understood the hadith and used it to remind his successor about the responsibility of a good and fair ruler. It proves that Sultan Alauddin was one of the religious Kings of Malacca where his quotation on hadith was correctly used in his will. The second hadith was mentioned by Makhdum Sadar Jahan, a Muslim scholar as an advice on the negative effect of alcoholism, which indirectly shows that this was a serious problem that existed in Malacca during that time.

From all of these analyses, it is clear that the people of Malacca at this time were not so familiar with the field of hadith because they were not able to distinguish clearly a

hadith from a normal Arabic saying as evident through the mixing of both in the Sulalat Al-Salatin. Additionally, it also shows that Islam had a high impact on the Malay culture and identity as manifested by the use of the quotations of hadith by the King of Malacca. In another perspective, the spreading of Islamic knowledge in this region had been done systematically by Muslim scholars from other regions. Consequently, in the future, it is recommended to study the Malay perspective of Islam and how Islam was portrayed by the Malays based on the manuscript of Sulalat Al-Salatin.

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