ACQUISITION OF MALAY MANUSCRIPTS BY THE CENTRE FOR MALAY MANUSCRIPTS, PERPUSTAKAAN NEGARA MALAYSIA: AN OVERVIEW

by

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ABSTRACT

Kertas ini memberi tinjauan mengenai koleksi manuskrip Melayu Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia terutama mengenai dasar perolehan serta aktiviti Pusat Manuskrip Melayu. Pengarang juga membantu penilaian kekuatan dan kelemahan koleksi dari aspek keteguhan perkara. Deskripsi beberapa manuskrip tertua dalam koleksi turut diberikan.

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a general overview of the Malay manuscripts collection, particularly the acquisition policies and activities of the Centre for Malay Manuscripts. An assessment of the subject strengths and weaknesses of the collection will also be made. Some of the earliest manuscripts available in the collection are also described.

BACKGROUND

Handwritten manuscripts in the Malay language or Malay manuscript in short reflects the intellectual development and depth of the Malays. They are an important part of the cultural legacy and wealth of the Malay people, embodying their thinking and culture from early times. As such it is often expressed as the cultural and intellectual heritage of the Malay people. It is the medium by which the Malays record their experience, knowledge and intellectual thinking considered of significance, not only for their own learning and reference but also for use by later generations. Every aspect of knowledge: history, religious beliefs, medicine, literature, social etiquette, law, etc. are dealt with in Malay manuscripts.

Libraries in the country have been very selective in acquiring Malay manuscripts. Manuscripts are not given priority in acquisition, and are usually considered as part of the Malaysiana collection. The difficulty in tracing, maintenance, high cost and the select group of users compared to printed materials are factors which contribute toward the development of the attitude. Among museums, manuscripts were acquired very selectively mainly for exhibition and not for research. The voice of concerned groups such as historical and literary associations and Malay literati were basically ineffective to change the situation.

Until recently, the conservation of Malay manuscripts in Malaysia was not given serious attention. Malay manuscripts in the hands of individuals were not cared for properly, mainly due to ignorance of the preservation methods and lack...
of facilities. The manuscripts were usually kept together with other books, kitabs and journals on book shelves, which would easily collect dust and exposed to insects. The hot and humid climate of the country is also a major cause of deterioration. Some of the individual owners even considered them as materials of little value, more or less as "scrapbooks" of history that could be disposed when the time comes.

Since the early days when the Malays first learned to write and read, especially after Islam was introduced to the region, culminating in the introduction of the Jawi script, thousands of Malay manuscripts have been written. These manuscripts covered a wide range of subject which reflects the rich cultural and high intellectual attainment of the Malays.

**THE CENTRE FOR MALAY MANUSCRIPTS**

Many individuals and organizations have voiced their concern about the state of affairs of Malay manuscripts in this country. There were no institution that was ready to take the responsibility due to several reasons such as financial, staffing, academic and technical expertise. The concern becomes a reality when the then Director-General of the National Library of Malaysia, Dato' Hashim Sam Abdul Latiff took an active part in the matter and proposed the Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia as the national institution to be responsible for Malay manuscripts in this country. Furthermore, the library already have conservation facilities.

Recognising the need to preserve the intellectual and cultural heritage of the Malays, The Honourable Anwar Ibrahim, the then Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, designated Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia as the National Centre for Malay Manuscripts on October 10, 1983. In 1985, the Centre for Malay Manuscripts was formally set up as a division of Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia to carry out the function. Since then, Perpustakaan Negara has taken various steps to build up expertise relating to Malay manuscripts, academically and professionally.

The functions of the Centre are as follows:

a. To trace and acquire Malay manuscripts irrespective of form.

b. To document Malay manuscripts, maintain a union catalogue and publish bibliographies.

c. To provide facilities for storage, preservation and reproduction of Malay manuscripts.

d. To provide facilities for research relating to Malay manuscripts.

e. To disseminate the knowledge available in Malay manuscripts through publication, research and exhibition activities.

**DEFINITION OF MALAY MANUSCRIPTS**

The Centre for Malay Manuscripts has defined Malay manuscripts thus:

*Malay manuscripts are handwritten texts relating to all aspects of Malay civilisation written on all forms of writing materials.*

Within this definition Malay manuscripts are further identified as:

i. Manuscripts in the Malay language.

ii. Manuscripts in the languages of the Malay stock especially those closely related to the Malay language.

**ACQUISITION POLICIES**

When the Centre was first set up in 1985, the number of Malay manuscripts in the collection of Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia was very small. There were 142 volumes of original Malay manuscripts and 3 rolls of microfilm in the collection. The acquisition of Malay manuscripts by the Library prior to 1985 was undertaken as part of building up the Malaysiana collection.

Soon after the Centre for Malay Manuscripts was set up, the tracing and acquisition of Malay manuscripts was given priority. A special budgetary allocation for the purchase of Malay manuscripts was set aside every year, though the amount was quite minimal.

Very often, the amount required to purchase Malay manuscripts exceeded the allocation. Thus, many manuscripts have to be paid for from the following year's budget.

The Centre was successful in acquiring a large number of Malay manuscripts during the period (1985-1988). The success can be partly attributed to the acquisition policy during the period which stresses on both quantity and quality. The stated policy of acquiring Malay manuscripts was the Centre for Malay Manuscripts will acquire all available Malay manuscripts irrespective of their subject content,
completeness and degree of damage. The policy was made as such in order to preserve whatever manuscripts available in the country and to build up a basic collection of Malay manuscripts at the National Library. The price for Malay manuscripts at the time was minimal and those in private collections were relatively easy to find. Information provided by academics and government officials who know of the whereabouts of Malay manuscripts in the course of their research and duties, but were not able to buy them due to financial constraints, greatly assisted the Perpustakaan Negara with the task of tracing these manuscripts. Thus, despite financial constraints, the Centre for Malay Manuscripts was able to acquire a large number of Malay manuscripts.

However, since 1989, the acquisition of Malay manuscripts became more selective. The policy was changed since the number of manuscripts in the collection has increased considerably. Many of the manuscripts in the hands of individuals in the country which have been a matter of great concern have been acquired and preserved. Furthermore, a large number of the manuscripts offered by dealers or those located by the officers of the Centre, were often in worse condition than those already in the Centre's collection. Thus, the new policy of acquisition for manuscripts was that the Centre for Malay Manuscripts is to acquire Malay manuscripts selectively and the quality of Malay manuscripts in the collection has to be maintained and improved.

However, in the course of acquiring manuscripts, the traditional method of selling manuscripts in bulk, rather than by titles resulted in the difficulty of exercising the new policy effectively. The manuscript dealers were not concerned with the price of each item, as long as the total for the whole was reasonable. Often, manuscripts not selected for purchase and returned to the dealers were donated to the Perpustakaan Negara anyway. Thus, the policy was not really very effective in the sense that manuscripts which were incomplete or in various stages of deterioration were still added to the National Library's collection.

From 1991, the policy for manuscript acquisition was further refined. The new policy since then was that the Centre for Malay Manuscripts is to acquire Malay manuscripts deemed to be useful for research and preservation purposes. The quality of the collection has to be maintained and improved. The change in policy has been successfully implemented and many of the recent acquisitions are valuable manuscripts, though the price paid is high. The main reasons for the change can be attributed to the following factors:

- A considerably bigger allocation for the acquisition of Malay Manuscripts.
- The large number of similar titles already available in the collection as against the other titles.
- The recent discovery of 'fake' manuscripts i.e. those detected to be copied very recently (pirate copies).
- The emergence of new suppliers who can deliver manuscripts of better quality.

**Acquisition activities**

Malay manuscripts are acquired through purchase, donation, bequest and copying. A trust account has been set up to facilitate the receipt of financial contributions from the public, which are tax exempted. The purchase price of manuscripts is decided by the "Committee for the Pricing of Malay Manuscripts" which normally meet every month. Not many valuable manuscripts are acquired through donation and bequest. However, quite a number of manuscripts are acquired through copying activities every year. Beside the direct purchase of manuscripts in microfilm copies from other institutions, manuscripts are also microfilmed during visits and when some of them are allowed to be borrowed for conservation treatment at the National Library. The projects to trace and document Malay manuscripts covers both inside and outside the country. So far four such projects have been undertaken overseas: the Netherlands, West Germany, France and Singapore. A bibliography of Malay manuscripts in those countries would be published upon completion of each project.

Within the country, the projects to trace and document Malay manuscripts are undertaken throughout the year as a matter of course. In addition to information that are obtained by the Centre from informants and documentation search, visit to museums and individuals outside Kuala Lumpur are undertaken from time to time.

The collection development performance for Malay manuscripts in the Centre up to October 1992 are as follows:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Original manuscripts (Volumes)*</th>
<th>Copies in microforms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>763</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>931</td>
<td>648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>1300</td>
<td>992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1539</td>
<td>1085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1648</td>
<td>1157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1992</td>
<td>1717</td>
<td>1259</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* includes a few facsimile copies.

**STRENGTH OF THE COLLECTION**

From surveys of the collection of Malay manuscripts in the Centre undertaken from time to time, it was found that the greatest number of manuscripts are on Islam. Among the subjects in Islam, a large number of manuscript are *on fiqh, tauhid, tasawuf* and *tarikh*, in that order. The Centre probably has all the manuscripts written by Sheikh Daud Al-Fattani. Among his writings not known before but discovered in the Centre are *Wasaya al-abrar* (MS 589), *Warda al-zawahir* (MS 1136) and *Faraid fawayid al-fikra fi al-Imam al-Mahdi* (MS 652). The Centre also has many important manuscripts written by Sheikh Nuruddin al-Raniri such as *Sirat as-sustaqim*, *Hill al-zill*, *Asrar al-insan* and *Hidayat al-habib*. Apart from that the Centre also has some manuscripts written by Shamsuddin al-Sumatrani.

The titles with more than 10 copies in the collection as at the end of 1990 are as stated below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Copies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Al-said wa al-dhabaih</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Azimat</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bahjat al-mardiyah</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bidayat al-hidayah</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bulugh al-maram</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Doa</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Durr al-thamin fi bayan caqaid al-murminin</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ghayat al-taqrib fi al-irth wa al-tas'sib</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Hidayat al-salikin</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Idah al-bab li murid</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>al-nikah bi al-sawab</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Jawahir al-sanniyah</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Jampi manter</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Ketika</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Kifayah al-muhtaj fi al-isra' wa al-m'raj</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Kitab sembahyang</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Kitab fiqah</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Kitab sifat 20</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Kitab jimak</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Kitab tajwid</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Kitab tasawuf</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Kitab tauhid</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Kitab tib</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Manhal al-safi fi bayan ramz min ahl al-sufi</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Masail al-muhtadi</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>li ikhwan al-mubtadi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Matn Umm al-barahin</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Mir'at al-Quran</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Muniyat al-musalli</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Petua</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Sembahyang Jumaat</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Sullam al-mubtadi</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IMPORTANT MANUSCRIPTS

There are several manuscripts in the collection that are considered very important:

MS 1517

Collections
The volume contains several titles. A statement in the manuscript mentioned that it was copied in 1090 H./1679 A.D. Based on the fact that the paper used is Italian, with the water mark tre capelli “three caps”, we believe about the the statement was true.

a. **Bustan al-salatin. Bab I: Awwal khalaq al-Samawati wa al-ard.**
   78 pp.
   Probably the oldest bab I of the *Kitab Bustan al-salatin* available. The kitab was originally written by Nuruddin al-Raniri in 1638 A.D.

b. **Umdat al-nisab**
   50 pp.
   Probably the oldest Malay manuscript available concerning the family tree of Prophet Muhammad s.a.w.

c. **Firasat tubuh manusia**
   8 pp.
   Explains about the human body and their significance in terms of the person’s possible characters and deeds in the future.

d. **Tanbih al-camil**
   80 pp.
   Question-and-answer kitab about muslim prayers.

MS 1102

**Sirat al-mustaqim**
173 pp.

The original manuscript was completed by the author, Sheikh Nuruddin al-Raniri in the year 1054 A.H./1644 A.D. on the order of the Queen of Aceh, Safiatuddin [1641 - 1675 A.D.]. The kitab in the collection was copied in the year 1091 A.H./1680 A.D. It was written on European hand-made paper with the watermark of old Propatria. Probably it is the oldest *Sirat al-mustaqim* available.

MS 1556

Shamsuddin al-Sumatrani was a follower of Hamzah Fansuri, the leader of wujudiyyah sufism. Their writings were burnt on the order of the Sultan of Aceh. As such the writings of Shamsuddin al-
Sumatrani are considered rare. The paper used is oriental with rough texture and fibres. The manuscript is undated but it is believed to have been written prior to 1880 A.D. In this volume of 16 titles, 12 are writings of Shamsuddin al-Sumatrani as listed below:

a. **Risalah jawami al-‘amal**
   4 pp.

b. **Anwar al-daqlq fl kasyfl asrar al-raqalq**
   7 pp.

c. **Dairah al-wujud**
   4 pp.

d. **Risalah kasyf asrar al-wujud**
   4 pp.

e. **Bayan al-qulub**
   4 pp.

f. **Risalah pada menyatakan perkataan A’yan thabitah**
   3 pp.

g. **Risalah mithal al-wujud**
   10 pp.

h. **Risalah pada menyatakan kelebihan insan daripada sekelian alam yang lain**
   4 pp.

i. **Kasytn sir al-rubibiyah fi kamal al-ubudiyah**
   11 pp.

j. **Haqi qat al-sufi**
   22 pp.

k. **Haq al-yaqin fl aqidah al-muhaqqiqin fl zikri asrar al-sufiyin al-muhaqqiqin**
   48 pp.

**Conclusion**

The Centre for Malay Manuscripts has been set up in 1985 to be the focal national point of research relating to Malay manuscripts. The main activities of the Centre in the first few years has been to trace and acquire Malay manuscripts. So far, the acquisition policy has passed through 3 phases. The present policy of acquisition is basically very selective. Among the collection of Malay manuscripts in the institutions of the country documented so far, Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia has the biggest collection. The strength of the collection is in Islamic manuscripts. In the future, the activities of publishing journals and books will be given priority, without jeopardizing the regular ongoing activities such as tracing, acquisition, documentation, and preservation of Malay manuscripts.
REFERENCES


