Hang Tuah
A Biographical Summary

by

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The display in the new National Museum, Kuala Lumpur, of a seven foot high Bas-Relief representation of the famous Malay hero Hang Tuah, which was completed by Mrs. Waveney Jenkins in August 1963, has been followed by many requests for details of his life and adventures. The following note will attempt to summarise what we know about this fifteenth century paladin.

There are two main sources of information: the ‘Sejarah Melayu’—(the ‘Malay Annals’) and the ‘Hikayat Hang Tuah’—("the Story of Hang Tuah"). The first of these is an anecdotal history of the Malay Rulers and great Chiefs of Malacca and neighbouring countries in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and was probably compiled before 1530 by an eye witness of events before the fall of Malacca. The second does not claim to be a history, but was written by a Malay author and is the earliest and most famous example of a romantic Malay epic, in which however the influence of pre-Islamic Javanese romances can be detected.

In the Malay Annals, references to Hang Tuah by name and by his title of Laksamana (a Sanskrit word meaning ‘Warden of the Coast’) occur on more than twenty different occasions, extending through the reigns of Sultan Mansur Shah, Sultan Ala’uddin Shah and Sultan Mahmud Shah during whose reign he died, but we first hear of him when he is a youthful warrior of good family (perwira yang berasal) of at least 16 years of age accompanying the 20 year old Sultan Mansur to Majapahit. From this we may calcu- late that he was probably born in about 1444 A.D. and that he probably died in about 1500.

There are very wide differences in detail between the two narratives; these will be apparent in the summary which follows. The source of each statement will be indicated by the letters S.M. (Sejarah Melayu) and H.H.T. (Hikayat Hang Tuah).

The sequence of facts and incidents which emerge from the two sources is as follows:—

i. Hang Tuah was born at the village of Sungai Duyong, near Malacca. (H.H.T.).

ii. His parents were Hang Mahmud and Dang Merdu Wati. (H.H.T.).

iii. His parents had a small shop near the Bendahara’s kampong and Hang Tuah split firewood for the shop when he was still a boy. (H.H.T.).

iv. Hang Tuah had four close friends of his own age who were inseparable companions,—Hang Jebut, Hang Kesturi, Hang Lekir and Hang Lekiu. (H.H.T.).

vi. On their return Hang Tuah and his 4 friends save the life of the Bendahara Paduka Raja from 4 armed madmen (Amok) after the Bendahara’s followers have fled, and they are taken into the Chief’s household. (H.H.T.).

vii. When the Sultan hears of the incident from the Bendahara he appoints the five friends to be Court Attendants (Bentara) and Hang Tuah rapidly becomes a favourite of the Sultan. (H.H.T.).

viii. The Sultan of Malacca hears of the beauty of the daughter of the Batara of Majapahit and sends Hang Tuah and his 4 friends with a letter expressing his desire to marry the princess. Hang Tuah and his friends are more than a match for Majapahit plots, ambushes and stratagem and so impress the Batara and his Chief minister Patih Gajah Mada, that he sends back a favourable reply to Malacca. (H.H.T.).

ix. The Sultan of Malacca (Mansur Shah) hears of the beauty of the daughter of the Batara of Majapahit and gives orders for ships to be prepared so that he can travel in person to woo her, accompanied by 40 young nobles and 40 young warriors of good family including Hang Tuah, Hang Jebat, Hang Kesturi, Hang Lekir, Hang Lekiu, Hang Khelem-bak, Hang Ali and Hang Iskandar. “Hang Tuah excelled all others in all that he did”. (S.M.).

x. The Batara is so impressed by the bearing and skill at arms of Hang Tuah and his companions that he agrees to give his daughter in marriage to Sultan Mansur Shah. (S.M.).

xi. The Sultan sails to Majapahit accompanied by Hang Tuah and his friends. Hang Tuah has many adventures at the Court of Majapahit including a duel with Tamang Sari from whom he wins an invincible Kris. He is given the title of Laksamana by the Batara of Majapahit and the district called Jemaja. (H.H.T.)

xii. After the wedding ceremonies the Sultan prepares to return to Malacca taking Radin Galoh, his bride, with him. He advises Hang Tuah to ask the Batara for the gift of Siantan and this is granted. (S.M.).
xiii. Hang Tuah rescues the Sultan’s favourite horse from a cesspool, when no one else can do so. (S.M.) & (H.H.T.).

xiv. Hang Tuah kills a Javanese madman (Amok) after the madman has killed many others and is rewarded by the Sultan. (S.M.).

xvi. The old court officials are jealous of Hang Tuah’s popularity with the Sultan and the public and they conspire with Pateh Kerma Wijaya, the chief Majapahit official at the Malacca court. Hang Tuah is falsely accused in the presence of the Sultan by Pateh Kerma Wijaya of an intrigue with a palace maid-in-waiting and the Sultan immediately orders the Bendahara to execute Hang Tuah. The Bendahara secretly spares his life and tells him to leave Malacca. Hang Tuah decides to go to Pahang and try to abduct Tun Tijah, the beautiful daughter of the Bendahara, whose fame has already excited the interest of the Malacca Sultan, but who rejected an earlier invitation to wed the Sultan on the grounds that she was not of royal birth. Hang Tuah expects thereby to restore himself to the Sultan’s favour. He succeeds in the abduction, brings Tun Tijah to Malacca and the Sultan marries her. Hang Tuah is pardoned and resumes his former position of trust. Hang Tuah is given the title of Laksamana by the Sultan. (H.H.T.).

xv. Hang Tuah becomes the Sultan’s favourite after his return from Majapahit and the older court officials are jealous. Hang Tuah is wrongfully accused of having an intrigue with one of the palace maids-in-waiting. The Sultan, without enquiring into the truth of the report, orders the Bendahara to kill Hang Tuah. The Bendahara decides to hide Hang Tuah in a country place in chains, but tells the Sultan that Hang Tuah has been executed. (S.M.).
xvii. Megat Panji Alam, of Trengganu, whom Tun Tijah was engaged to marry, hears of her abduction and prepares to attack Malacca. Hang Tuah volunteers to go to Pahang and kill Megat, and takes Hang Jebat and Hang Kesturi with him. Megat Panji Alam and his brother Megat Kembar Ali are stabbed on the steps of the Audience Hall by Hang Jebat and Hang Kesturi and their army disperses in disorder. Hang Tuah defies an order by the Sultan of Pahang to execute Hang Jebat and Hang Kesturi and the Sultan allows them to return to Malacca, where they are rewarded by the Sultan. (H.H.T.).

Note i. The abduction of Tun Tijah is related in Sejarah Melayu, but it occurs after Hang Tuah’s death and Hang Nadim carries out the abduction. The main outline of the story is the same in the Malay Annals and in the Story of Hang Tuah.

xviii. The Batara of Majapahit is offended when he hears that the Sultan of Malacca has taken a second wife (Tun Tijah). Hang Tuah is sent to Majapahit to reassure the Batara that his daughter still retains her position as a royal consort. Many attempts are made on his life but all are unsuccessful. (H.H.T.).
xx. The palace officials again resent the favours shown to Hang Tuah and plot with Pateh Kerma Wijaya to get rid of him. The Sultan again accepts a false accusation of misconduct in the palace by Hang Tuah, and orders the Bendahara to kill him. The Bendahara hides Hang Tuah up river. Hang Jebat is given the title of Paduka Raja and Hang Tuah’s Keris. His behaviour is deliberately calculated to insult the Sultan and within a week he takes one of the Sultan’s concubines as his mistress. The Sultan moves out of the palace and the same story as in (xix) is related in greater detail, substituting Hang Jebat for Hang Kesturi. The Keris of Tamang Sari plays a vital part in the duel. Hang Jebat is mortally wounded by Hang Tuah, but is not killed. Hang Tuah leaves him stretched on the palace floor and returns home. Hang Jebat gathers his strength and runs ‘amok’ in the market killing many people, but finally dies in Hang Tuah’s arms. (H.H.T.).

xxi. Hang Tuah is installed as Laksamana and is given a place of honour in the royal audience hall on a level with the Bendahara and carries the sword of State when Sri Bija di-rraja is absent from court. (S.M.).

xxii. In H.H.T. Hang Tuah has been Laksamana for a long time and there is no special honour conferred on him. He is described thereafter as being consulted by the Sultan on everything. H.H.T.).

xxiii. Semerluki, Raja Mengkasar, ravages the coast south of Malacca. The Laksamana is sent to intercept him. The Laksamana sinks many enemy ships and drives them away. (S.M.).

xxiv. The Laksamana and Sang Stia and Tun Mamat are sent to Gunong Ledang (Mount Ophir) to ask the Princess of the mountain to marry the Sultan of Malacca (Sultan Mansur). The Princess imposes a number of strange conditions which are conveyed to the Sultan by the Laksamana, and the Sultan abandons the project. (S.M.).
xxv. The Bendahara and Laksamana are ordered by the Sultan of Malacca to reinstate Sultan Zainal Abidin on the Pasai throne after he has been driven out by his younger brother. (S.M.).

xxvi. When Sultan Ala’uddin of Malacca falls ill with diarrhoea the Bendahara and Laksamana never leave his side. The Laksamana bathes the Sultan 20 times a day and refuses to allow Raja Tua (grandmother of the young Sultan) to approach her grandson, because she intends to smother the young Sultan to make way for her own son who was banished to Pahang. (S.M.).

xxvii. The Sultan, when he recovers, gives a Litter (portable couch) to the Bendahara and Laksamana. (S.M.).

xxviii. The Bendahara gives his finest kris and other weapons to the Laksamana “because he is a great war Chief.” (S.M.).

xxix. The Telanai of Trengganu is murdered by orders of Sultan Mohamed of Pahang because the Telanai paid homage to Sultan Ala’uddin at Malacca. Sultan Ala’uddin sends the Laksamana overland to Pahang to impress on his half brother that he is inferior in status. Hang Tuah contrives the stabbing of a relative of Sri Akar Raja who had killed the Telanai, but refuses to allow his follower, who stabbed the Pahang courtier, to be punished. (S.M.).

xxx. Sultan Ala’uddin sends the Laksamana to Siak to reprimand the Sultan who has put a man to death without first seeking the permission of the Sultan of Malacca. (S.M.).

xxxii. The Laksamana leads a Malay fleet to drive off an attack by a fleet from Haru and another from Pasai. He is victorious. (S.M.).

xxxiii. When Sultan Ala’uddin was dying he sent for the Bendahara Temenggong, Kadli Munawar Shah and the Laksamana. (S.M.).

xxxiv. Sultan Mahmud (Raja Mohamed the young son of Sultan Ala’uddin) is made Sultan and has young favourites. One of these—Tun Omar—asks the Sultan for the title of Laksamana. The Sultan replies “the Laksamana is still in office and he has done nothing wrong to warrant our dismissing him” (S.M.).

xxxv. Sultan Mahmud has an intrigue with the wife of Tun Bayajit, son of the Laksamana, while Tun Bayajit is away up river. Tun Bayajit returns as the Sultan is leaving his house at dawn, but restrains his followers, out of loyalty, from attacking the Sultan. (S.M.).

xxxvi. The Sultan takes Tun Birah, a daughter of the Laksamana, as one of his wives and she bears a daughter Tun Dewi. (S.M.).

xxxvii. Whenever the Bendahara held an enquiry into a dispute between two men of position, the Temenggong and Laksamana were present. (S.M.).

xxxviii. If anyone showed disrespect for the Bendahara Sri Maharaja, the Laksamana put him to death. He kills Tun Perpateh Hitam and his son Tun Hussain for making a derogatory remark about the Bendahara. Sultan Mahmud rewards the Laksamana (S.M.).
xxxviii. Laksamana Hang Tuah died and his son-in-law Khoja Husain was made Laksamana by Sultan Mahmud. Laksamana Hang Tuah had two wives. One was related to Sri Bija diraja (Dato Bongkok) and had three children: the eldest, a daughter married Khoja Husain, the second was a son called Tun Bayajit and the youngest, a daughter called Tun Birah, became one of Sultan Mahmud's wives and had a daughter Tun Dewi.

The other wife of Laksamana Hang Tuah was of the family of Bendahara Paduka Raja. She had two children, a son who was given the title of 'Sang Guna' and the other a daughter who was married to Hang Nadim. (S.M.).

Note ii. In Hikayat Hang Tuah, the Sultan of Malacca also sends Hang Tuah on diplomatic missions to India ('Benua Keling'), China & Turkey ('Benua Rum'). Hang Tuah visits Mecca & performs the Pilgrimage while on his way to Turkey. Hang Tuah also fights with Portuguese fleets on two occasions & is severely injured by a cannon ball, but recovers. He finally disappears after the capture of Malacca by the Portuguese: 'entah mati, entah ghaib'—'may be he is dead, may be he disappeared'. But on the last page of the Hikayat it is stated that Hang Tuah did not die, but retired to the head waters of the Perak river, where he lived as an immortal ascetic, the Chief of all the Aborigines.