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Authorship of Malay Manuscripts: The Case of Multiple Manuscripts

Dr. Wan Ali Wan Mamat (IIUM)

Department of Library and Information Science, International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Email: wanaliwm@yahoo.com

Abstract: Soon after the introduction of Islam in the Malay Archipelago, circa in the 12th century AD, the Malays developed their new script based on the Arabic script known as the Jawi script. The earliest Jawi script extant could be found in the Terengganu inscription, dated 1303 AD. Since then, there were thousands of Malay manuscripts written. Despite the fact that many of them had been destroyed and lost yet there are still thousands of them still available in libraries, museums and in private collections throughout the world. Many of the titles are in multiple copies, some even in the hundreds. Definitely not all the copies were written by one man or the author himself. This paper will try to explore the possible practices among the Malay authors/copiers that contribute toward the proliferation of the manuscript copies.

Introduction

Manuscripts are records of the transmission of civilization in a society (Beit-Arie: 79). It records repeatedly the intellectual and informational idea in the form of a text, from one person to another, covering either a short span of time or generations. Kitab manuscripts, unlike other manuscripts are available in many copies in the collection of libraries and museums were often products of learning sessions in the past. Unfortunately, during the period when kitabs were all hand written, the means to get it was a lot harder. One alternative might be for an individual to borrow the kitab from his friend, but this approach would not be satisfactory because the friend might need it himself and would not like it to be borrowed for long period. The alternative would be for him to copy it himself or request others to do it for him, probably with some payment as inducement. The other alternative would be purchase it from somebody who did copy the kitab for sale.

Importance of learning in Islam

One important factor that contributed toward the development of Islamic civilization was the positive role of the mosque in fostering knowledge (‘ilm) seeking and learning. The role of the mosque then was not just be the place of congregation for ‘ibadah, but also for learning. This is in line with the teaching of Islam that emphasizes the importance of learning. At the mosque, people of knowledge (muallim) conducted classes almost all the time after performing prayers, in the morning, afternoon and at night, to the extent that the congregations of both ‘ibadah and learning sessions happened almost simultaneous. The
people who came to the mosque, was not only to perform ibadah such as prayer and wirid, but also to attend halaqah, or learning classes.

The teacher sat at one corner, and in front of him were students and audience who sat in layers in a semi circle, with kitabs and qalam in their hands, the teacher will recite the kitab in his hand and explain the meaning (sharh). It was basically an open session whereby anyone can put up questions to the teacher and the teacher will try to answer them, but with proper decorum. Most of the time, the teachers were the imam and the learned in the vicinity who would teach certain subjects such as fiqh, tasawwuf and usuluddin based on certain kitabs at hand. However, it is important to note that this did not mean that the teachers concerned were knowledgeable in only one particular subject. The teachers or ulama’ of the periods were in fact very knowledgeable in many different subjects because in the course of their studies, they learnt many subjects. Hence, scholar of philology was also a Qur’anic interpreter, Hadith interpreter, theologian, philosopher, historian, and so forth and every man of education had his portion of this universal knowledge (Pedersen: 20).

It is important to note that while he was a teacher, he was at the same time also a student. In the course of teaching, he had to read several kitabs beforehand in order to prepare himself for the classes, and while the classes were in sessions, he would hear opinions from the students and the audience. Some of the so called students and audience were in fact themselves teachers and ulama. If he teaches in the morning, he might be a student in the afternoon and evening. Actually, mosque as a place of learning is open to all: children, teenagers and adults. At the lowest level, since the early history of Islam, the learning process was based on kuttab or a place of learning for children. They were taught al-Qur’an recitation, writing, spelling, vocalization marks, simple mathematics, proper method to perform wudhu’ and learning how to pray. Kuttab were normally set up outside the mosque, but within the same compound, administered by a teacher known as mu’allim. He did everything for the success of the kuttab, both as administrator and teacher. The finance of a kuttab was primarily based on zakat and contributions from the public (Kadi, 2006).

However, from the 10th century AD onwards, a new development occurred in Islamic education system, whereby a special place called madrassa was set up, primarily for teenagers and adults. This development happened because of the increasing demands for education among the Muslims. Madrasah were normally built beside a mosque that created the mosque-madrassah institution, within the same compound. In the madrassa, students were taught all types of knowledge, either knowledge that deals with relationship between man and God (generally classified as fardhu ‘ain) and man and man (generally classified as fardhu kifayah). In the madrassa, teachers will teach the knowledge according to the kitabs used by each of the teachers concerned. In such a situation, it was pertinent that each student has in his hand that particular kitab for easy reference and notation of sharh by the teacher concerned. To meet such needs, the students have to get a copy of the kitab either by copying it himself or requesting others to do it for him, probably with some payment. From the mosque-kuttab-madrassa-mosque library institution, many universities were established. The Al-Azhar University of Cairo is an example of such a university.
Authorship and Copyist

In the introduction to the following two kitabs by Sheikh Daud Abdullah al-Fattani, the author wrote (in Arabic):

a. Kitab Furu’ al-Masail

In the year 1254 of the Hijrah (1838 AD), may the best of blessings and most peace be upon him ((the Prophet), my heart was moved and my thought inclined to take up for your questions like pearls and jewels, and answers like pearls arranged on a string of explanations, and some precious branches of Islamic law, full of satisfying benefits from great two books *Fatawa Shams l-Millah wa al-Din* of the strong pillar of jurists and explorer of truth, al-Sheikh Muhammad al-Ramli, and the kitab Kashf al-Litham ‘an As’ilat al-Anam by the later, more recent great scholar and researcher for truth, Husayn ibn Muhammad al-Mahalli, may God have a mercy upon both of them. I took from both books the religious problems to which the answers are needed by both the educated and the common believers. I named it *Furu’ al-Masa’il wa Usul al-Wasil.* (Hasan Madmarn: 23)

b. Kitab Idah al-Bab li-Murid al-Nikah bi al-Sawab

This is a small commentary, covering the law and the rule of marriage. It concerns also divorce and what is involved, as well as the other things necessary for those who need to know the right way of marriage. I compiled this book depending on the books of the respected (Shafi’ite) maddhab such as Minhaj al-Talibin (by Muhyi al-Din al-Nawawi, Fath al-Wahhab (by Sheikh Zakaria al-Ansari, Tuhfat al-Muhtaj (by Shihab al-Din Ahmad ibn Hajar) al-Nihayah (by Shihab al-Din Muhammad al-Ramli, al-Uddah wa al-Silah (by Muhammad ibn Ahmad). I entitled this book *Idah al-Bab li-Murid al-Nikah bi al-Sawab.* (Hasan Madmarn: 26).

Both kitabs give a glimpse of the way the author approaches authorship. No doubt that he wrote the kitabs, but more importantly he mentioned the names of the kitabs he referred to as reference materials, even the names of the authors. No doubt that this is the approach normally used by authors of the Malay kitabs, but more importantly is that he wants to give authority to his works. His works are not his ideas alone but the result of his readings of other very authoritative works in the relevant fields. This is in line with the Islamic approach of authorship, to give legitimacy for his kitab (Brinkley Messick, 1993: 15).

Copying a kitab by himself seemed to be the most logical course of action to be taken by a student. As a student he should know how to write. The papers could be purchased from many sources, the shop and individuals who are engaged in trade, and the ink and qalam can be made by him from local materials. He should know how to prepare the quires and the pagination by looking at the manuscripts already available. However, whereas all seemed to be quite easy to do, it is a different matter when he want to implement it. This is especially so when we want to write a kitab with long text. Can he do that?

Normally, the copyists of Malay manuscripts were undertaken by those with good hand writing skill. Despite the fact that the manuscripts were copied by individuals for his own use but in practice only people with good handwriting would do the work. The person who do not have the expertise to write nicely would normally commission the work to those with such ability. If we look at a collection of Malay kitabs, the general impression that we got is that they were written very nicely, almost in calligraphic manner. There were no lines visible to help create sentences in straight lines, and the texts were rarely written over the frame or into the margin area of the page. Such a product could only be produced by persons who have had experience in writing manuscripts.
However, in the context of Malay kitab manuscripts in particular, most kitabs were written by selected few in the community or the madrassah. According to several informants from elders who formerly studied at several pondoks in Kelantan (Malaysia) and Fattani (Thailand), only those with good handwriting were entrusted by students to copy Malay Islamic kitabs, with some payments. In the pondoks, the inks and qalam used were made by the students themselves from local materials. Even among the Arabs where many of the books were produced by warraqin at the bookshop, most of the kitabs used by the Arabs were written by the individuals outside the scriptoria. According Beit-Arie (82) “Notwithstanding the existence of institutional centre of learning and research, numerous public libraries and the extensive commercialization of books through the warraqin, paper and book dealers, the dominant nature of Arabic book production and consumption seems to have been private, boosted by the early introduction of the cheaper writing matter of paper”.

**Malay scriptorium**

A few papers had been written by researchers relating to the possibility of the existence of Malay scriptorium in the past. There were indeed Malay scriptorium in Batavia (present day Jakarta), attached to the Algemeene Secretarie Office. According to Voorhoeve, (1964), the scriptorium was set up by the Dutch administration in order to copy Malay manuscripts and to write letters to the local sultans in the Malay language. A few local writers were employed to copy Malay manuscripts that came into the hand of the Dutch administrators including the famous copier Muhammad Ching Saidullah. Behrend (1992) informed us that Cohen Stuart also had his own scriptorium when he was working as manuscript conservator at Bataviaasch Genootschap from 1862 to 1871. He employed several locals with good handwriting skills to copy Malay manuscripts, including the famous Suryawijaya who was also an author (quoted from Ding Choo Ming, 1997). Besides the Dutch, the British also had scriptorium, although a bit less formal in nature. Several locals were employed, either in Singapore or in Malacca to copy Malay manuscript and to help the British administrators in writing letters to the local rulers. Among the local writers recruited by Stamford Raffles while in Malacca, and later moved together with him to Singapore were Abdullah Munshi and his uncle Ismail (Hikayat Abdullah).

The scriptoria mentioned, with some differences between them were established by the colonial powers or administrators to serve their needs, those scriptoria can be considered as foreign tradition of writing implanted into the local environment, and not local tradition *per se*. Did local scriptoria existed? This matter has often been perused by a few researchers, including Ding Choo Ming (1997). He was of the opinion that local scriptoria did exist in the Malay world, otherwise manuscripts and letters requested by the rulers could not be written. For example Tun Sri Lanang wrote Sejarah Melayu when he got the request from the Sultan Alauddin Ri’ayat Shah. However, according to Ding, the Malay scriptoria set up was a bit informal May be there were a room in the palace for writing purposes but the writers may do his work either at the palace or at his own house. On the other hand, there might be no office at all specially set up for the purpose in the palace. However, when a sultan wanted something to be written or copied, there were writers or copiers available (in Malay called jurutulis). Most probably they work quite independently from the palace but will readily accept the responsibility when requested by the palace. Such an opinion, while it may be valid and did really exist, but it cannot be considered a scriptoria in a real sense. However, a more plausible explanation would be the availability of a group of jurutulis whenever the sultan of court official needs them.

In a traditional madrassa or pondok of reasonably big in size, there always been at one or two students with good handwriting. In order to supplement his meager income given by his parents, he will try to supplement it with whatever odd jobs suitable for him, including copying kitabs. When he is known as a good copier, other students from the same madrassa or pondok will request for his assistance to copy kitabs for him, with minimal payment. The job will be undertaken on part time basis. One cannot expect...
him to finish his job in a short while. He might take even one or two months to finish the job. However, since he did the job as according to kurrassa, whatever kurrassa that has been done will be given to the student who authorized him the work. In such a case, there is no complaint from the person that the work was late. That is part of the reason when we peruse Malay kitabs they were done by a professional hand.

The tradition of writing of Malay manuscript was basically different from that of Europeans and the Arabs. In Europe, most of the manuscripts were written in the scriptoria or copying centers at the monastery and cathedrals. At scriptoria, the materials for writing purposes such as the original manuscripts to be copied, the writing materials to be used. At the place, the materials for writing purposes such as manuscripts to be copied, the writing materials and the peoples to copy them were already there. However, unlike the Europeans and the Arabs, Hebrew manuscripts were mostly written or copied at home, thus they were the work of individuals without the facilities found in scriptoria (Beit-Arie, 1992: 81).

The Malay manuscripts, especially the Islamic kitabs were produced almost like the Hebrew manuscripts in medieval period, whereby they were generally copied by individuals themselves, except that they were copied by individuals with good handwriting, and by anyone who wants them. The same with the Arabs although to a lesser degree as compared to the European tradition. At the first level, the manuscripts were written under the patronage of the Caliphs and the rulers, by copyists who were experts in their fields. They were paid quite handsomely for their work, and with the payment received, they can purchase quality writing materials beforehand. The copyist can also get hold of the original manuscripts quite easily, for he was working for the caliph or people of authority (Koningsveld). In fact, in many of the Muslim countries, there were many institutions that dealt with the work of copying manuscript, the most famous were Bayt A-Hikma and Dar Al-Ilm.

The interest of the Malays to Islamic kitabs

If we scrutinize Malay manuscript collections, we will notice that most of them were on Islamic knowledge, history and biography of Islamic leaders and heroes. In fact, when glancing through the Malay manuscript collection of the National Library of Malaysia, which is considered the largest manuscript collection in this country, almost 90% of them were manuscripts on Islam. The titles of the manuscripts were normally preceded by the word kitab. However just not to be confused, sometimes non Islamic manuscripts were also given the title preceded by the word kitab, especially kitab tib (book on medicine). This shows that in Malay society of the past, the production of book on Islam were given priority by the people, simultaneously giving the perception that the learning on Islamic knowledge were the focus of studies during the period.

If we scrutinize in detail, we will find that many of the Islamic kitabs were in duplicates or multiple copies. As an example, in the collection of the National library of Malaysia, there are 518 copies of works by Syeikh Daud Abdullah al-Fattani in early part of 2011, the details are as follows (Faizal Hilmie, 2011):

- Kitab Idah al-bab li-murid al-nikah bi al-sawab – 60 copies
- Kitab Jawahir al-saniiyyah – 57 copies
- Kitab Sullam al-mubtadi – 55 copies
- Kitab Muniyat al-musalli – 40 copies
- Kitab Ghayat al-taqrib fi al-irth wa al-tasib -39 copies
- Kitab Kifayah al-muhtaj fi al-Isra’ wa al-mi’raj – 35 copies
- Kitab Al-Saidu wa al-dhaba’ih – 26 copies
- Kitab Furu’ al-masail wa usul al-masa’il – 22 copies
Kitab Al-Manhal al-safi fi bayan ramz ahl al-sufi – 20 copies
Kitab Al-Bahjat al-mardiyyah – 17 copies
Kitab Bulugh al-muram fi kaiﬁat muqaranat takbirat al-ihram – 17 copies
Kitab Bughyat al-tullab li murid ma’rifat al-akhkam bi al-sawab – 17 copies
Kitab Tanbih al-ghafilin – 13 salinan
Kitab Jumu’ al-fawaid wa jawahir al-qala’id – 12 copies
Kitab Durr al-thamin fi bayan aqa’id al-mu’minin – 10 copies
Kitab sembahyang Jumaat – 10 copies
Kitab Tahsil al-maran li bayan manzumah ‘aqidat al-awwam – 8 copies
Kitab Kashf al-ghummah fi ahwal al-mawta fi al-barzakh wa al-qiyamah – 7 copies
Kitab Nahj al-raghibin wa subul al-muttaqin – 7 copies
Kitab Tuhfat al-raghibin fi bayan haqiqat iman al-mu’minin – 6 copies
Kitab Diya al-murid fi ma’rifat kalimat al-tauhid – 5 copies
Kitab Hidayat al-muta’allim wa umdat al-mu’allim – 5 copies
Kitab Minaj al-abidin ila jannah rabb al-’alamin – 5 copies
Kitab Fath al-mannan li safwat al-zubad – 3 copies
Kitab Tuhfat al-raghibin fi suluk tariq al-muttaqin – 3 copies
Kitab Warda alzawahir li hal alfaż ‘iqd al-jawahir – 3 copies
Kitab Kanz al-minan ‘ala hikam Abi Madyan – 2 copies
Kitab Kafiat khatam al-Qur’an – 2 copies
Kitab sifat dua puluh – 2 copies
Kitab Wasaya l-abrar wa mawa’iz al-akhyar – 2 copies
Kitab Aqidat al-jawahir – 1 copy
Kitab Ghayat al-maram fi kaiﬁat ‘ala alhajj al-Islam – 1 copy
Kitab Basaya’ir al-ikhwan bi asbab al-mawt ‘ala al-iman – 1 copy
Kitab Bidayat al-hidayat – 1 copy
Kitab Faraj’id al-fikri fi al-imam al-mahdi – 1 copy
Kitab Musawwadah – 1 copy
Kitab Mudhakarat al-ikhwan – 1 copy
[Kitab Risalah masalah fiqah] – 1 copy

From the figure above, it is very clear that most of the kitabs by Syeikh Daud Abdullah al-Fattani were in duplicates, the highest were *Idah l-Bab li Murid al-Nikah bi al-Sawab* with 60 copies and *Jawahir al-Saniyyah* with 57 copies. Definitely the author wrote only one copy for each title and the others were copies made by others. The question is who are the others? In order to understand this phenomenon, we have to understand the importance of knowledge in Islam which the Malays very much adhered to. Those who have kitabs at home would come to the mosque with kitab and qalam in their hand. Others might have left their kitab and qalam in the mosque already. After a while, the number of kitab and other reading materials especially al-Qur’an kept in the mosque multiplied that required a special place for safekeeping. As the kitabs multiplied the need to find a suitable place to keep them and for individuals to do reading and writing arises. The easiest way was to find a corner of the mosque to be turned into a library (mosque library).

In the process of copying manuscripts, it is quite common that new materials were added to the text. It was quite impossible to find manuscripts of the same title to have similar text. Part of the cause was due to human factors. It is quite common that the same text can mean differently by different person. If the sentences were not very clear to him, he will try to improve it according to his interpretation. The classical Malay language were generally quite difficult to comprehend, thus the copyist will try to improve them. Thus, in Malay manuscripts, the addition of new information in the following text were quite normal. This is in line with the intertext theory that in a text there other texts. The copyist will be
influenced by his earlier readings and understanding of an issue. Advertently or otherwise, he will add the knowledge into the new text at hand (Bakhtin, 1973:167).

Conclusion

In Malay writing tradition, scriptoria play a very minor role. Although the rulers could count on the services of the learned and writers to write almost whatever the sultan wants, but whether such work were undertaken at a special room in the palace itself was not very clear. Most of the directives from the sultans were related to copying of stories or hikayats, rather that Islamic kitabs. Islamic kitabs were mostly used in the madrassas or pondoks by the students. In order to meet their needs, new kitabs were copied by those with good handwriting and familiar with the work within the madrassas itself, with some payment.
References


