"Lands below the Winds" as Part of the Persian Cosmopolis: An Inquiry into Linguistic and Cultural Borrowings from the Persianate societies in the Malay World

Les « Terres sous le vent » (Lands below the Winds) comme partie de la cosmopole persane: une enquête sur les emprunts linguistiques et culturels aux sociétés persanes dans le monde malais

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An Inquiry into Linguistic and Cultural Borrowings from the Persianate Societies in the Malay World

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This article attempts to trace and analyze the major fields of Persian cultural impact in Maritime Southeast Asia in order to provide a more complex picture of the cultural pluralism and hybridization, which has been taking place in this region from time immemorial. The primary argument of this paper is that the societies of the Malay-Indonesian region were once part of a great cultural sphere, which has been labeled as the “Persian cosmopolis”. This connection brought about intense mutual interaction, resulting in numerous cultural borrowings mainly on the Malay side. The Persian cosmopolis dominated as a pluralistic and prestigious supra-national culture across vast swaths of Asia roughly between the 11th and 19th centuries (Pollock 2009, Eaton

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This realm is usually defined geographically as extending from Anatolia (and indirectly, via the Ottoman expansion even further northwest, from the Balkans) to Central Asia to Bengal, and along maritime trading routes as far as the coasts of Southeast Asia. Pollock and Eaton argue that the Persian cosmopolis to some extent replaced the Sanskrit cosmopolis that had preceded the Persianate culture as the superior cultural complex, and which had once dominated the societies from the areas of modern-day Afghanistan as far as the historical Champa and the Indianized kingdoms of the Indonesian archipelago (ibid.). However, arguably, this opinion does not seem very obvious from many historical works, which tend to regard the Persian factor as part of a broader Arabo-Islamic civilizational impact. While true to a degree, I am convinced that the Persian cultural influence had specific merits of its own, having left behind a wide scope of high-profile cultural and lexical imports in the Malay World, and therefore deserves more scholarly attention as such, as is the case in the texts of only a handful of scholars such as e. g. Marrison (1955) and Marcinkowski (2002, 2005, 2010), on whose work I will attempt to draw on.

Having said that, the aim of this paper is multiple—first, I strive to review and cast more light the general historical knowledge regarding how, and how intensely, the Malay world was involved in this cultural sphere, what particular important shifts and imports occurred during this historical era and what the circumstances of this interaction were. This historical approach will be combined here with an attempt at historical linguistics via examining a range of loan-words from Persian into Malay with the aim to analyze the main spheres of mutual interaction.

**BACKGROUND**

For millennia, the main sphere of cultural contact in the Indian Ocean basin has been trade. The earliest recorded contact between the Iranian world and Southeast Asia thus also pertained to this activity. The maritime trade routes across the Indian Ocean were plied by the Parthian traders who operated in the late 2nd and the early 3rd centuries CE as far as the international entrepôts of Tun-Sun in the Malay Peninsula and Funan (Setudeh-Nejad n.d.).

By the 4th century AD, Iranian sailors allegedly enhanced their presence in the Indian Ocean commercial network—Setudeh-Nejad even considers them to have been “carriers” of the sea trade (ibid.)—, supported by the new Persian Sassanid dynasty (224-651), which was facilitated by a combination of their energy, navigation skills and innovations in maritime technologies, including redesigned ship rigging (Farrokh 2007).

Sassanid Persians also made an intense imprint on the local populations via translating some of the Sassanid literary works into Cham. This interaction served to make the Cham people familiar with elements of Sassanid cosmology, namely in the Book of Anurshiwan, which was allegedly sacred to the Chams, for they long considered Anurshiwan to be their first king (Setudeh-Nejad n.d.). It is therefore worth noting that the Muslim Chams in the southern areas of the Cham-populated areas of Vietnam, known as Orang Bani, claim their origins from a figure called Noursavan, which Schafer explains as reference to the Persian King Anurshiwan (Shafer 1967: 11).
References to King Khosrow Anurshiwan also appear in Malay literature with the figure of King Anurshiwan Adil (Anurshiwan the Just), who appears in the seminal Malay chronicle Sejarah Melayu (1612).

Persian presence on the India-China trading route was strong until the 8th century, and the Chinese, the Chams and other sea-oriented communities benefited from it culturally and technologically. Under the Abbasid Khalifat, when Persia was ruled by the Arabs, the intercourse with Iranian culture subsided—to resume again around the 13th century during the era known as Persian Renaissance when the Persian religio-cultural legacy, including strong Sufi elements, began to be disseminated mainly by Persianate South Asians in the areas east the Bay of Bengal.

Based on the insights gained from a wide range of sources, it is obvious that the period between the 13th and 17th centuries was the era of the most intense religio-cultural and linguistic exchange between the Persian cosmopolis and the Malay-Indonesian world. It was Muslim trade and its extensive networks which provided the major platform for transmission. The sources of this cultural transmission may be explained as two-fold: a) via the activities of Iranian merchants and sailors from Persia itself; b) by seamen, traders, diplomats, healers and other influential figures from Persianate sultanates or kingdoms of the Indian subcontinent, such as the Delhi sultanate, Gujarat, the Bahmanid Sultanate, or Golconda. These areas were exposed to several waves of Islamization, but the most important in relation to Southeast Asia was the third one, which took place during the period between the 11th and 14th centuries. This period witnessed increased missionary activity of the “Sufi saints”, who played an instrumental role in shaping the Indo-Muslim culture of today’s Pakistan, Bangladesh and large parts of India (Fatimi 1963: 96). And, as a result of the prevalently Sufi character of Perso-Indian sultanates and their representatives operating in the Indian Ocean trading network, the more tolerant, eclectic and mystically oriented tasawwuf (Sufism) became one of the key factors behind the Islamization of previously Hindu-Buddhist Maritime Southeast Asia. Intertwined with this discourse, other Persianate cultural elements followed suit, flowing to the areas east of the Bay of Bengal.

To obtain a better understanding of these particular processes, as well as the general processes which facilitated the relatively intense contact of the Persian cultural sphere with the Malay-Indonesian world, we need to take a closer look at the historical, cultural and linguistic developments in the homeland of Persian culture and its immediate vicinity, as well as the socio-cultural history of the Indian Ocean littoral.

Therefore, it might be useful at this point to provide a brief explanation concerning the background of the language medium we are aiming to observe—i.e. the so-called New Persian or Fārsī, which apparently developed in the latter half of the 9th century in Eastern Iranian areas. Originally, New Persian—partially based on Middle Persian (used approximately from the 2nd to the 8th centuries CE), though not a completely linear continuation of it—was to a degree a new and, in the initial phase, somewhat crude vernacular which represented the result of linguistic and inter-ethnic mixing in the areas of Khorasan and Transoxiana, where a process of pidginization (of a form close to original Middle Persian) and subsequent creolization apparently took place. This resulted in the rise of a new language variant. Consequently, during the 10th century this new form established itself as a very important medium of inter-ethnic
communication in the areas of Greater Iran (Fragner 2006). Nevertheless, this original language of nomadic tribes and traders was soon to develop into an altogether more sophisticated form, especially due to its newly acquired position as both the official and literary language at the court of Khorasan under the Samanid dynasty (819-999).^3

Another factor behind its boost in popularity and thus widespread use was a practical one since New Persian was written in the more straightforward Arabic script, unlike the literary Middle Persian, which used the awkward and complicated Pahlavi script, thus discouraging the more lay social classes from using it. The Pahlavi script was so difficult that even educated native Persians had trouble learning it. Nonetheless, with the introduction of the Arabic script, this new writing system began to gain in popularity since it also better addressed the religious needs of pious Muslims. While Pahlavi did not immediately disappear, the evolution and spread of (New) Persian, enriched by Arabic borrowings and conveyed in the Arabic letters, was fairly intense since this new language form was better suited to the ever-growing process of Islamization. In other words, the Muslim speakers of Farsi thus in a way “linguistically cut themselves off from the Pahlavi past and adopted literary standards closer to those of Muslim Arabic than to those of pre-Muslim Persian” (Hodgson 1974: 450).

The Islamic dimension behind the expansion of Farsi was of immense importance, for according to Marcinkowski and Fragner, New Persian had basically become the second language of Islam, mainly for the Eastern areas of the Islamic world (the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia and Southeast Asia). As New Persian accepted the cultural dominance of Islam, it became a complementary language to Arabic. It was, in a way, the “first language successfully made fit for Islam” and so it became the secondary language of this creed (Fragner 2006). Fragner also explains that, given such a task-division, New Persian contributed significantly to the spheres of historiography, poetry and epics (ibid.), and later also to scholarship, mainly medicine.\(^4\) Furthermore, Farsi, as the second language of Islam and also as a vernacular more familiar than Arabic to the peoples of Central Asia, also helped pave the way towards a gradual conversion.

Another factor behind the deeper spread of Persian into Central and Inner Asia, however disastrous at first, was the overwhelming Mongol conquest of much of Eurasia. By conquering all of Central Asia and Persia (in addition to other areas), the Mongols had incorporated into their realm an advanced civilization, which used Persian as its primary contact language. By annexing this area, they also annexed its peoples, bringing with them a degree of Mongol influence, linguistic and otherwise, but ironically, this process worked mainly conversely: the Mongol conquerors were to be subjugated by Islam, the Persian culture and language.

On recognizing the competence of their new subjects, the ruling Mongols entrusted many Iranians and Persian-speaking Tajiks with the role of administrator in many Mongol-governed provinces. The Persian language and elements of Iranian technologies, administrative methods and tax-farming were thus introduced into many Mongol-governed lands. As Buell claims, there is also evidence of the cosmopolitan character of the Mongol courts, where Persian was widely used as an important working language (mainly in the administrative sphere), alongside Mongolian, the Turkic languages and, increasingly, Chinese (Buell 2007: 208). According to Ye Yiliang, Persian was used as the lingua franca when dealing with the countries of Central
and Western Asia. The Yuan administration even established a bureau called Huihui Guozixue in 1289, in which Persian was taught (Yiliang 2010: 5).

Simultaneously, the multiple invasions of Persianized Turco-Mongols from Central Asia and modern-day Afghanistan brought Persianate culture to the Indian subcontinent, where Persian, by then already a well-established medium of high prestige, soon became a court language and generally a supra-national language of scholars, literati, the merchant class and administrators (Pollock 2009, Eaton 2013).

In addition to the Turco-Mongol conquest, it was also the subsequent Persian exodus in the late 14th century, known as the “Samarqandi diaspora”, which brought thousands of representatives of Persian-speaking intellectual elites (arbāb-i qalam, or ‘men of the pen’) from the Central Asian land of Transoxiana, modern-day Uzbekistan, to India. They were fleeing from the brutalities and tyranny of the much feared new Turco-Mongol ruler, Timur-i Lang.

As Jennifer W. Nourse stresses, most of the fleeing intelligentsia headed south, which in turn had a tremendous impact on the history of Southeast Asia. She suggests that the exodus indirectly—via the Persianate sultanates of India—sparked a dramatic cultural shift in the Malay archipelago as erudite refugees, their descendants and disciples “brought to these shores a language and style honed for centuries by sophisticated traders in the grand Silk Road cities” (Nourse 2013: 404). She argues that as these literate and Persian-speaking elites became established in India by the early 15th century, a great interest in all things Persian spread. This process continued outside the subcontinent via Muslim trade in the areas of the Indian Ocean littoral, including Southeast Asia.

The exiled Central Asian Persians fleeing from Timurid tyranny who are known to have reached the distant shores of Indonesian islands included figures as important as Sunan Gresik, one of the Wali Sanga, the legendary “nine saints”, or proselytizers of Islam in Java. He was probably born in 1359 in Samarqand as Maulana Ibrahim and became a key historical figure since many Indonesian authors consider him to have been the first of the wali (Quinn 2008: 65). He apparently left his native Transoxiana around 1370, along with his father and brother, who both excelled in medicine. Having traveled via India, they headed next for “Champa”, where they allegedly spent thirteen years, during which Maulana himself became a successful healer and, via marriage to a princess, also the son-in-law of the local ruler (Nourse 2013: 406). Later, sometime in the 1390s, he moved to Java, where, after having impressed local communities by his medical prowess, he began the Islamic proselytization process on the island. Thus, his medical expertise facilitated his missionary efforts. It is also likely that Maulana, as most healers from Central Asia tended to be, was a member of a Sufi tareqat, which would also be in line with the theory that Sufism was amongst the major drivers behind the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia.

Given the hitherto historical and linguistic developments, we may conclude that during the golden age of Muslim trade in the Indian Ocean prior the Portuguese conquest of the Melaka Sultanate in 1511, Persian began to serve as the main medium of communication in all major ports along the India-China route. This was generally true for Muslim Indians, Arabs, other Indians and the Chinese. Simultaneously, Malay remained and further developed as the vital contact language of all indigenous peoples across all of Maritime Southeast Asia.
Thus, due to its status as a cultural *lingua franca* and its non-sectarian character, Persian had become a supra-regional and supra-national language of the elite in many regions and countries of Asia. According to Pollock, it is exactly these conditions and situations that provide fertile soil for the development of so-called “cosmopolitanisms”, where the “foreign” language garners a great deal of influence, not as a vernacular, but as a medium that embodies a set of sophisticated concepts—more sophisticated than the local ones so that they “stipulate imitation of their style and way of being” across geographically vast areas (Pollock 2009).

However, Persians or Persianate South Asians did not apparently impress by their number in the ports of Southeast Asia, but rather thanks to their fashionable appearance, charisma and strong personalities, which attracted the interest of both the local populations and chroniclers. It was probably the rare combination of good manners, riches and knowledge, especially in the realm of medical achievements (Nourse 2013: 405), that led to them enjoying great “prestige, intellectual and spiritual, not commensurate with the size of their communities” in the harbor-cities of Nusantara (Guillot 2004: 177).

Therefore, I believe it may be useful at this point to review a range of Persian loanwords in Malay-Indonesian to gain a more complex picture of cultural hybridization in Maritime Southeast Asia, thus enabling us to identify the areas in which the influence was most intense. First, a list in alphabetical order will be presented and then I will attempt to examine particular areas of exchange in some detail.8

- **badam** (almond) – from *bādām* / بادام
- **baju** (clothes, shirt, blouse) – from *bāzū* (jacket)
- **bandar** (port, harbor, also a ‘city’ in Malaysian use, for all cities then were basically ports) – from *bandar* / بندر
- **biadab** (disrespectful) – from *bi-adab* / بی ادب, *bi* (not) and *adab* (civilized)
- **bius** (drugged) – from *bi-būś* / بیبوش, *bi* (not) and *būś* (conscious)
- **cambuk** (whip) – from *cābuk* / قابک
- **cogan** (a royal (metal) standard) – from *čugān* or *čangān* / چوگان, also stands for a ‘polo stick’9
- **cokmar** (royal mace / club) – from *čób-mār*
- **destar** (rurban, male headcloth) – from *dastār* / دستار
- **devan** (council) – from *dvān* / دوو، ‘council of state’; in the Perso-Indian sphere (an office of) a ‘high official’, ‘minister’
- **domba** (sheep) – from *dumbā* / ذنبه, ‘original meaning: ‘tail’, (tail) ‘fat’ (of a sheep); a specific kind of sheep with a broad (fat) tail
- **gandum** (wheat) – from *gandum* / گندم
- **ini** (this) – from *in* / ابن
- **istana** (palace) – from *āstāne* / آستانه

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As is evident from this list, the lexical transfer was most intense in the area of the primary and most frequent interaction, i.e. trade, which not only included a number of commercial items such as *gandum* (wheat) or *kurma* (date) the Persians traded, but also the very conceptual word for the ‘market’ in the Malay expression *pasar*, which is derived from the Persian *bāzār*. Persian or Perso-Indian commercial influence also materialized in the Malay expression for a trader—*saudagar* (interestingly, in Melaka times, it was mainly used for Muslim Tamil merchants in the service of the Sultan, known as *saudagar-saudagar raja*, which indicates that India was the intermediating source). Other trade-connected loan-words include various foods, fruits, flowers and animals of foreign origin not familiar in the archipelago before these contacts, such as *domba* (sheep), *anggur* (grapevine), *kismis* (raisins), *laksa* (vermicelli), etc. or items for which Persian merchants were famed, such as their fashionable attire: the
ubiquitous Malay-Indonesian *baju* (see above), *seluar* (from *šalwār*, ‘trousers’), *serban* and *destar*, or *kamka* (from *kamkhā*, ‘brocade’).

The sphere of trading is naturally interconnected with the field of maritime and naval affairs since they facilitated commercial exchange. It is worth noting again that a number of rather elementary concepts, such as *bandar* (port, harbor) and *shahbandar* (harbor-master), as well as *kelasi* (sailor) and *nakhoda* (captain, fleet commander), terms that became widely used in Malay and also other Malayo-Indonesian languages, had their origin in Persian. One might speculate at this point as to whether or not Malay had had such words in its arsenal before this contact, or, why it was particularly Persian and not, for example, Arabic or another influential language, that provided the lexicon, since the Persians were not the only traders plying these waters. Nonetheless, given the multitude of exiles from Persia, India and Central Asia, their vast trading network and competence, it is obvious that Iranians and Perso-Indian seafaring merchants were of great prominence in this area as early as the 13th century. This close association definitely lasted at least until the late 15th century, with the intense commercial connection between Cambay and Melaka being well-recorded by Pires and others. According to the Portuguese chronicler, Melaka “could not live without Cambay, nor Cambay without Malacca” (Pires, as quoted in Riello 2009: 316-317). Given the intensity of these ties, the Gujarati entrepôt port of Cambay played a major role in providing a link with Southeast Asia, becoming one of the sources of Sufi Islam that was to become instrumental in the first wave of the Islamization of the Malay and Indonesian coasts (Ricklefs 2001).

Subsequently, it was apparently the Iranians themselves who then dominated trade in the area until as late as the 17th century, with the Persian *nakhodas* remaining in charge of great portions of the Indian Ocean trade, including long-haul links such as the one between the Persian Gulf, Surat and Masulipatnam and the Thai Kingdom of Ayutthaya (Siam), where they acted in the service of the Siamese King (Subrahmanyam 1992: 349). Many of these seafarers were most probably Persians, individuals who may have fled the unfavorable religious atmosphere in Iran under the Safavid dynasty (ibid.).

The itinerant Iranians and Persian-speaking South and Central Asians were not only influential as traders and ship-owners, but also as capable state administrators and officials. Their legacy was tangible along the Indian Ocean littoral, including the Malay world, where they left a significant mark in relation to Malay statehood and kingship (*kerajaan*). This is evident in the adoption of royal and political expressions such as *shah*, *tahta*, *nobat*, *dewan*, *cogan*, *cokmar* etc. It was from the Melaka Sultanate times—the golden age of Malay kingship and culture—that Malay kings began the tradition of adding the Persian title *shah* to their name (Marrison 1955: 53), starting with Melaka’s founding father, Parameswara, who upon his conversion to Islam in around 1405 took the new Muslim kingly name of Iskandar Shah. Many of his successors, be it in Melaka, Johor, Perak, or Pahang, then followed suit.

It is likely that the term *shah* was adopted because of its narrow connection with the pre-Islamic Iranian concept of the ‘just and universal king’, which later evolved into the Sufi notion of the monarch as ‘God’s shadow on Earth’. This idea apparently appeared attractive to Malay rajas since it resembled the Brahmanic concept of the *dewaraja*, thus fitting into the existing Hindu-Buddhist cosmological matrix. This
Persian notion had a considerable effect on the spread of Islam into parts of modern-day Pakistan and India during the 11th and 12th centuries, and later, indirectly, across the Malay-Indonesian world, for it had turned “kingship into a highly respected institution” (Milner 2008: 41).

As a result, important cultural and ritual borrowings from Persianate royal culture began to appear at the Malay ruling courts. They involved *inter alia* the adoption of the Persian orchestra and its individual musical instruments at the coronation ceremony—the *nobat* (from the Persian *naubat*). The *nobat* orchestra was to become vital for Malay kings as a highly symbolic part and indeed the most important item of the treasured regalia (*pusaka*), for it symbolizes the Sultan’s status and sovereignty (Kartomi 2012: 26). Its instruments are even considered to be sacred and only chosen individuals (*orang kalur*) are allowed to play them or even touch them (Raja Iskandar bin Raja Halid 2009: 1). The first one to be established in the Malay world was probably at the behest of the first sultan of Melaka from the area of Islamized West India (probably the Delhi Sultanate). Other important lexical items denoting kingship would be *tahta* (rule, to rule), *istana* or *astana* (ruler’s palace), and *dewan*, the state council, today an expression for both houses of Indonesian, resp. Malaysian parliaments. Of similar significance are the Perso-Malay names of other regalia, including the long metal standard (*cogan*, from the Persian *čugān*), used in idioms such as *cogan alam* (scepter of the world) and *cogan agama* (scepter of religion) as well as the royal mace (*cokmar*, from the Persian *čōb-mār*), all of which are symbols of the authority of Malay sultans and which continue to be held in high esteem.

At the apex of its power at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, the Aceh sultanate was in intensive contact with the Perso-Indian circuit, which is reflected in a number of Persia-inspired administrative positions. According to Leonard Andaya, the Persian word for scribe, *karkon*, was widely used at that time in the Aceh court, and the chief scribe was given the mixed Malay-Persian title, *penghulu karkon* (Andaya 2010: 132). Furthermore, in Aceh, as well as in Melaka, Johor and Banten, the harbor chief was referred to by the widespread expression *shahbandar*, although “only in Aceh was the *shahbandar* assisted by a *nazir* (inspector of trade) and a *dalal* (middleman), which were also Persian titles” (ibid.).

All in all, over 300 words of purely Persian origin have been recorded in Malay-Indonesian, most of which probably entered the language between the 13th and 15th centuries when the Persian impact on Nusantara was at its zenith. The recorded outcome is irrespective of whether they reached Southeast Asia directly from Persia or via the Persianate areas of the Indian Subcontinent, although, given the previous arguments, the latter source was more instrumental.

In addition to this lexicon, there is another set of words, amounting to roughly 280 items of Arabic origin, which probably reached Southeast Asia via Persian. They include important expressions, such as *laskar* ‘army’, ‘militia’ (from the Persian *laškar*), derived from the original Arabic *al-askar* (‘soldier’ or ‘guard’), or *haftiz* (a title for a Muslim who knows *al-Quran* by heart, literally a ‘guardian’).
LITERARY IMPRINTS

As Persian was a sophisticated medium of expression for many non-Persian entities, courts and literati, many Persian literary forms, as well as stories and figures, also entered the Malay cultural-cum-linguistic zone and have since had a great impact on traditional Malay literature. Similarly to the afore-explained processes, most of these were not direct imports from Persia, but rather intermediated via the Islamized areas of (Perso)India.

One of the most popular genres in early modern Malaya and other parts of the Malay world was hikayat (a story, an account), from the Persian hikāīat. Many classical Malay texts such as Hikayat Amir Hamzah, Hikayat Bakhtiar and Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyah are adaptations or even direct translations from Persian. Some of these hikayat, as well as other Malay texts from the 16th and 17th centuries, also reveal a degree of Shi‘ite influence, despite the fact that modern Malay and Indonesian Islam follows the Sunni variation of the Shafi‘i school. This confirms the India connection, where the Shafi‘i maddhab prevailed. Nonetheless, it appears that the Shi‘ite connection was quite important and had considerable influence on the Malay-Indonesian world, both in relation to religious practices and literary forms.

Curiously, even today Shi‘ite residua are to be found in Indonesia, outside the realm of traditional literature—for instance the tabut or ashur‘a ceremony, which is a Shi‘i festival commemorating the defeat of the Prophet’s descendants on the battlefield of Karbala, and which is still practiced to this day in the Minangkabau area of West Sumatra (Daneshgar 2014: 194).

From the 18th century onwards, however, most of the Sufi and Shi‘ite elements were gradually replaced or marginalized by the Sunni Islamic forms, the result of both the rise of Arabia-inspired Wahhabism and the general strengthening of ties between Hadhrami and other Arab ulama and their Southeast Asian counterparts. Concurrently, interaction with and the influence of Sufi-oriented Perso-India was in the process of decline.

Interestingly, before this process started in the 17th century, one of the most important sources of Islamic knowledge for the Malay world lay not in Arabia, Persia or India, but in an area of close proximity and within the region—the kingdom of Ayutthaya. In the seventeenth century, this country boasted a large and influential Persian, mostly Shi‘a Muslim, community. Amounting to around 4,000 persons, the resident Persians were not only involved in commercial activities, but some were to become highly influential at the royal court of King Phra Narai, who was a great patron of their presence and cultural impact (Encyclopaedia Iranica, 2004 http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/southeast-asia-i). King Narai was known to have been attracted to Persian designs, cuisine and clothing styles, the latter influencing his own dress, apart from the turban, which he allegedly found ridiculously heavy. However, he did support the construction of mosques and invited Persian Muslims to take part in court administration, with several Persians serving as key ministers, clerks and diplomats (Marcinkowski 2005: 60). These Persians, who referred to Ayutthaya as Šahr-e nāv/Shahr-i-Nav (“New City”), the name adopted by the Arabs and Persians as early as the 15th century, were Shi‘ites and the influence of their creed later spread among the unorthodox Sufis in Aceh during the late 16th and early 17th centuries.
According to one source, a notable Sufi man of letters, known for his association with the Aceh court, Hamzah Fansuri (d. 1590), lived and worked there. Allegedly, he was even born in Ayutthaya, to which he refers in the corrupt form, Shahr Nawi, in his poetry. The identical form is also to be found in the chronicle Sejarah Melayu (Marcinkowski 2005: 46). Joll, however, argues that Hamzah was a naturalized Persian from Sumatran Barus (Fansur, and hence his toponymic epithet), and that he only spent some of his time living and working in Ayutthaya (Joll 2012). Interestingly, unlike most Malay-Indonesian ulama of that time, he was not only a Sufi, but was also possibly an adherent of Shi’a, taking into consideration both his stay in Siam (with the Iranian Shi’ite community) and his visit to a pilgrimage site in Iraq while returning from hajj to Mecca. As for Hamzah’s origins, Marcinkowski argues that he was born in Ayutthaya, whereas van Bruinessen claims that it is the place where he experienced his mystical insights (Marcinkowski 2002, Bruinessen 1994). Be that as it may, the influential Iranian community thereof served as an important source of literary and religious inspiration for Malay world, given the intellectual networks of the ulama, who were engaged in intensive contacts across the region (Azra 2005).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

To sum up, we may conclude that the Persian impact on the Malay-Indonesian world was highly significant, of manifold origins and multi-faceted. The Persian cosmopolis was in existence for almost a millennium, i.e. from the 11th till the 19th centuries, with its influence in Southeast Asia being most pronounced from the 13th to 17th centuries. The elements of the supranational Persian culture originated basically from four areas: a) Persia per se; b) Persianate Central Asia; c) Persianate Indian sultanates; and lastly d) the Thai kingdom of Autthaya.

As predecessors of modern-day Malaysians and Indonesians were exposed to, adapted and adopted a range of foreign imports—Indian, Arabo-Islamic, Chinese and European, to name the major ones, it would be rather misleading to magnify the impact of Persian and Persianate culture on the region. Yet, it is evident that Persian cultural, religious, political and administrative elements have been very important, discernible and specific in the Malay-Indonesian world.

Persians and other Persophones arrived with new goods, attractive ideas relating to statecraft, sophisticated literary forms and lexicon, and a more mysticism-oriented form of Islam. They were to be gradually superseded by intensive Arab missionary inputs from the 18th century onwards (Azra 2005: 12) and by the additional impact of European colonizers. The Persian element may no longer be in fashion or might have merged or been overlaid with new inputs, without any local awareness of its origins, but it is still there, deeply entrenched in the cultural fabric of many parts of the Muslim Malayo-Indonesian world.

Notes

1. Bani People.
2. In later stages of this article we will refer to this language simply as Persian.
3. This dynasty gradually began to rule the area as an independent kingdom, although it was still formally under Abbasid rule. As a result, its governors heavily promoted New Persian at the expense of Arabic (which still retained a degree of influence both in the lexicon of New Persian and as the sacred language of Islam. Nonetheless, this was when Farsi really took off.

4. Among the most notable figures we can identify also Ibn Sīna or Avicenna, who hailed from a Persian-speaking part of Central Asia.

5. Alam and Subrahmaniam refer to them as “lords of the pen” (2011).

6. Nourse supports this argument by stating that the exodus of rich merchants, craftsmen and scholars from Khorasan and Transoxania, fleeing from Mongol invasions, contributed greatly to the further cultural development of the cultures of Anatolia, Cairo and India (Nourse 2013).

7. According to Quinn, Maulana Ibrahim is held in such reverence by Javanese Muslims that his tomb has become a major pilgrimage site, with more than 1.5 million visitors in 2005 alone (Quinn 2008).

8. Primary source http://sealang.net/indonesia/lwim/, accessed October 2014 to April 2014. The author is deeply indebted to Ms Keyvan Zahedian, who provided the Persian-script versions as well as most of the transliterations and advised invaluably on the etymologies. Any error arising from the manipulation with the provided information is purely the author’s own responsibility.

9. Polo standing here for horse polo, a Persian national sport, wherein the word čaugān (also transliterated as chaugān) is used for the mallet used to hit the ball (source: http://www.polomuseum.com/history_of_polo.htm).

10. An important Malay/Indonesian derivation of this word is menobatkan—to install as king.


12. Quite importantly, the word nobat then became the root word for the verbal derivation menobatkan—to install as king, clearly of high importance to the pretenders to the throne.

13. These instruments include the Persian trumpet nafri (from the Persian nafīr) and the flute known as serunai (from sornā or sūrnāy).

14. Dalal (a go-between) actually originates from the Arabic (dallāl), but seems to have entered Malay via Persian as many other words from Arabic did. A more prominent example would be ustād, ‘a religious teacher, master’.

15. Another version of the English transliteration of this Persian word is hekāyat.

16. Besides hikayat, these forms include, for example, nasihat (advise) and poetic meters such as ghazal, mathnawī (rhyming couplet) and ruba’ī (from rubā‘ī, a Persian quatrain, in which the first, second and fourth lines rhyme).

17. It should be noted that while some Shi‘ite elements are recorded, before the 15th century the association between Persian Sufism and Shi‘ism was not apparent, although Shi‘ite elements were always present in Sufi literature (Marcinkowski 2010: 161).

18. The more orthodox Sunni Islam as well as shari‘a-oriented Sufism, as taught for example by al-Ghazali, was preached from the 17th century onwards both by Malay and Indonesian ulama, as well as by those hailing from Hadhramawt (Yemen). As a result of this, along with the decline in contacts with Perso-India and Persia, an Islamic reform movement started and these forms of Islam gradually began to dominate in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago.
References


MARCINKOWSKI, M. Ismail, 2005, From Isfahan to Ayutthaya: Contacts between Iran and Siam in the 17th Century, Singapore: Pusaka Nasional Pte Ltd.


Abstract: This article attempts to analyze the fields of Persian cultural impact in Maritime Southeast Asia to provide a more complex picture of the cultural pluralism and hybridization, which has been taking place in this region since time immemorial. The primary argument of this paper is that the societies of the Malay-Indonesian region were once part of a great cultural sphere, which has been labeled as the ‘Persian cosmopolis’. This connection to various Persianate societies across the Indian Ocean brought about intense mutual interaction, resulting in numerous and highly formative linguistic, cultural, political and also material borrowings, mainly on the Malay side. Therefore, the author first strives to review and cast more light on the general historical knowledge regarding how, and how intensely, the Malay world was involved in this cultural sphere, what particular important shifts and imports occurred during this historical era and what the circumstances of this interaction were. This historical approach will be combined with an attempt at historical linguistics via examining a range of loan-words from Persian into Malay with the aim to define the main spheres of mutual interaction.

Les « Terres sous le vent » (“Lands below the Winds”) partie de la cosmopolis persane: une enquête sur les emprunts linguistiques et culturels aux sociétés persanes dans le monde malais

Résumé: Cette note tente de retracer et d’analyser le degré d’impact culturel persan en Asie du Sud-Est insulaire afin de donner une image plus complexe du pluralisme et de l’hybridation culturelle qui a eu lieu dans cette région depuis des temps immémoriaux. L’argument principal de ce texte est que les sociétés de la région malay-indonésienne faisaient autrefois partie d’une grande aire culturelle persane. Cette connexion à diverses sociétés persanes dans l’océan Indien a provoqué une interaction mutuelle intense qui a entraîné de nombreux et très formateurs emprunts linguistiques, culturels, politiques ainsi que matériels, principalement du côté malais. Par conséquent, l’auteur cherche en premier lieu à examiner et éclairer les connaissances historiques générales, comment et avec quelle intensité le monde malais a-t-il été impliqué dans cette sphère culturelle, quels changements et quelles importations importantes ont eu lieu au cours de cette période historique et quelles étaient les circonstances de cette interaction. Cette approche historique est combinée à une tentative de linguistique historique à travers l’étude d’une gamme de termes malais empruntés au persan dans le but de définir les principales sphères d’interaction.

Keywords: Indian Ocean trade, the Malay world, Persia, Persian language, Persianate culture, India, Indonesian archipelago, Islam, Sufism.

Mots-clés: commerce de l’océan Indien, le monde malais, Perse, langue persane, culture persane, Inde, archipel indonésien, islam, soufisme.