

Al-Attas and Hikayat Raja Pasai: A Source of Malay-Islamic Historiography

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Abstrac

Hikayat Raja Pasai (The Chronicles of Pasai) is considered one of the oldest texts that tells about Islamization in the Malay-Indonesian region. According to other traditional historiography, this hikayat by Western scholars is often regarded as a story full of myths and very subjective so its credibility is judged to be reduced, even considered as a mere fantasy story. This opinion was rejected by Syed M. Naquib Al-Attas. According to him, the results of the interpretation of Western scholars were due to their biased worldview, so they built a secular historical research methodology. As a result, they consider traditional historical works such as Hikayat Raja Pasai to be only literary works. That's why Al-Attas then tried to re-interpretation the Hikayat Raja Pasai which is the oldest historiographical work that explains the process of Islamization in the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago. Among the results of his interpretation of this hikayat is that the name Samudra comes from the word semutraya, the process of Islamization mentioned in the hikayat has been going on since the 9th or 10th century AD and was brought by the Quraysh Arabs from Mengiri, Merah Silu is a fictional character, and Malik as-Saleh was not the first Muslim king from Samudra Pasai.

Keywords: Hikayat Raja Pasai, Historiography, Malay-Islam, Syed M. Naquib Al-Attas

Abstrak

Hikayat Raja Pasai dianggap sebagai salah satu naskah tertua yang menceritakan mengenai proses Islamisasi di kawasan Melayu-Indonesia. Sebagaimana historiografi tradisional lainnya, hikayat ini oleh para sarjana Barat seringkali dianggap sebagai cerita yang penuh mitos dan sangat subyektif sehingga kredibilitasnya dinilai berkurang, bahkan dianggap sebagai cerita fantasi semata. Anggapan ini ditolak oleh Syed M. Naquib Al-Attas, menurutnya hasil

interpretasi para sarjana Barat itu karena adanya bias pandangan hidup mereka sehingga membangun metodologi penelitian sejarah yang sekular. Akibatnya mereka menganggap hasil karya sejarah tradisional seperti Hikayat Raja Pasai hanya sebatas sebuah karya sastra. Karena itulah Al-Attas kemudian mencoba melakukan pembacaan ulang terhadap Hikayat Raja Pasai yang merupakan karya historiografi tertua yang menjelaskan proses Islamisasi di Kepulauan Melayu-Indonesia. Di antara hasil intepretasinya terhadap hikayat ini adalah bahwa nama Samudra berasal dari kata semutraya, proses Islamisasi yang disebut dalam hikayat telah berlangsung sejak abad ke-9 atau 10 M dan dibawa oleh orang Arab Quraisy dari Mengiri, Merah Silu adalah tokoh fiksi, dan Malik as-Saleh bukanlah raja Muslim pertama dari Samudra Pasai.

Kata Kunci: Hikayat Raja Pasai, Historiografi, Syed M. Naquib Al-Attas

Introduction

An imaginative reconstruction of the past based on existing data after going through the historical method process is commonly referred to as historiography.¹ That's why historiography can be said to be the last part of the historical research method after going through the stages of heuristics, source criticism, and interpretation. This is because history is not just a series of data or facts, but also a series of past stories that are restated by a historian.² In addition, as explained by Dien Madjid, historiography can also be interpreted as the study of historical writing. In other words, studying how humans in each era write about their past history.³

In general, historians argue that Indonesia has at least three phases of historiographic development, namely traditional historiography, colonial historiography, and modern Indonesian historiography. Indonesian historiography is considered to be the most advanced form of historical writing because, in this phase, historical writing has used a modern research methodology that demands the elimination of myths and legends through critical analysis. In addition, this phase is also different from colonial historiography, which uses an outsider's perspective to reduce the bias of the political interests of

¹ Louis Gottschalk, *Mengerti Sejarah* (Jakarta: UI-Press, 2015), 39.

² Dien Madjid and Johan Wahyudi, *Ilmu Sejarah: Sebuah Pengantar* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2014), 230–31.

³ Dien Madjid, *Metode Sejarah: Teori Dan Praktik* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2021), 109.

the colonizing country.⁴ Traditional historiography, on the contrary, is characterized as something that is opposite to modern historiography, because it is considered to contain many magical elements, myths, and legends. Also, there is no time information so it is anachronistic, highly subjectivist because it *istana-centric*, and is often unknown who the author is.⁵ Because it is considered to contain elements of myth, in the end many scholars doubt traditional historiography as a work of history. As Collins explains, history and myth are two things that are considered contradictory, where both are described in terms of truth and falsity.⁶

Some historians try to find common ground between the scientific method and traditional historiography. Husein Djajadiningrat, for example, argues that traditional historiography such as *babad* (chronicles) are works of historical literature that cannot be discarded as having no historical value, because sometimes the historical parts of the chronicles can be controlled by Western sources such as Portuguese or Dutch records.⁷ The same thing is also voiced by N. J. Krom that historical literary works such as *babad* or *hikayat* are still historical sources and therefore must be processed according to historical methods so that it can be clearly known which facts can be trusted and which facts must be discarded.⁸

One of the most influential and important works of traditional historiography in Indonesia is the *Hikayat Raja Pasai*. This work is considered as the oldest historical writing work in the Malay region. In addition, this work also influenced various other traditional historiographical works in the Malay region such as *Sejarah Melayu*.⁹ Even so, many researchers consider *Hikayat Raja Pasai* as a literary work, not a historical work whose information can be accepted as truth.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 126; Sartono Kartodirdjo, *Pendekatan Ilmu Sosial Dalam Metodologi Sejarah* (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2017), 274.

⁵ Madjid, *Metode Sejarah: Teori Dan Praktik*, 124–26; Imas Emalia, *Historiografi Indonesia: Sejak Masa Awal Sampai Masa Kontemporer* (Jakarta: UIN Jakarta Press, 2006), 22.

⁶ Rebecca Collins, "Concealing the Poverty of Traditional Historiography: Myth as Mystification in Historical Discourse," *Rethinking History* 7, no. 3 (December 1, 2003): 342.

⁷ Soedjatmoko, ed., *An Introduction to Indonesian Historiography* (Jakarta: Equinox Pub, 2007), 77.

⁸ Emalia, *Historiografi Indonesia: Sejak Masa Awal Sampai Masa Kontemporer*, 27.

⁹ Kajian mengenai pengaruh Hikayat Raja Pasai terhadap Sejarah Melayu, lihat P. L. Amin Sweeney, "The Connection between the Hikayat Raja2 Pasai and the Sejarah Melayu," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 40, no. 2 (1967).

This is because the *Hikayat Raja Pasai* is considered to contain many elements of subjectivism because it is *istana-centric*, which tells a lot about the rulers of Samudra Pasai, does not have a clear description of the time or author, and describes events that are considered beyond human reason or myth.

However, it cannot be denied that the *Hikayat Raja Pasai* is an important source in writing the history of the Malay Archipelago or Nusantara. In the historical research contained in *Pasai dalam Perjalanan Sejarah: Abad ke-13 Sampai Awal Abad ke-16* and published by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, for example, *Hikayat Raja Pasai* is one of the main references besides of course being balanced with sources from other reports, especially Chinese and European records and archaeological evidence.¹⁰ Likewise, in other works when discussing Samudra Pasai, the same narrative is presented, where some data is taken from the *Hikayat Raja Pasai* but by ensuring external written records or reports as well as archaeological evidence.

However, a different approach and interpretation was tried by Syed M. Naquib Al-Attas. In his latest work entitled *Historical Fact and Fiction*, he provides a new perspective on the reading of the *Hikayat Raja Pasai*. Not only does he provide a new interpretation of the traditional historiography, but Al-Attas also criticizes the methodology of historical research developed by the West. On one hand, Al-Attas appreciates how Western historians have contributed greatly to the research on the history of Malay-Indonesia, but on the other hand, Al-Attas also emphasizes how there are differences in research methodologies between the West and Islam due to differences in their respective worldviews. For example, when writing about the history of an Islamic civilization, we cannot just rely on facts based on material sources alone, because in Al-Attas' concept, the influence of Islam is actually more deeply visible in the inner aspects of a society. The result of Islamization can be seen from the aspect of thought to the use of language. In Al-Attas' assessment, this is often neglected by Western historians, so when they read or transliterate manuscripts, they often experience mistakes.¹¹

¹⁰ Muhammad Gade Ismail, *Pasai Dalam Perjalanan Sejarah: Abad Ke-13 Sampai Awal Abad Ke-16* (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI, 1997).

¹¹ Syed M. Naquib Al-Attas, *Historical Fact and Fiction* (Johor Baru: Universiti Teknologi Malaysia Press, 2012), xiv–xv.

In this way, Al-Attas came to a different conclusion when reading *Hikayat Raja Pasai*. To find out this, this article will try to answer the concept of Islamic history according to Al-Attas and his contribution to Islamic historiography in Malay, as well as what are his conclusions related to the interpretation of *Hikayat Raja Pasai*. This research is a literature study of Al-Attas' works related to history and historiography, using a descriptive content analysis approach to describe in detail the content of a text.¹² In this case, this paper will focus on Al-Attas' work related to the discussion of the *Hikayat Raja Pasai* manuscript, but before that, a brief biography of Al-Attas and his thoughts on historical methodology and Islamic historiography in the Malay region will be discussed.

Syed M. Naquib Al-Attas: A Short Biography and His Thoughts in Islamic Historiography

Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas,¹³ was born in Bogor on September 5, 1931. His paternal grandfather was Abdullah bin Muhsin Al-Attas (Habib Empang), a Hadhrami cleric whose name is widely known in Indonesia, and his grave is one of the pilgrimage sites visited by many people. During his elementary school years, Al-Attas studied in Indonesia, after which he moved to Malaysia. During his stay in Johor, Malaysia, Al-Attas lived in the house of his uncle Ungku Abdul Aziz ibn Ungku Abdul Majid. In the house of his uncle, who is still a relative of the Chief Minister of Modern Johor, there is a large library that has many Malay manuscripts. Al-Attas spent much of his youth reading manuscripts and books on history, literature, and religion both from Malay and Western sources. Al-Attas also lived with his uncle, Dato Onn ibn Dato Jaafar, who was one of Malaysia's nationalist figures and the founder and first president of UMNO (United Malay National Organization). It was this educated family environment that, according to Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, supported Al-Attas' intellectual potential.

He completed his higher education at the University of Malaya in 1957 at the undergraduate level. Al-Attas then received a scholarship to continue his education at the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill

¹² Eriyanto, *Analisis Isi: Pengantar Metodologi Untuk Penelitian Ilmu Komunikasi Dan Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial Lainnya* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2015), 33.

¹³ Untuk mempersingkat selanjutnya disebut sebagai Al-Attas.

University, Canada in 1960. It was here that Al-Attas completed his master's program with a thesis entitled *Raniri and the Wujudiyah of 17th Century Aceh* in 1962. A year later, with the encouragement of several scholars and orientalists, Al-Attas continued his studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London, with Prof. Arberry and Dr. Martin Lings as his supervisors. He completed his doctoral studies in 1965 with a dissertation entitled *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansuri*.

After receiving his doctorate, in the same year Al-Attas returned to Malaysia and became Head of the Department of Literature at the University of Malaya. In 1968 he was then appointed Dean of the Faculty of Letters at the same campus. Al-Attas was also involved in the establishment of Universitas Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), as well as the founder and chairman of the Institute of Malay Language, Literature and Culture at UKM. The highlight of Al-Attas' career was when he was trusted to establish the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) in 1991. Here, Al-Attas was involved in almost every aspect, from the design of the building and interior, the philosophy of education, the curriculum, to the selection of lecturers.

Al-Attas has also participated in many international activities in the field of scientific development. Among other things, he was trusted to lead a panel discussion at the 29th Congress International des Orientalistes in Paris in 1973, inducted into the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy in 1975, the main consultant at the World of Islam Festival in London in 1976, speaker at the First World Conference on Islamic Education in Mecca in 1977, Visiting Professor of Islamic Studies at Temple University in Philadelphia in 1976-1977, chaired a meeting of Islamic historians organized by UNESCO in 1978 in Syria, awarded the Iqbal Centenary Commemorative Medal by the president of Pakistan in 1979, and the holder of the Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali Chair of Islamic Thought at ISTAC-IIUM.

As for his works, there are at least 400 scientific papers and 26 books and monographs that have been written and published, as well as translated into various languages including Malay, English, Arabic, French, Persian, Turkish, Urdu, German, Indonesian, etc.¹⁴ From his educational background to his written works, it can be said

¹⁴ Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *Filsafat Dan Praktik Pendidikan Islam Syed M. Naquib Al-Attas* (Bandung: Mizan, 2003), 53–55.

that Al-Attas is an intellectual who focuses on the field of Islamic thought. However, the ideas he developed were so broad that they did not only cover Islamic philosophy and theology, but also related to literature and Islamic history in the Malay region. Some of his works related to Malay history, literature, and culture include *Some Aspects of Sufism as Understood and Practiced Among the Malays* (1963), *Raniri and the Wujudiyah of 17th Century Aceh* (1966), *Preliminary Statement on a General Theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago* (1969), *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansuri* (1970), *Islam in Malay History and Culture* (1972), *Comments on the Re-examination of Al-Raniri's Hujjat Al-Shiddiq: A Refutation* (1975), *A Commentary on the Hujjat Al-Shiddiq of Nur Al-Din Al-Raniri* (1986), *The Oldest Known Malay Manuscript: A 16th Century Malay Translation of the Aqa'id of Al-Nasafi* (1988), and *Historical Fact and Fiction* (2012).¹⁵

Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, one of Al-Attas' students and colleagues, mentioned that Al-Attas was the first person to initiate a general theory of the Islamization process in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago.¹⁶ This theory is explained by Al-Attas as a theory based on the history of ideas on the change of key concepts of the community's worldview towards the Islamic worldview reflected in Malay-Indonesian literature.¹⁷ In other words, the theory initiated by Al-Attas emphasizes rational evidence that appears in the use of language rather than material or material evidence. This is because the process of Islamization cannot be seen as limited to empirical evidence alone, but more than that the process of Islamization is more important and has further changed the inner structure and soul of humans because Islam brings intellectualism and rationalism. This means that the philosophical teachings of Islam contained in Sufism and Kalam even though it also influenced the people of the Malay-Indonesian region which will appear if seen from changes in the worldview of the community which is reflected in the use of language and literary works that existed at that time. According to Al-Attas, this is different from the Hindu-Buddhist influence which is more inclined to art (aesthetics). Moreover, most of the adherents of Hindu-Buddhist religion can only be seen from the aristocracy.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid., 47.

¹⁶ Ibid., 62.

¹⁷ Syed M. Naquib Al-Attas, *Preliminary Statement on a General Theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago* (Kuala Lumpur: Ta'dib International, 2018), 1.

¹⁸ Ibid., 6; Syed M. Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam Dalam Sejarah Dan Kebudayaan Melayu*

Evidence of the strong influence of the Islamization process in the Malay-Indonesian region, according to Al-Attas, can be found in the changes in thinking in the community which can be seen from the flood of Islamic terms in Arabic into Malay. That is why the Malay language can only develop rapidly only when the presence of Islam. Its strong influence is manifested by the Malay language which is not only used as a daily language or lingua franca but also as a scientific language used in the world of intellectualism among the Malay-Indonesian community.¹⁹

Azyumardi Azra even mentioned that Al-Attas is the “most persistent defender” of the opinion that Islam in the Malay Archipelago came from Arabia. Al-Attas’ view is in line with what is explained by traditional local historiography such as *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, *Sejarah Melayu*, *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*, and so on.²⁰ Although in the end, Azra does not really agree with Al-Attas’ theory, among the reasons is that much of traditional historiography has been mixed with myths and legends.²¹ Azra in this case strengthens A. H. John’s theory which emphasizes the role of Sufis.²² However, Al-Attas himself is also of the view that Sufis and Sufism are important in his theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago.²³

The theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian archipelago is none other than the result of Al-Attas’ study through history as a science that has its own philosophy of science, especially epistemology in Islam. Al-Attas states that humans know knowledge through at least four channels, namely *khobar shadiq*, ratio (reason), senses, and intuition. This is different from Western epistemology, which emphasizes human ratios and senses. Furthermore, the concept of science between Islam and the West is also different. In Islam, Al-Attas explains that science cannot be limited in its definition, unlike the West which translates science into the term science which means knowledge that can only be proven scientifically and produces

(Bandung: Mizan, 1990), 38–42.

¹⁹ Al-Attas, *Islam Dalam Sejarah Dan Kebudayaan Melayu*, 42–43.

²⁰ Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah & Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII & XVIII* (Depok: Prenada Media, 2018), 8–10.

²¹ Azyumardi Azra, *Islam Nusantara: Jaringan Global Dan Lokal* (Bandung: Mizan, 2002), 29.

²² *Ibid.*, 33; Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah & Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII & XVIII*, 15.

²³ Al-Attas, *Islam Dalam Sejarah Dan Kebudayaan Melayu*, 37.

empirical evidence. With such a Western philosophy of science, there has been what he calls the Westernization of Contemporary Science.²⁴ This means that today's science has been infiltrated by the concepts of a secular worldview. This includes the science of history.

In the context of history, an event will be considered a proven fact only if it is accompanied by material evidence such as records, reports, or archaeological objects such as coins, tombstones, and so on. In fact, in the context of history, evidence of the influence of Islam on a society cannot only be seen from material relics, more than that Al-Attas explains that the process of Islamization has a major effect on the inner aspects of society. This is what distinguishes the concept of Islamic civilization from others. In other words, historiography is also a reflection of the author's worldview. Tatiana Denisova confirms this:

"The historian's worldview determines the concept of historical knowledge, the selection of source, the interpretation of facts, the identification of historically consistent patterns, and the formulation of conclusions."²⁵

The same thing is actually also recognized by other historians. Sartono Kartodirdjo, for example, mentions that the development of historiography shows that historical stories are composed with the composer's worldview (*weltanschauung*).²⁶ Therefore, a work of traditional historiography when the society's worldview is still filled with myths will be different from the work made by colonial people who not only have different beliefs but also have political-economic interests, and both will also be different from the results of historiography made by researchers in this modern era where historical science has developed with a special methodology that is considered more modern and critical as the nature of science.

The problem is that today's historiography and historical concepts are dominated by the secular Western worldview. This can be seen from the views of Western thinkers regarding their theory of history, that human history is a change towards a secular life. Max Weber refers to the process of rationalization of society, and August Comte refers to the evolution of positivism. Secularism, according to

²⁴ Syed M. Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam Dan Filsafat Sains* (Bandung: Mizan, 1995).

²⁵ Tatiana Denisova, "Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas' Concept of History: Methods, Sources, and Contemporary Challenges," in *Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas: His Philosophical System and Conceptions of Humanity, History and Civilization* (Kuala Lumpur: RZS-CASIS & HAKIM, 2022), 166.

²⁶ Kartodirdjo, *Pendekatan Ilmu Sosial Dalam Metodologi Sejarah*, 269.

Al-Attas, comes from the Latin *saeculum*, which means present time and space, so what secularism means is present. In other words, the view of secularism only sees the events of the human historical process as occurring only in the world currently occupied by humans and in the present.²⁷

However, this does not mean that Al-Attas denies the results of historical research by Western scholars. He still appreciates them, especially those who have contributed to the research of Islamic history in the Malay-Indonesian region, while still reading them critically.

"We must sincerely acknowledge their wonderful intellectual contributions and affirm what is true in their interpretation of our history which they have gradually set in the crucible agreed among themselves. But there are certain problems of knowledge and methodology that we must question which they and their followers from among our own scholars have caused to arise in our understanding of our history."²⁸

Among Al-Attas' criticisms of Western scholars is how they consider Malay historiographical texts to be unscientific, unreliable, because they are only literary works full of myths and legends, anachronistic because they do not have time information, and often quote the Qur'an and Hadith as justification. This, as explained by Denisova, is due to the bias of the Western worldview when reading Malay historiography texts that developed during the Islamization process. In the colonial view, for example, history writing has Eurocentric characteristics, thus negating Islam and local culture.²⁹ As also explained by Hussain Othman colonialism did not only affect political and economic domination, but also the dominance of historical writing in the Malay-Indonesian region.³⁰

Therefore, calling the work of traditional Malay historiography a work of historical literature with fictional value based only on the views of Western scholars who have a biased worldview is certainly a mistake. Denisova even explained that history and literature do have different forms and purposes, but that does not mean that a work

²⁷ Syed M. Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam Dan Sekularisme* (Kuala Lumpur: RZS-CASIS & HAKIM, 2020), 30; Denisova, "Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas' Concept of History: Methods, Sources, and Contemporary Challenges," 168–70.

²⁸ Al-Attas, *Historical Fact and Fiction*, xi.

²⁹ Denisova, "Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas' Concept of History: Methods, Sources, and Contemporary Challenges," 191–94.

³⁰ Hussain Othman, "Malay Muslim History as Seen by Western Colonialist," *World Journal of Islamic History and Civilization* 1, no. 2 (2011).

of historical literature written as historiography is then considered completely fictional. This is because writing a historical fact can be done with the beauty of form and words, which is the essence of literature. He also quoted how Stephen Humphreys emphasized, "...we are not dealing with raw documents but with a consciously shaped literary tradition, and this tradition has constructed its body of historical fact according to its own aims and criteria, not ours."³¹

Thus, Denisova concludes that the concept of history formulated by Al-Attas is not contradictory to scientific understanding but on the other hand also develops his approach.³² The science of history and the tradition of historiography in Islam thus also adopt the same concept as scientific knowledge, which contains the values of rationalism, intellectualism, logic, objectivity, and others. However, a Muslim does not simply adopt these concepts, but also improvises them by changing them to fit the teachings of Islam.³³

In building a methodology, it will also not be separated from the researcher's worldview. For example, in historical research methodology, Al-Attas asserts that there is a fundamental relationship between one's worldview and the process of verifying sources. The Islamic worldview has a fundamental element in seeing a reality that is external (*zahir*) and also internal (*batin*). The internal aspect is very influential in explaining the external aspect. He also quoted Ibn Khaldun who said that the idea of external historical data has an internal cause whose meaning must be revealed.³⁴ That is why in reconstructing history, when interpreting a fact, it will also not be separated from a value, because to explain whether the existing facts match the reality in the past requires an explanation that cannot be separated from the values brought by the researcher. Al-Attas explained:

"It is true that some traces of the past are found in the present, such as documents, official registers, records of events, stone inscriptions, manuscript, coins, buildings, various implements and the like, which are the necessary materials from which historians derive their data to reconstruct the past. But the reconstruction of past facts as well as present fact cannot be conducted accurately regardless of value, for a facts is not

³¹ Denisova, "Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas' Concept of History: Methods, Sources, and Contemporary Challenges," 196–97.

³² *Ibid.*, 179.

³³ *Ibid.*, 181.

³⁴ Al-Attas, *Historical Fact and Fiction*, 71–72.

only what is, it includes also what follow from it by way of explanation. To test the accuracy of the explanation is not necessarily achieved by seeing whether the fact corresponds to a reality which is already known to us now. To find coherence in the explanation of facts describe by history cannot be free of judgement that involve value."³⁵

For this reason, in his research on the history of Islam in the Malay region, Al-Attas prefers to refer to primary sources directly, namely the work of local sources and the work of Muslim scholars and written reports that existed at that time. The closer this source is to the time of the event, the more reliable it will be.³⁶ Al-Attas did this when he read the manuscript of *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, which is the oldest historiographical work in the Malay-Indonesian region that explains the process of Islamization. The results of his reading were written by Al-Attas in his work entitled *Historical Fact and Fiction* in its first section. Some of Al-Attas' interpretations are new conclusions that are different from those of other scholars. This is because Al-Attas did not stick to Western sources alone, in addition to referring directly to manuscripts, he also examined contemporaneous works in the form of travel notes or reports in the Malay-Indonesian region or in other regions that have relations with this archipelago.

Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai: A Concise Review

The first manuscript of *Hikayat Raja Pasai* was written in Java for Sir Stamford Raffles when he was governor-general of Java. The manuscript in Raffles' possession is dated January 3, 1814. Raffles then took it to England, and when he died the manuscript was handed over to the Royal Asiatic Society in 1830. Until now the manuscript is still stored at the Royal Asiatic Society Library in London with Raffles Malay register no. 67.³⁷ According to Hill, the manuscript under Raffles consisted of 30,000 words on 72 pages. Its author is unknown, but Hill argues that it was written continuously by several people.³⁸

³⁵ *Ibid.*, xii.

³⁶ Denisova, "Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas' Concept of History: Methods, Sources, and Contemporary Challenges," 187.

³⁷ Russel Jones, "The Text of the Hikayat Raja Pasai: A Short Note," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 53, no. 1 (1980): 167.

³⁸ A. H. Hill, "Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai: A Revised Romanised Version of Raffles MS 67, Together with an English Translation," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 33, no. 190 (1960): 26.

In 1849, the Frenchman Dulaurier copied this *Hikayat Raja Pasai* and deposited it in the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris under the code 'No. Mal.-Pol 60, see Cabaton, 224'. Dulaurier in his publication then changed the title of the manuscript from *Hikayat Raja Pasai* to *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai*. Dulaurier is considered the first person to bring the study of Malay manuscripts to France. *Hikayat Raja Pasai* was first published with a romanized text in 1914 by J. P. Mead. However, Mead's work was considered by A. H. Hill to have many errors until finally in 1960 he published his own revised edition of the romanization of the *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai* manuscript.³⁹

Some Western scholars such as Winstedt, Hill and Jones believe that the story in *Hikayat Raja Pasai* begins in the mid-to-late 13th century AD, or precisely in 1280 AD, a time when there was an attack from the Tai Kingdom that destroyed Srivijaya, and on the island of Java the new Majapahit power grew. The manuscript was only written around the middle of the 14th century, making it the oldest Malay manuscript.⁴⁰

According to A. H. Hill, at least the content of *Hikayat Raja Pasai* can be divided into three parts with the following summary:⁴¹

1. The first is about the Islamization of Samudra-Pasai. It begins with the story of two brothers in Semerlanga who each found a child. The two children then married and had two offspring named Merah Silu and Merah Hasum. Due to an argument, Merah Silu and Merah Hasum then separated, Merah Silu traveled from place to place and arrived at the Pasangan river, then was appointed as the local ruler. Once Merah Silu was hunting and found a big ant, he ate it. The place where he found the big ant was later called Samudra. The Caliph in Egypt who heard of the Samudra kingdom sent a delegation there to fulfill the Prophet's will to spread Islam. Shaykh Ismail was appointed as the leader of the delegation. He stopped by a place called Ma'abri, and met a sultan there who then followed him to Samudra as a fakir. Another time, Merah Silu had a dream that he met the Prophet, named him Sultan Malik as-Saleh, and when

³⁹ Jones, "The Text of the Hikayat Raja Pasai: A Short Note," 167.

⁴⁰ R. O. Winstedt, "The Chronicles of Pasai," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 16, no. 2 (1938): 24; Hill, "Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai: A Revised Romanised Version of Raffles MS 67, Together with an English Translation," 7; Jones, "The Text of the Hikayat Raja Pasai: A Short Note," 167.

⁴¹ Hill, "Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai: A Revised Romanised Version of Raffles MS 67, Together with an English Translation," 32–35.

he woke up he was miraculously circumcised and could read the Qur'an fluently. When Shaykh Ismail's entourage arrived, he asked Malik as-Saleh to say the shahada, then inaugurated him. Shaykh Ismail then left with gifts while the fakir remained in Samudra. Many people converted to Islam, but the colony from Gayo went away from Samudra to the Pairs River. Sultan Malik as-Saleh married the daughter of the Perlak kingdom and had a son named Malik at-Tahir. One day Malik as-Saleh was hunting with his dog named Pasai, then the dog fought with a very tough deer. Malik as-Saleh was amazed and thought the place was a good location. He named it Pasai and established a city there with Malik at-Tahir as its leader. Malik at-Tahir had two sons named Malik al-Mahmud and Malik al-Manshur, who would later lead Samudra and Pasai respectively when Malik as-Saleh died. In the end, these two brothers also fought each other. Malik al-Mahmud managed to exile Malik al-Manshur and kill his prime minister. Out of remorse, Malik al-Mahmud had asked his brother to return, but on the way Malik al-Manshur died. When Malik al-Mahmud died, his son Sultan Ahmad ascended the throne.

2. The second part is about the adventures of Tun Beraim Bapa. It is told that Sultan Ahmad had three sons, namely Tun Beraim Bapa who was endowed with super strength, Tun Abdul Jalil who was endowed with a handsome face, and Tun Abu al-Fazil who was endowed with intelligence, as well as two daughters. Sultan Ahmad had an interest in his own daughter and wanted to marry her, but Tun Beraim Bapa managed to take away the two sisters and hide them, making Sultan Ahmad angry. One day a group of people from India came who were experts in fighting and causing trouble. In the kingdom, no one could defeat them, until finally Tun Beraim Bapa managed to defeat and expel them. Thanks to his services, Sultan Ahmad forgave Tun Beraim Bapa. But then Tun Beraim Bapa was known to approach one of Sultan Ahmad's concubines and make him angry again. Sultan Ahmad made a plan to kill Tun Beraim Bapa. Finally, Sultan Ahmad gave Tun Beraim Bapa poisoned food. Although he knew there was poison, Tun Beraim Bapa still took it because he did not want to be considered a traitor, until finally he died on Fadlullah Hill.

3. Then the third part is about the Majapahit invasion and victory. A princess from the Majapahit kingdom fell in love with Tun Abdul Jalil after seeing his portrait. The princess and her royal entourage went to Samudra Pasai to meet him. However, Sultan Ahmad had already killed Tun Abdul Jalil out of jealousy. The princess from Majapahit who knew this swore and prayed to be united to Tun Abdul Jalil, until suddenly she and Tun Abdul Jalil and the ship they were traveling on sank into the ocean. The Majapahit Kingdom, knowing this, took revenge by attacking Samudra Pasai. During the attack, Sultan Ahmad fled to Menduga.

According to Braginsky, the *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai* combines history with mythology, and also contains the doctrine of traditional state ethics in the Malay world based on the belief that the harmony of the world is protected by the ruler.⁴² In other words, the political element in the formulation of the story in this hikayat is inevitable. On the other hand, as explained by Denisova, that many researchers, especially those from the West, consider the results of these Malay historical works to be unscientific, more like fairy tales or legends. She mentioned some names such as Winsted who called it a folklore full of fantasies and legends, to Roolvink who called Malay historical manuscripts something unbelievable.⁴³ Snouck Hurgronje even called the *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai* a children's fairy tale, influenced by Indian fairy tales.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, A. H. Hill, while dismissing Snouck's statement, also recognizes that the description of events conveyed in it has more elements of subjectivity.⁴⁵

Re-reading Hikayat Raja Pasai by Syed M. Naquib Al-Attas

In contrast to the aforementioned Western scholars, Al-Attas considers that traditional Malay historiographical works such as the *Hikayat Raja Pasai* are important in explaining the process of Islamization, especially before the arrival of the West. This is because the history of the Islamization process in the Malay-Indonesian region cannot only be explained by facts derived from Western records, because the West itself only arrived here in the 16th century AD, while the Islamization process had been going on since before. For this reason, the *Hikayat Raja Pasai* became one of Al-Attas' basic references in proposing his Islamization theory.

“The data upon which historical events are explained have been gathered first from the daily registers of the early colonizers (16th century onward). The order of historical events, including the explanation and interpretation of the coming and spread of Islam in the Malay Archipelago, was then measured by this framework. But Islam had come and spread here long before the coming of the Europeans, and events proceeding from it cannot be made to fit into their chronological framework.”⁴⁶

Those who are skeptical of Malay historiographical sources such as *Hikayat Raja Pasai* argue that the story in this work does not have a clear date when it happened, which could lead to historical anachronisms. Al-Attas, however, defends that although the work lacks a clear date and chronology, it provides an important explanation of the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of past events.⁴⁷ This is because history is not only about when an event happened. Even so, by referring to various reports or other records of the times, Al-Attas actually managed to close this hole by estimating the time and chronology stated in the *Hikayat Raja Pasai*.

There are several concluding issues raised by Al-Attas regarding his interpretation of the *Hikayat Raja Pasai*. In this case, the author will divide and summarize them into four parts, namely:

1. Status of the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad

Among the doubts that many historians have about the *Hikayat Raja Pasai* is that the process of Islamization mentioned in this text was inspired by a hadith or saying of the Prophet Muhammad. They doubt its veracity because even in the hadith books, there is no statement similar to the hadith of the Prophet as in the *Hikayat Raja Pasai*.

The hadith of the Prophet referred to in this hikayat reads, “Bahwa ada sa-peningal-ku wafat itu, ada sa-buah negeri di-bawah angin, Semudera nama-nya, apabila ada di-dengar khabar negeri itu, maka bawa’i orang suroh sa-buah kapal membawa perkakas alat kerajaan dan kamu bawa’i orang dalam negeri itu masok ugama Islam serta menguchap dua kalimat al-shahada. Shahadan lagi akan di-jadikan Allahu subhanahu wa ta’ ala dalam negeri itu terbanyak daripada segala wali Allah jadi dalam negeri itu. Ada pun pertama ada sa-orang faquir di-negeri Ma’abri nama-nya ia-itu-lah kamu bawa

⁴⁶ Al-Attas, *Historical Fact and Fiction*, xiii.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

serta kamu ka-negeri Semudera itu.”⁴⁸

For many scholars, it is impossible for this hadith to be authentic, because not only does it not appear in any of the hadith books, but there is no evidence that the Prophet knew the existence or name of what he called Samudra. They believe that the Samudra in question must have been a new kingdom established in the 13th century CE. But according to Al-Attas, the Arabs, including the Prophet, it is possible for them to know the names and existence of places in Southeast Asia. Al-Attas’ argument is that the Arabs were familiar with the names of places and products from Southeast Asia, some of which are even mentioned in the Qur’an. The product in question is referred to in the Qur’an as *kāfūr*, a name derived from the Arabic root *kafara*, which means ‘to cover’.⁴⁹ The Arabs used the term *kāfūr* for this product because the material can be found inside the trunk of a tree, so it was covered from the outside, and the trunk had to be split before the material could be extracted. In addition, the ancient funeral practices of the Arabs used to use *kāfūr* to cover the corpse before burial due to the fragrant nature of the material. Because of this, *kāfūr* is also often used in medicines and perfumes.⁵⁰

Al-Attas then concludes that the same thing can also happen with the term of the place named Samudera, which is why the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad regarding the order to Islamize the Samudera region in Southeast Asia cannot necessarily be considered a fake hadith. However, to prove this, it is necessary to answer the question, did the name Samudera already exist when the Prophet was alive? For this reason, Al-Attas then explains how the name Samudera originated and when the term is thought to have appeared.

2. Origin of the Samudra-Sumatra Name

Many researchers say that the name Samudra is taken from Sanskrit, which means ocean. Others argue that the term comes from the word *Suwarna*, which means gold, because gold is found on this island. Al-Attas, however, rejects this notion. He agrees with what is explained in the *Hikayat Raja Pasai* that the name Samudra is a combination of two Malay words, namely “*Semut*” and “*Raya*” which are combined into *Semutra*, which is related to the story of Merah Silu who found a large ant that was said to be even as big as a cat. Al-Attas refers to the records of Arab explorers from the 13th to 15th centuries AD where the name Samudra is spelled with the letter ‘ta’

instead of 'dal'. Al-Dimashqi wrote it as "*Samatar*", Ibn Batutah wrote it as "*Samutra*", and Ibn Majid wrote it as "*Shumutra*" or "*Sumutra*".⁵¹

According to Al-Attas, although the name *Semutra* already existed, it was not widely recognized as the name of an island. Arab traders in the 9th century AD for example used the name *Ramni* (Lamri), while records from China used the name *Sribuza* (from the word Srivijaya) to refer to the island in the 10th century AD. In those days, the name of a region was often determined by the name of the ruling kingdom or region, which is why the use of the term *Semutra* had not yet emerged. The term was only used to refer to the entire island after the collapse of Hindu-Buddhist royal power and the spread of Islam in the 14th century AD, which was marked by the presence and growing influence of Islamic kingdoms that used the same term. The difference in letter characteristics between Malay and Arabic then led to the derivation of the term *Semutra* into *Sumatra* as it is used today. In Arabic, there is no 'e' vowel sound to pronounce 'se' in *Semutra*. That's why in Arabic records of the time, they would write it as *Samutra* or *Sumutra*. Even Al-Dimashqi in his book written in the 13th century actually mentioned it as *Samatar*. This indicates a change in the pronunciation of the name *Semutra* in Arabic records with the arrangement of the letters *s-m-t-r*, which when added with an 'h' at the end, *Semutra* can be read not only as *Samutra* or *Sumutra*, but also *Sumatra*.⁵²

On the other hand, many researchers have questioned the naming of *Semutra* and doubted the existence of this large ant. Al-Attas mentioned several names that he later criticized such as S. Q. Fatimi and C. C. Browne who he considered to be mistaken in reading Malay historiography texts. Fatimi, for example, doubted the story of the existence of the big ant found by Merah Silu. He considered this story a myth created by the hikayat writer to explain where the name Samudra came from, because according to Fatimi the name Samudra was new to the Malays and they did not know where the name came from before. Browne, however, when translating the *Sejarah Melayu* manuscript which also contains the same story, used the word *Samandara* in his transliteration which he interpreted as a large ant. According to Al-Attas, Browne seems to have been referring to the Ming Dynasty records of 1403 which refer to *Semutra* as *Su-men-ta-la*. But what is

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 8–9.

surprising is that Browne used the letter “d” instead of “t” even though he knew the meaning was a great ant. Al-Attas also criticized John Leydens for using the term *Semadra*, which he interpreted as a large ant. This mistake, which continues to be used by modern researchers, is why Al-Attas believes the name Samudra is more recognizable today when referring to the first Islamic kingdom in Sumatra.⁵³

Al-Attas said that the existence of these large ants is not a myth, but an animal that really existed at that time. He then referred to a report written by Buzurg ibn Shahriyar in *Ajaib al-Hind* that at the end of the 10th century, Muhammad bin Babishad reported that in the northern part of Sumatra, there were very large ants, especially in the Lamri Island area. However, after the end of the 10th century, he no longer found records of the existence of these large ants in the records of Arab traders and explorers who visited Lamri and Barus. Thus, according to Al-Attas, it is most likely that the events described in the *Hikayat Raja Pasai* took place not in the 13th century, but much earlier, around the 9th or 10th century AD.⁵⁴

3. The Beginning of the Islamization: Who, Where, and How

The *Hikayat Raja Pasai* also describes the role of a Caliph Sharif in Mecca in sending a group to Samudra to Islamize the region:

“Hatta berapa lamanya kemudian daripada hadzrat nabi salla Allahu alaihi wa’s-salam wafat, maka terdengar-lah khabar kapada sharif yang di-Makah ada suatu negeri di-bawah angin bernama Semudera, maka oleh khalifah sharif, maka ia menyuroh sa-buah kapal akan membawa segala perkakas alat kerajaan ka-negeri Semudera. Sa-telah sudah kapal itu lengkap, maka di-suroh sharif Shaikh Ismail itu singgah ka-negeri Mengiri.”⁵⁵

According to Al-Attas, the Sharif of Makkah referred to here can be explained as the ruler of Makkah and Medina at that time who was subordinate to a caliph. Although at that time there were Umayyad rulers and continued by the Abbasids, in Makkah and Madinah there were always descendants of Ali ibn Abu Thalib, especially from Hasan and Hussein, who were placed in charge of the two holy cities of Muslims. They were then collectively referred to as Sharifs. Makkah

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵⁵ J. P. Mead, “A Romanized Version of the Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai,” *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, no. 66 (1914): 9, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41561000>.

was under Abbasid rule from 750 AD. During the reign of Al-Ma'mun (813-833), for example, he appointed these descendants of Ali ibn Abu Thalib in various important positions including as authorities in Makkah and Madinah. By referring to Al-Tabari, Al-Attas argues that it is most likely that the Sharif of Makkah mentioned by the *Hikayat Raja Pasai* occurred during the reign of Al-Ma'mun where he in 820-822 AD is recorded to have appointed Sharif Ubaidillah bin al Hasan bin Ubaidillah bin al-Abbas bin Ali bin Abu Thalib as governor of the two holy cities of Muslims.⁵⁶ This corroborates Al-Attas' argument about when the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago occurred based on the *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, which was earlier than the 13th century AD, around the 9th or 10th century AD.

Then the Sharif of Makkah, under the orders of the caliph, sent someone named Shaykh Ismail to lead the journey on a mission of da'wah to Samudra. As per the message in the Prophet's hadith, the messenger was to stop by an area referred to as Mengiri to pick up a faqir. Based on the story in the hikayat, Shaykh Ismail made it to Mengiri and met the local ruler named Sultan Muhammad who had two children. Finally, Sultan Muhammad decided that he and his youngest son would follow Shaykh Ismail to the land of Samudra where they would leave their royal clothes and act as *faqirs*.

The existence of Mengiri country and the figure of Sultan Muhammad also became the focus of Al-Attas' attention. Mengiri is a place name in India. He learned this from Al-Mas'udi's (d. 956 CE) account of his travels in Al-Mansurah and Multan in Sind, as well as Qanawj in north-central India, and not far from there, about 600 miles to the southeast, was a place called Mangir (Monghyr = Mengiri). On the 9th-century CE map of India, this Mengiri is in northeastern India, which in the 13th century CE became known as the boundary between northwestern Bengal and southern Bihar.⁵⁷

The mention of the Mengiri region has led many researchers to speculate that this is corroborating evidence of how Islam came from and was carried by Indian Muslims. However, Al-Attas denied this. According to him, while the Mengiri area currently has a sizable local Muslim population with many tombs and ancient houses of worship, this is a condition that occurred in later times. In the 9th-10th centuries AD when Al-Mas'udi lived and wrote his report, Mengiri was not yet

⁵⁶ Al-Attas, *Historical Fact and Fiction*, 14.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

a large city. Mengiri is even described by Al-Mas'udi as a vast plain controlled by various groups through warfare. Even so, there was a kingdom at its center led by Balhara, a title commonly used for kings in the Indian region, who commanded a large number of powerful troops. Al-Mas'udi also mentions that there were already many Arab Muslims in this part of India at the time, and he mentions that around 10,000 of them were descendants of Quraish who settled in Al-Mansurah, Multan, and Mengiri. When he entered Al-Mansurah in 911 AD he reported that the king at that time was Abu al-Mundhir Umar bin Abd Allah al-Quraishi. At the same time, he also came to Multan and met his king, Abu al-Lahab al-Munabbih bin Asad al-Quraishi. Qanawj was led by Sang Bu'warah, the native king of Sind. As for Mengiri itself, despite being led by a native king from the Indian region, he still treated these Muslim Arabs well, and the area where they lived was guaranteed security. The Muslim Arabs of Mengiri did have their own divided territories with their own kings but still pledged allegiance to Balhara.⁵⁸

Al-Attas' opinion is that the Sultan Muhammad whom Shaykh Ismail met and brought to the *Semutra* area was one of the Muslim kings in Mengiri who was of Quraish lineage. Even in the *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, it is mentioned that he descended from Abu Bakr, one of the Prophet's companions. Furthermore, Al-Attas explained that it was this Sultan Muhammad who later founded and was inaugurated as the first king of Samudra Pasai. As for the story that Merah Silu was the founder of Samudra Pasai, according to him, it is just fiction. He supported this opinion with the well-known tradition at that time that a leader must be chosen from among the Quraish, in addition to being able to implement government laws and courts according to Islamic law, as well as having skills in defense and military, and other good leader criteria. Sultan Muhammad, who had the lineage of a Quraish and had experience in leading a kingdom, according to Al-Attas, would make more sense if he was called the first king of an Islamic kingdom that was established.

In other words, Al-Attas emphasized that the arrival of Islam to the Malay-Nusantara region came from Arabia directly. Although many of their shipping routes also came from India, Persia, and China, the Muslim preachers who came were still Arabs. The Islam that came was not a teaching that had been changed and influenced by Indian

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 21–23.

or Persian philosophy and culture, but indeed the pure teachings of Islam. Even so, Al-Attas did not deny the influence of India and Persia, but in the fields of trade, literature, and art.

"It was nowhere reported in the *Hikayat Raja Pasai* that Indians or Persians were the missionaries that spread Islam in the Malay world. Moreover, the Islam that was brought and disseminated was the original 'Arab' Islam and not a transformed Islam that had first to pass through the sieve of Indian and Persian (i.e. Shi'ite) culture and interpretation. I am not denying that there had been Indian and Persian influences involved in the process of Islamization in the Archipelago, especially in activities having to do with trade and literary and artistic creations. Traders and transmitters of literary and artistic creations were not missionaries of the religion. The initial missionaries were from the noble families (ashraf) among the Arabs, learned men of spiritual discernment, some of whom had come directly from Arabia, some from Persia, and some via India and Indo-China, and some looked and dressed like Indians and Persians, being easily mistaken for them..."⁵⁹

Al-Attas also argued that based on the *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, the process of Islamization was a planned and organized process.

"...and the spread of Islam by these Arab missionaries in the Malay world was not a haphazard matter, a disorganized sporadic affair carried on by merchant and traders and port authorities, and even by Sufi order conceived somewhat as trade guilds, whose roles have been exaggerated. It was a gradual process, but it was planned and organized and executed in accordance with the timeliness of the situation."⁶⁰

The question then arises, if Sultan Muhammad was the founder and first king of Samudra Pasai, then who were Merah Silu and Malik as-Saleh? For this reason, Al-Attas also gave his explanation regarding the genealogy of the kings of Samudra Pasai.

4. Genealogy of the Kings of Pasai

According to *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, Merah Silu was the founder and first king of Samudra Pasai. Al-Attas doubted this, because it was Sultan Muhammad who came together with Syaikh Islmail who was the first king.

"I am inclined to propose that the person intalled as the first Muslim king of

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Samudra-Pasai was Sultan Muhammad, who in the *Hikayat* was described as a *fakir* only to make him conform with the *fakir* reported tradition. If this were so, then I would say that the process of royal succession began with his son, who would by then have been married into the local nobility.”⁶¹

The opinion that Sultan Muhammad was the first king of Samudra Pasai was also presented by S. Q. Fatimi. Based on Tome Pires’ account that the first king of Samudra Pasai was from Bengal in the Indian region, Fatimi concluded that Sultan Muhammad who came with Shaykh Ismail was also Merah Silu or Malik as-Saleh. This is certainly criticized by Al-Attas for at least two reasons: 1. The mention of Bengal origin obscures the ethnic structure, because in the saga itself, it is mentioned that Sultan Muhammad was a descendant of Abu Bakr Ash-Shidiq, and based on the records of the time it is possible that he was an Arab of Quraysh blood. 2. Malik as-Saleh is considered by historians to be the first king because of the inability of researchers to read the damaged and worn writings on the tombstones scattered in Blang Mei, thus considering him the earliest king.

However, according to Al-Attas, research in the early 20th century showed that there were also gravestones of Muslim kings from Samudra Pasai who died earlier than Malik as-Saleh. Among them is the gravestone of Malik al-Kamil, which is written that he died on Jumadil Akhir in 607 AH/1210 AD. Then not far from this gravestone, there is also a gravestone named Ya’qub who is a cousin of Malik al-Kamil with the date 630 AH/1232 AD. In this case, Al-Attas refers to research conducted by Sayyid ‘Alawi bin Tahir bin Abd Allah al-Haddad al-Hadrami who visited Blang Mei in the early 20th century and read the inscriptions on the tombstones there, this can then be read in his work entitled *Al-Mudkhal ila Ta’rikh al-Islam bi al-Sharqi al-Aqsa* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-Hadith li Tiba’ah wa al-Nashr, 1971). Thus, this shows that Malik as-Saleh, whose tombstone reads that he died in 696 AH/1296 AD, was indeed the king of Samudra Pasai but not the first.⁶²

The story of Merah Silu and his powers and adventures in Al-Attas’ view is fiction, a story added by chronicle writers in the centuries

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 16–17; Sebagai pembanding, sebuah buku yang diterbitkan oleh Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI juga mencantumkan informasi adanya makam dari seorang yang disebut Tengku Jacob, dan dianggap sebagai perdana menteri dari Samudra Pasai, dengan nisan berangka tahun 630H/1252 M, lihat *Album Nisan Samudera Pasai* (Naggroe Aceh Darussalam: Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2012), 102, <https://repositori.kemdikbud.go.id/12361/1/Album%20Nisan%20Samudera%20Pasai.pdf>.

after Samudra Pasai was established in order to identify him as Malik as-Saleh and its first king. Merah Silu, according to Al-Attas, could also be a real historical figure, who lived in the pre-Islamic period, and whose name is found in the oral traditions of the people, which at that time developed with a mixture of myths and supernatural elements with the aim of building the spirit of heroism and patriotism. Since ancient times, it has been common for folklorists to tell stories of heroes, legendary kings, and mythical figures, about their origins, adventures, love stories, battles, and exemplary lives. Over time, these fairy tales can be reinterpreted to accommodate the changing times. For example, when material customs and culture change, these fairy tales or myths are translated into music, songs, or dances. Likewise, when the form of writing is present the story is written in the literary form of poetry, epics, or romances.⁶³

Al-Attas thus concluded that Merah Silu was not Malik as-Saleh, nor was Malik as-Saleh the first Muslim king of Samudra Pasai. He also explained that the use of the name 'Malik' by the kings of Samudra Pasai was also an influence from the division of power in Mengiri in the 9th or 10th century AD, not from the Mamluks in Egypt who were only established in the following century. Quoting Al-Mas'udi, Al-Attas explained that in Mengiri at that time the title al-Malik was given to Arab nobles who ruled under Balhara. The title sultan, on the other hand, was reserved only for the sovereign king of a kingdom. Therefore, the correct title for the first king of Samudra Pasai should have been al-Malik Muhammad, and not Sultan Muhammad. The title al-Malik continued to be used until al-Malik al-Zahir even though they were sovereign as sultans. The *Hikayat Raja Pasai* refers to him as Sultan Muhammad, indicating that this work was written in the 13th century when the title sultan was already familiarly used.⁶⁴

Conclusion

Traditional historiographical works in the Malay-Indonesian region such as *babad*, *hikayat*, *tambo*, and so on cannot be ruled out as a source in historical research. Al-Attas has proven how doubts about these traditional historiographical works can be answered by conducting an in-depth interpretation of the linguistic aspects and

⁶³ Al-Attas, *Historical Fact and Fiction*, 23–24.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

the support of other contemporaneous literature records or reports. He used this method when interpreting the *Hikayat Raja Pasai* so that Al-Attas could conclude various new things about the process of Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian region. Among his conclusions is that the process of Islamization took place long before the 13th century AD, estimated to have been since the 9th to 10th centuries AD. Then Islam was brought by preachers from Arabia who entered through various routes, one of which was through the Mengiri region in India, and this Islamization process was also an organized activity. The conclusions related to the history of Samudra Pasai include, among others, that the name Samudra comes from the word *semutraya* which means large ant, and it is possible that the Prophet had heard and knew the name of this location that made him say to the Companions to go and preach there in the future. Merah Silu is a fictional character and he is not Malik as-Saleh, nor was he the first Muslim king. The first Muslim king of Samudra Pasai was Sultan Muhammad, an Arab of Quraysh descent who came from Mengiri.

However, Al-Attas also gave a critical view of the data contained in the *Hikayat Raja Pasai*. Among them is how he criticized the authenticity of the figure named Merah Silu as the first person to become king in Samudra Pasai. In his interpretation, Al-Attas assumes that the story of Merah Silu and all his supernatural powers is a myth that has been mixed in the writing of this hikayat manuscript.

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