

Sub-project A06

On the Edge of a Tradition: Paratexts in 19th-century Malay Manuscripts

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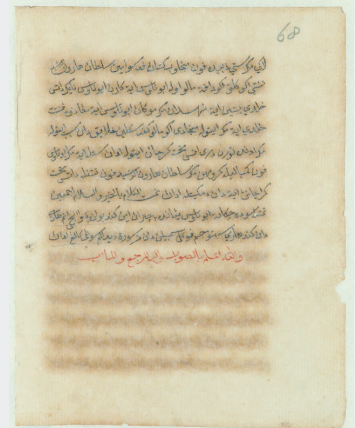
Malay Manuscripts

In very general terms and based on physical remains preserved in the repositories, Malay Muslim manuscripts produced in Malay-speaking areas that comprises Peninsular and Maritime Southeast Asia span a period from the early 16th until the first half of the 20th century. The most obvious agents for changes in, or even demise of, a flourishing manuscript tradition in the closing decades of the 19th century were the advent of indigenous lithographic printing industries in a few urban centres, the establishment of Western education systems, and the publication of Malay-language periodicals. Muslim lithographic reproduction built directly on the manuscript tradition at hand, and adopted a standard form and layout of Islamic manuscript for its printed products (Proudfoot 1996: 253).

The big majority of studies of Malay manuscripts have been directed towards the text contained in the manuscripts, thereby hardly, if ever, touching on physical or codicological aspects of the text container. Although concise descriptions of physical aspects of the manuscripts may be found in text editions and catalogues of collections, and recently a start has been made to study paratextual characteristics of the text carriers (e.g. Chambert Loir 2006, Braginsky 2002), there has been little effort to come to a more comprehensive study about the physical, codicological or paratextual elements in Malay manuscripts.

Objectives

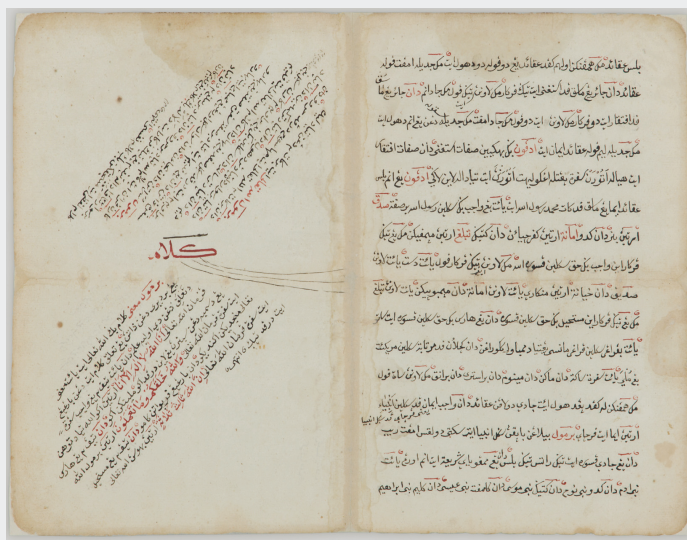
The research proposed here intends to explore paratextual elements found in a selection of Malay manuscripts from the 19th century. It will focus on a limited number of manuscripts that have been identified by scholars as produced for a local audience, as opposed to manuscripts copied and written for colonial officials. A number of local cultural entrepreneurs collected, copied and wrote the texts in these manuscripts to lend them to readers for money.



The Tale of Abu Nawas (19th century)

The best known and researched collection, a collection established and managed in Jakarta in a family business from the mid-19th until the early 20th century (Chambert Loir 1984, 1991), will be used as starting point for this exploration, which is meant to look into the form of paratextual elements, such as colophons, marginal notes, illustrations and other elements, and what they disclose about the use, social surroundings and attitude towards manuscripts and texts during this period when printed texts became more readily available. The research material may be expanded by including concurrent manuscripts from other, similar collections from urban centres, such as Palembang, Singapore and Riau. Special attention will be given to statements of ownership that may attest a change in attitude towards a manuscript from an anonymous product of tradition into a commercial object that was owned by an individual.

Other paratextual elements for navigating the texts, such as rubrication, and elements that offer information about the interpretation of the text, such as glosses and textual comments, will not be discarded as these also may show changing attitudes towards manuscripts. This research into the physical features of the manuscripts will enable a more thorough comparison with other manuscript traditions and is envisioned as the start of a more comprehensive investigation into the Malay tradition as a whole.



Twenty Attributes of God (early 20th century)